

Eight ready-to-use sermons for your outreach campaign

Youth & Young Adults



Refresh!

JESUS—THE ESSENCE OF OUR FAITH

TY GIBSON

published by the General Conference Youth Ministries Department

REFRESH!

Jesus—the essence of our faith

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Written by Ty Gibson

8 DAILY READINGS | THEME: JESUS—THE CENTER OF IT ALL | MARCH 19, 2016

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2016 Senior Youth/Young Adults Week of Prayer

Theme:

Jesus—the center of it all.

Title:

Refresh!

Jesus—the essence of our faith

8 daily sermons (Sabbath– Sabbath)

OFFICIAL DATE FOR THE WEEK OF PRAYER IS

March 19-26, 2016

Global Youth Day: March 19, 2016

Homecoming Sabbath: March 26, 2016

EDITORIAL

BY GILBERT CANGY



At a gathering of Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders in Minneapolis in 1888, Ellen White observed that while members and leaders had thoroughly imbibed the distinctive Adventist doctrines, they did not know what it meant to be saved by the righteousness of Christ and sanctified by His softening love. She told the leaders at the conference:

“We want the truth as it is in Jesus. ... I have seen that precious souls who would have embraced the truth have been turned away from it because of the manner in which the truth has been handled, because Jesus was not in it. And this is what I have been pleading with you for all the time—we want Jesus.” (The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials, page 153)

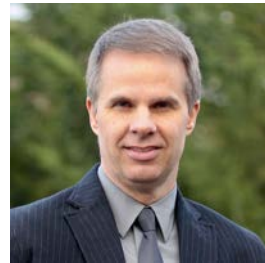
Could it be that Ellen White’s 1888 plea, “We want Jesus,” is still echoing within our Church today? During this Week of Prayer, we will rediscover the beauty of our “pillars” and a number of our core beliefs as they are in Jesus. I wish you all a renewed appreciation of what we stand for as a Church. It is my earnest prayer that we will experience the refreshing winds of the Spirit to impel us as we pursue the unique calling that God has entrusted unto us.

Dr. Gilbert Cangy is the World Youth Director at the General Conference Headquarters. He can be reached by email at cangyg@gc.adventist.org

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

At the age of 18 Ty Gibson encountered the truth of God's existence for the first time. After having been raised with a purely secular worldview and having witnessed evil and suffering firsthand, Ty was completely opposed to the idea of a Supreme Being. "If God exists," he reasoned, "he would have to be cruel to have made a world like ours." Ty's conversion as a teenager was founded on the answer to that question. The powerful reality of God's love opened Ty's mind to a whole new line of thought.

Ty is a co-director of Light Bearers and pastor of Storyline SDA Church in Eugene, Oregon, USA. A passionate communicator with a message that opens minds and moves hearts, Ty teaches on a variety of topics, emphasizing God's unfailing love as the central theme of the Bible. His most recent work includes the digma.com video project and the [Truth Link](http://truthlink.org) Bible study series and web-course at truthlink.org. He has authored eight best-selling books, including, [A God Named Desire](#), which paints a compelling picture of God's character. Ty and his wife Sue have three adult children and two grandsons.



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READ THIS FIRST

PLANNING FOR THE WEEK OF PRAYER

1. **Start Your Planning Now.** We know that leadership sometimes changes at the end of the year, but please, if you will no longer be the AY leader next year, do not let that stop you from planning for this special week. Start your planning, develop your target, get your team together, and make sure your pastor is a part of that team.
2. **Global Youth Day Information.** Get information on the Global Youth Day project. This day will be the launch of the Youth Week of Prayer. Please visit our website, www.gcyouthministries.org, or contact your local youth director to find out how you can participate.
3. **Commit Your Prayer Warriors.** Get a team of adults together who will commit to praying for you and your ministry on a regular basis. Make sure this is a group with whom you can confidentially share both your personal and ministry prayer needs.
4. **Choose a Theme Song.** Involve your youth choir. If your church does not have a youth choir, this is the perfect time to get one started. Pick out songs that you all like and which fit the topic of each evening, or choose a song for the entire week.
5. **Start a Prayer Journal.** Nothing is greater for your personal spiritual growth than time spent in prayer. Your youth group will grow as you grow. Prayer journaling will help you encounter God in new and exciting ways. You will be able to “track” your walk with God as you go back and review answered prayers and see how He has lead you step by step each day. New, fresh ideas will come to mind as you spend time in His presence journaling your prayers. You can find many ideas online on starting and keeping a prayer journal. Just go to ***www.google.com*** and type in the words “starting a prayer journal.”
6. **Form a Week of Prayer Development/Review Team.** Depending on the size of your church, this group can be four to eight persons who will go through all eight readings with you. Include on your team only interested and committed young adults and youth ministry leaders (Pathfinder, Sabbath School, etc., your pastor/s); this

is important because it gives ownership to the entire group, rather than just you and your assistant. Ask the group to commit to meeting for at least three weeks—at least one week for four lessons, and an extra week to wrap things up. Be sure to identify the goal and direction you want to go, preferably at the first meeting, and choose a young person to speak for each day.

7. **Integrate Global Youth Day (GYD) into Your Week of Prayer Plans.**

Ideally, GYD should be a time to teach youth how to sacrificially give of themselves by providing opportunities in the church and the community. If you are a small youth group and do not have the resources to arrange a community-based GYD event, you can use this opportunity to break down denominational barriers in the area by partnering with and pooling resources and ideas with other youth groups from other churches in your area.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK WITH A SMALL OR LARGE GROUP

Journal Space. This book is designed to be filled with your thoughts. Use the space provided to record your reactions to the something you may hear in the sermon and the questions at the end of each day. It can also be used to write a prayer request or praise to God. Encourage participants to use it anyway they want. It's their journal! Tell them there are no rules, just guidelines. The important thing is to listen to the Lord and open their heart in response to His leading. Leaders, if you take the time to read the daily readings prayerfully and with the anticipation that God will reveal new things to you, you will be surprised at what will flow through your pen or pencil onto the pages of these journals.

1. **Start a Prayer Journal.** Nothing is greater for your personal spiritual growth than time spent in prayer. Your youth group will grow as you grow. Prayer journaling will help you encounter God in new and exciting ways. You will be able to “track” your walk with God as you go back and review answered prayers and see how He has lead you step by step each day. New, fresh ideas will come to mind as you spend time in His presence journaling your prayers. You can find many ideas online on starting and keeping a prayer journal. Just go to [www. google.com](http://www.google.com) and type in the words “starting a prayer journal.”
2. **Daily Questions.** At the end of each sermon are questions and statements designed to get you thinking. Form small groups and discuss these questions. Take a moment to really think about what they are asking. Listen to the Holy Spirit as He teaches you through Scripture. Encourage participants to record their thoughts in their journal.



Global Youth Day is set to launch the official week of the Youth Week of Prayer meetings.

Ahead of time, please contact your pastor or conference youth leader to see what projects your church will be involved in on this day, March 19. If you are planning a full day event, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) has an amazing activity that can be done during your afternoon AY program. In Their Shoes is an interactive poverty experience that takes teens on a 24-hour journey into the lives of teens from other countries around the world. Through the eyes of this new identity, they will begin to understand the challenges that millions of people in developing countries face every day. You'll discover what ADRA is doing to help and what the Bible has to say about living a life of Christian service. For more information please contact Lauren Lombard at lauren.lombard@ADRA.org. The PDF instruction files can be downloaded at:

[http://gcyouthministries.org/EventsProjects/GlobalYouthDay\(GYD\)/tabid/371/Default.aspx](http://gcyouthministries.org/EventsProjects/GlobalYouthDay(GYD)/tabid/371/Default.aspx)

Global Youth Day

March 19, 2016

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WELCOME

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, my Church and your Church, was officially organized in 1863, with a membership of 3,500 in Battle Creek, Michigan, in the Northeast of the United States. By its latest census in 2011, the Church had grown to a 17.5 million-member global community of faith with a presence in 208 of the 232 countries and areas of the world recognized by the United Nations.

Shortly after 1863, our Church engaged in the mainstream health reform movement of the time, and by the 1890's the Battle Creek Sanitarium, its flagship institution, had become the largest Health Reform Institute in the world. Today, Adventists run a global health care system through the Church's 589 institutions. In an essay titled Proper Education, Ellen G. White provided the inspiration for the establishment of the Adventists educational system, which today represents the second largest Christian school system in the world.

Our Church's commitment and passion for worldwide mission was grounded in a strong sense of prophetic identity. While we shared a common Christian foundation with the wider evangelical community, we have never viewed ourselves as just another Christian denomination. Anchored in strong Millerite roots, we have always understood the emergence of the movement to be a fulfillment of prophecy; we have perceived our role in terms of preaching the unique messages of the three angels of Revelation 14:6-12, presenting God's last appeal to the world before Christ's return.

That foundational self-defining resolve, coupled with a sense of the nearness of the end of earthly time, compelled us into one of history's most energetic mission-driven movements. Because the SDA Church emerged in a predominantly Christian world, it perceived its mission to be primarily that of converting other Christians to its special message for the end time. While Adventism shared many fundamental beliefs with other denominations, such as salvation by grace through faith in Christ's sacrifice, its proclamation focused on its distinctive biblical teachings, which it came to describe as "pillar" doctrines. Assuming that people were already familiar with the person of Jesus and what He essentially stood for, we neglected to position our Lord and Savior at the center of all our "pillar" doctrines.

It is our prayer that during this week of prayer series you will capture a glimpse of Jesus—the essence of our faith, the center of our doctrines.

1

DAY 1: THE TRINITY

Windows: An Introduction to the Series

In this this week of prayer series we will be exploring eight key Bible doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Many of our people—perhaps you included—go into intellectual neutral, breathe a sigh of boredom, and expect a repeat of dry theological facts we've heard over and over again:

The seventh day is the Sabbath, not the first day, and here are a gazillion Bible verses to prove it.

The 10 Commandments were not abolished at the cross, so you still need to keep them, and here are the verses to prove it.

The Investigative Judgment began in 1844, and your name could come up any minute, and here are the verses and a time prophecy chart to prove it.

When we die, we're really dead, completely dead, dead as a door nail, so if a dead family member or friend ever appears to you, it's not really them, it's a demon, and here are the verses to prove it.

Jesus is coming soon, and when He does it will not be a secret rapture with some second chance at salvation after a seven-year tribulation, so you better be ready now, and here are the verses to prove it.

And besides all of that, you should become a vegetarian, pay tithe, stop watching TV, and get baptized by immersion.

Can I get an amen?

No?

Why not?

Well, because we all sense that something is missing when the truth is reduced to a series of intellectual facts and behavioral requirements.

So here's a *fact* for us to face: none of these doctrines individually, nor all of them collectively, constitute *the* truth. Are you listening? None of them constitute the truth until they are centered in, informed by, and pervaded with the love of Christ. This is why the apostle Paul speaks of the truth "as the truth is in Jesus" (Ephesians 4:21).

Hmmmm.

The truth as it is *in Jesus*.

What exactly does that mean?

You may recall that Jesus once said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free," and then a little later He said, "I AM... the truth" (John 8:32; 14:6).

You get the point, right?

Truth isn't just a bunch of abstract factual information to memorize, quote, and argue about. Truth is a person, and His name is Jesus. In relationship with Jesus there is liberation from all that binds us—namely, from all our relational brokenness and the shame that attends it.

So what is the "truth" like when it is preached *outside* of Jesus?

Well, for one thing, truth apart from Jesus is merely raw data void of personality and character. It doesn't have a face, a heart, or a personal desire for you. Secondly, truth apart from Jesus is emotionally brutal because all it can do is impose guilt and arouse fear. It cannot save, heal, or transform the human heart.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that it is spiritually abusive to preach a list of doctrinal truths and behavioral standards while failing to preach Jesus as *the* Truth, with a capital T. Paul says, "The letter kills" (2 Corinthians 3:6), by which he means that the bare facts of the truth, preached without Jesus as the living, loving, compassionate center, only have the effect of slaughtering people on a spiritual, emotional, and relational level. "Truth" that does not magnify Jesus can only drive people away from God in despair or produce in them a spirit of condemnatory Pharisaism. By contrast we see in Jesus a beautiful equilibrium between two crucial complementary factors: John says Jesus came to our world "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

See that?

Grace and truth!

Why is that combo so vital?

Truth that is void of grace can only heap shame upon sinners, whereas grace combined with truth brings healing.

It is clear, then, that we don't merely need truth—the bare bones of doctrinal facts. Rather, we need the truth *as it is in Jesus*—the living embodiment of God's love.

So, then, let's employ a simple, but powerful metaphor to guide us in our series of messages for this week of prayer.

The doctrinal truths of Scripture can be thought of as a series of perceptual windows through which God's character may be viewed from various different angles. For our purposes, let's imagine the structure of truth as an octagon-shaped building.

On each of the eight sides of the structure, there is a window. Each window represents one of our doctrinal beliefs:

1. The Trinity
2. The Great Controversy
3. The Law of God
4. The Sabbath
5. The Sanctuary
6. Death and Hell
7. The End Times
8. The Second Coming

As we look into the building through each window, we see Jesus, and Jesus, and Jesus, and Jesus, as the true and accurate revelation of God's character.

Eight windows into one reality!

Windows are designed for looking through, not at. A window serves its purpose when it operates as a visual passageway. No biblical doctrine is an end in itself: not the Sabbath, not the State of the dead, not the judgment, not end time prophecy. None of these truths exist to point to themselves. Rather, the Sabbath serves as a visual passageway into the heart of God. The sanctuary doctrine serves as a visual passageway into another dimension of God's beauty and so on with every biblical doctrine.

Think about it like this. As Seventh-day Adventists, we actually only have one belief, one doctrine:

"God is love" (1 John 4:16).

That's it.

We don't believe many things, we believe one thing with many dimensions. We can always expound on the one thing, but it is always the same one thing we're looking at, just from various angles. Like one tree with many branches. One engine with many moving parts. One river with many contributing streams.

The various doctrines we hold serve their purpose only to the degree that we communicate them in such a manner as to magnify the beauty of God's love. In fact, Ellen White explicitly states that this is the case:

It is the darkness of misapprehension of God that is enshrouding the world. Men are losing their knowledge of His character. It has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. At this time a message from God is to be proclaimed, a message illuminating in its influence and saving in its power. His character is to be made known. Into the darkness of the world is to be shed the light of His glory, the light of His goodness, mercy, and truth... The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. (Ellen White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 415).

Astounding, huh?

God has been horribly misrepresented in our world, especially by religion, which professes to represent Him. And what is the form in which this misrepresentation of God's character exists? Doctrines! Belief systems! Many people in our world are afraid of God, not because they know Him as He really is, but because of the false reports they have heard about Him in the form of religious teachings.

God specifically called the Seventh-day Adventist Church into existence as a prophetic movement, to proclaim a message to the world that vindicates God as the good God He really is. If correctly

understood, our theological system has the potential to offer our world a beautiful and inviting picture of God unlike anything they have ever known before. Adventist theology, when viewed in Christ, is like a series of windows through which the character of God is clarified and exonerated.

So let's get started by looking through the first of our eight windows.

Ancient Love

Do a simple thought experiment. Go lock yourself in your bathroom for the rest of your life—it's a thought experiment, so stay in your seat and use your imagination—and ask yourself a simple question: will I ever experience love?

The obvious answer is no—even if you have a full-length mirror!
And why is the answer No?

For the simple reason that love cannot be experienced in isolation. Love, by definition, is other-centered rather than self-centered; for it to really be love, it requires more than one person. With this we have realized something deep and vitally important for our understanding of God. Let's unpack it.

The first truth we encounter when we open the Bible is that God is a social unit rather than a solitary self. Notice the opening line of Scripture:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).

The most obvious thing we see here is that there are two basic categories that compose reality:

1. God
2. And everything else

God is the Creator and anything else that exists He created. This means that God predates and transcends all things that fall into the “made” category, and that God alone occupies the “unmade” category. The apostle John, in introducing Jesus, articulated this sublime insight with these words: “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:3). Pretty deep, I know, but hang on because it's all about to become beautifully clear.

In the same passage, John said this: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:1, 2).

In the beginning, who was with whom?

“In the beginning... God... was with God.”

Okay, that’s cool, but in what sense were these equally divine persons “with” one another? John tells us in verse 18: “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.”

Wow; I love that! So interpersonal!

John wants us to understand that Jesus, whom He earlier identified as none other than God, came to our world from a very specific and special relational place: from “the bosom of the Father”. *Bosom* is a poetic word that conjures up the idea of closeness; the Phillips translation says Jesus lives in the “closest intimacy with the Father”. Now, with all this in mind, go back to Genesis 1:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

The Hebrew word in this sentence that’s translated to English as “God” is a proper name in the original language. It is a super significant name, jam-packed full of meaning. In fact, it is the most beautiful name that will ever leave your lips:

Elohim.

The thing that makes this name so meaningful is that it is a plural noun. In other words, the God that we encounter in the opening verse of the Bible is in some sense *one* and yet *more than one*. Later on in the chapter this idea becomes even more explicit. Notice verses 26 and 27:

“Then God [Elohim] said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’... So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

Here we see that Elohim is composed of an “Us” and an “Our”. We are not to think of God as merely a “Me” and an “I”, but rather as social unit that involves more persons than a single solitary being. Remember our opening point: love cannot be experienced in isolation. Now, in the context of this simple realization, we can read with understanding the most profound and powerful declaration in the Bible:

“God is love” (1 John 4:8).

We deduce from this basic reality that God has never existed in isolation. God is, and always has been, an “Us” and an “Our”—in other words, a social unit—because “God is love.” Without doing any injustice to the text, we could paraphrase the opening sentence of the Bible like this:

“In the beginning LOVE created the heavens and the earth.”

Cross reference this once again to John 1 and the picture becomes even more beautiful:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:1-3).

From this passage we see that both God the Father and God the Son were active agents together in the work of creating our world. Now go back to Genesis 1 for an additional brush stroke of the picture: “The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2).

We see here that the Holy Spirit was also actively involved in the creation event, along with the Father and the Son. Amazing!

So, then, the God we encounter in Genesis 1, bearing the plural name *Elohim*, is composed of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Within the parameters of God’s own divine reality, apart from any created beings, God is an other-centered fellowship, a self-giving friendship. As we move forward from Genesis in the biblical narrative, we encounter what the Jewish people call, “*the shema*” which they regard to this day as the most important of all theological declarations:

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!” (Deuteronomy 6:4).

There is a hidden beauty here in plain sight, which is brought to light by asking the question: in what sense is the Lord our God *one*? We find the answer in Jesus, because He intentionally employed the language of the *Shema* to describe the relationship that exists between Himself and the Father: “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30).

Brilliant!

Again, we see that God is not *one* in the sense of being a *solitary* being, but rather God is *one* in the sense of relational *oneness*. Later, in John 17, Jesus again used the language of *oneness*, and on this occasion He defined it as the relational dynamic of *love*. He prayed to the Father for His disciples “that they may be one just as *We are one*: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world” (Verses 22-24).

Then He closed His prayer by asking “that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them” (Verse 26).

Here’s the picture before us:

The Father is God, but not all there is of God.

Jesus Christ is God, but not all there is of God.

The Holy Spirit is God, but not all there is of God.

All three, together, as an intimate social fellowship, compose one divine reality. This is why we use the word *Trinity*, or *Tri-unity*, to describe God.

It is not a dry doctrinal fact.

It is not a cold theoretical equation.

It is not a complex philosophical concept.

No. The doctrine of the Trinity is a crystal clear window into God’s outgoing, other-centered, super-social character.

What’s not to like about a God like this?

LEADER, PLEASE SHARE THIS INFORMATION WITH THE AUDIENCE:

Next week Sabbath we will celebrate a special homecoming. Our theme that day will be The 2nd Coming of Christ. This could be an opportunity for your friends who have disengaged from our church community to experience their second coming to our church community. Please invite your friends out tomorrow night, and the rest of the week, and then on Sabbath for our Homecoming Celebration.

See posters for distribution on pages 82 and 83.

*For ideas on planning your Homecoming Celebration please visit our website,
<http://www.gcyouthministries.org/MediaPublications/YouthWeekOfPrayer/tabid/100/Default.aspx>*

DAY 1: Discussion Questions

1. Have you heard the “truth” portrayed as a series of facts, as described at the beginning of this lesson? How did it make you feel? How did you react?
2. Share together some of the concepts that have helped you to try to understand the Trinity. (Accept that it’s something humans cannot totally comprehend.) How would you describe or explain it to a Muslim or Jewish friend who thinks you are worshiping plural gods?
3. What is it about the phrase “God is love” that most appeals to you? How has this foundational concept affected your life?

DAY 1: Group Activity

Supplies needed:

- Different colors of cellophane
- glue
- scissors
- two dowel rods 36 inches long and ½ an inch in diameter, cut into eight pieces that are 9 inches each, strong aluminum foil
- one piece of sturdy Styrofoam cut into an octagon approximately one foot/30 centimeters across (simple) **or** one piece of a half-inch thick piece of plywood cut into an octagon, with eight half-inch holes drilled in the corners (stronger).

As a group, create a model of the octagonal building with eight windows that we are using as an image for this week of prayer.

1. Use a doubled layer of the foil to create a roof.
2. Alternately, bring various art supplies, poster board, etc.
3. Let each member try to create a drawing, painting, or collage of an octagonal building with eight windows.
4. You could add to it each night as we look at each “window”.

2

DAY 2: THE GREAT CONTROVERSY *Conquering Love*

Well, here we are for part two of our eight-part series. This is going to be really fun, like hiking off into a familiar area you've been to over and over again and suddenly you find yourself unexpectedly standing in breathless awe at the sight of a beautiful waterfall you never knew was there.

We are exploring what for most of us is familiar territory: eight of the core doctrines that compose the Adventist belief system. As we pointed out in our first message, these familiar doctrines are anything but dry, boring, theological facts to be recited from memory. For sure, we have often made them that, but just because we have dumbed them down and stripped them of their beauty doesn't mean there's no beauty to be discovered.

Remember our guiding metaphor?

The doctrinal truths of Scripture are like windows that look in upon the God's attractive character as revealed in Christ. No doctrine is an end in itself. The Sabbath isn't about the Sabbath, *per se*; it's about Jesus. The state of the dead doctrine isn't merely about proving that people are unconscious when they die, it's about Jesus. The sanctuary doctrine isn't about a tent or a building or a curtain or a procedure or a ceremony, it's about Jesus. And so on and so forth. Every biblical doctrine, when correctly understood, functions as a perceptual lens into the heart of God, into the goodness of God, into the love of God.

Along these lines, the doctrine we commonly refer to as *The Great Controversy* is no exception. So let's look through this window and find the beauty that awaits our discovery.

War in Heaven

The first rule of logic is that things are usually what they appear to be. Our world *looks* like a war zone because our world *is* a war zone. The second rule of logic is that things are not always *exactly* what

they appear to be. The war going on in our world is of a character that is not immediately apparent to the casual observer. At first glance we see only human beings engaged in the battle, but there is more to the situation than meets the eye. According to the Bible, we *homo sapiens* are not alone in the universe. From Genesis to Revelation we encounter an order of beings called angels. We know from Scripture that these beings predate the existence of humans (Job 38:4-7; Revelation 1:20), that they are numerous (Hebrews 12:22), powerful and intelligent (Psalm 103:20; Daniel 4:17), that they function within an orderly system of governance (Ephesians 3:10; Daniel 7:9-10), that they actively operate within our world, mostly unseen, but sometimes in visible form (Hebrews 1:14; 13:2), and that the evil afflicting our world originated with some of them (Revelation 12:7, 12).

One of the angels was called “Lucifer”, which means *bearer of light*. This exalted being was created to be a revealer of God’s character to his fellow angels, but he chose a different course of action. The Bible says that Lucifer was “perfect in all” his “ways” (his patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior), “until iniquity was found in” him (Ezekiel 28:15). At this point he became “Satan”, which means *adversary*. The Bible also tells us that the fall of Lucifer occurred because he developed a desire for self-exaltation, leading to the heady aspiration to displace God from the hearts of his fellow angels and to usurp their loyalty (Isaiah 14:12-14). As Lucifer nurtured self-centeredness inside himself, he ceased to reflect the light of God’s character and began to attribute to God his own self-serving motives. The aspiration, “I will exalt” myself, followed by, “I will be like the Most High,” indicates that Lucifer began attributing self-exaltation to the character of God as justification for his own self-exaltation. By denying the essential goodness of God’s character, Satan’s course of action was calculated to erode trust toward God and incite rebellion against Him.

It is in this narrative context that the Bible says: “War broke out in heaven” (Revelation 12:7).

That is, among the angels! The word translated here as “war” is *polemos* in the original Greek, which is related to words like *polemic* and *politics*. This gives us insight to the exact nature of the “war”. It was not primarily a war of physical engagement or force of arms. It was a political war, a propaganda campaign, a character assassination scheme. Satan waged his war by disseminating lies regarding the character of God. Thus he is described as the one who “deceives the whole world” and as “a liar and the father of it” (Revelation 12:9; John 8:44).

Follow this biblical logic:

Ezekiel says that Lucifer was cast out of heaven because he “sinned” (Ezekiel 28:16).

John defines sin as “lawlessness” (1 John 3:4).

Paul defines God’s law as “love” (Romans 13:10).

We see, then, that Lucifer rebelled against God's law, which really means he rebelled against God's love. He raised charges against God and against the law of love by which God governs the universe. Whereas the Bible claims that "God is love" and that His law is, therefore, a law that governs only by the principles inherent in love (1 John 4:8; Matthew 22:37-40), Satan has decided to live without love and to form a kingdom that operates without love. It serves his purpose, therefore, to portray God as self-serving and His law as a list of arbitrary rules imposed for selfish purposes.

Ellen White explains the core issue of the great controversy with brilliant clarity:

Unselfishness, the principle of God's kingdom, is the principle that Satan hates; its very existence he denies. From the beginning of the great controversy he has endeavored to prove God's principles of action to be selfish, and he deals in the same way with all who serve God. To disprove Satan's claim is the work of Christ and of all who bear His name. (*Education*, p. 154)

Now that we understand the foundational issue involved in the war between good and evil, we are prepared to allow Scripture to paint a more detailed picture for us in seven progressive scenes.

Scene One: Dominion

Let's begin by comparing two biblical statements that together create a conceptual framework for understanding what's going on in our world:

"God created mankind in His own image" (Genesis 1:27).

"God is love" (1 John 4:8).

Since love is the essence of God's character, it follows that His creation would be designed for love. And since love, by definition, is the voluntary giving of oneself to others, it follows that freewill had to be built into God's creation. Therefore we read in the creation account that God gave human beings "dominion" over the earth (Genesis 1:26). Dominion is a crucial biblical concept. As free moral agents made for love, Adam and Eve were given the high privilege of self-governance. The earth would be the environment, the material space, in which their love for God and for one another could flourish. The planet was theirs by divine delegation. Understanding this arrangement, David wrote these insightful words: "The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's; but the earth He has given to the children of men" (Psalm 115:16).

That's delegation language, freedom language, language of self-governance. Having created them with freewill and given them the earth as their home, the stage was set for an eternity of relational

bliss. However, liberty possesses inherent risk. For all its glorious possibilities, freewill also carries a potential danger. Humanity's "dominion" was heavy with both promise and threat; it was up to them to decide which way it would go.

Scene Two: Abdication

Since God gave the earth to Adam and Eve, it was theirs to do with as they pleased. The Creator's intent, of course, was that they would use the power of their freewill to be fruitful and multiply and build a global society of self-giving love. It's right here that the story goes bad. Tragically, our first parents abdicated their position of authority over the earth by yielding allegiance to a foreign lord, to the fallen angel once called Lucifer, the luminous one, who was now known as Satan, the adversary. Yes, the Fall of humanity was a moral fall, but it was a legal fall, as well, because it involved a transfer of power. Adam and Eve lost their dominion because they chose to give it away. Through the exercise of human freewill, Satan became the "ruler of this world" (John 12:31) and "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Notwithstanding, Satan's power over our world does not constitute a rightful rule. He is not earth's legitimate lord. His triumph over humanity was an act of war based on deception. He led our first parents into rebellion by denying the existence of love in God's heart for them, thus breaking their capacity for trusting God. Therefore, the hope of humanity from that day through to this day lies in the revelation of God's true character of selfless love.

In response to Satan's authority-grab, God immediately began to orchestrate a counteroffensive to reclaim the world for humanity. Though God and His adversary are two sides of one conflict, God's counter-offensive would not be implemented by the same principles upon which Satan's kingdom operates—not by deception and force, but rather by means of truth and love.

Scene Three: The Promised Warrior

Once the cosmic conflict began, both sides immediately proceeded to organize their forces and set their principles in motion. The Creator initiated His plan of attack by declaring war and making a promise.

Speaking to Satan in the hearing of Adam and Eve, God said, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel" (Genesis 3:15, NIV). God here announced that a Warrior would be coming to Earth to crush Satan's

head, as it were. The Warrior would also be wounded by the enemy in the process of achieving victory.

Here God also explained that the promised Deliverer would enter the human race through an established lineage of “offspring”. In other words, a specific people-group would be selected from among the nations to be the one through which the Savior could enter the war as a human being. The most important point to grasp is that this prophetic promise informed the world in advance that God would conquer the kingdom of darkness by condescending in humility and self-sacrificing love.

Scene Four: Organized Forces

In tactical response to Satan’s hostile takeover, God did something remarkable, ingenious, and necessary. Moses explains:

When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord’s portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance. He found him in a desert land and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings, so the Lord alone led him, and there was no foreign god with him. (Deuteronomy 32:8-12)

Verses 15 to 17 further fill out the picture:

“Then he (Israel) forsook God who made him, and scornfully esteemed the Rock of his salvation. They provoked Him to jealousy with foreign gods; with abominations they provoked Him to anger. They sacrificed to demons, not to God, to gods they did not know, to new gods, new arrivals that your fathers did not fear” (Deuteronomy 32:15-17). Here we see that God established a chosen people among the nations. Israel was called to be “the Lord’s portion” on earth, and there was to be no “foreign god” among them. It is crucial to notice that Moses informs us that the “gods” of the pagan nations were none other than “demons”, or fallen angels masquerading as deities. Psalm 106, verses 37 and 38, further confirms that there were, in fact, “demons” behind the “idols” of the pagan tribes: “They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons, and shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with blood” (Psalm 106:37, 38).

With Israel God staked out a territory in our demonically dominated world and thereby laid claim to the human race. Israel was chosen by God to be the “line” through which the promised Warrior-Savior would come into the world to reclaim humanity from satanic control. By calling Israel out from among the nations, God manifested His intent to take the world back from demonic dominance.

Scene Five: The Unarmed Warrior

The promised Warrior landed on earthly soil as a helpless, dependent babe in arms. Raised to manhood by humble Israeli peasants, He launched His attack against the kingdom of darkness and proceeded to systematically crush the head of the usurper without ever taking a weapon of violence in hand. We could call Jesus “The Unarmed Warrior” because he came to win back the world by truth and love rather than by deception and violence. Satan recognized Jesus for who He was. They have history, after all. With a self-assured arrogance developed by thousands of years of apparent victory, Satan boldly laid claim to earth as his domain and offered it to Jesus in exchange for worship:

Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, “All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours.” (Luke 4:5-7)

Jesus refused, of course, knowing that Satan could not possibly see what was coming his way. Now completely blind to the character of God, Satan simply was incapable of grasping that Jesus was about to pounce on his dark empire with a kind of power foreign to his understanding—the power of self-sacrificing love. Announcing His warrior identity and mission, Jesus explained to the people what was going down before their very eyes: “When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. But when one stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils” (Luke 11:21, 22).

In this little parable, the “strong man” is Satan. The one “stronger than he” is Jesus. Clearly, a battle is underway and a final showdown is about to happen. And nobody is expecting the move that the rightful King of heaven and earth is about to make.

No carnal weapon will be taken in hand.

No violent army will be commanded.

One act alone will be of sufficient power to reclaim lost humanity.

Pointing to the sacrifice He is about to make at Calvary, Jesus spells out the triumph He is about to achieve over the enemy: “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself” (John 12:31, 32). By His humble incarnation, by His perfect life of love, and by His self-sacrificing death on the cross, Jesus would take from Satan “all his armor in which he trusted.” All Satan’s lies about God were completely gutted of their potency by the illuminating revelation of God’s love in Christ. Paul explained it like this: “Having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Colossians 2:15, NIV).

Love, not force, triumphed over evil.

In principle, the war between good and evil was won in Christ, in His one supreme act of self-sacrificing love. Now that victory must be taken to “all the nations” (Matthew 28:19). The war must be won within the realm of individual human hearts, person by person, home by home, village by village, territory by territory the world over—which brings us to the real mission of the church.

Scene Six: The Church Militant/Triumphant

It's not merely the earth under our feet that is under dispute in the great controversy between good and evil. The real war is over the 3-pound plot of ground situated in our skulls. God makes no secret about the fact that He's after our “foreheads” (Revelation 14:1). In other words, He wants the mental, emotional, and volitional territory within us. The apostle John states that it is there, in the human forehead, that God wants to write “His name,” indicating His abiding presence within the realm of our characters. Human beings are permeable creatures. Outside influences get into us. We are, in fact, designed to be inhabited, as “an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22, KJV).

Each human mind is:

- a citadel of kingly enthronement, and Jesus is the rightful king
- a precinct of eternal truth, and Jesus is the truth
- a chamber of sacred romance, and Jesus is the one true lover of our souls

The great enemy of God and man is also seeking enthronement in the human heart. He is in the business of taking up mental and emotional territory within our souls. He is on a mad quest to fill our hearts and minds with shame where there ought to be innocence, moral defilement where there ought

to be purity, hostility where there ought to be love, and demons masquerading as gods where there ought to be the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The language Paul uses to describe the nature of our warfare is extremely insightful:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

The warfare we fight occurs within the realm of the mind, where thoughts and feelings are formed, where knowledge resides. The enemy is waging his battle against us by formulating "arguments" that are calculated to block the true "knowledge of God". To the degree that his theological lies occupy our minds, he possesses defensive "strongholds" within us. Conversely, to the degree that his arguments are effectively "cast down" and replaced with truth, he is defeated and the human soul is liberated.

The mission of the church is to make known God's beautiful character of self-giving love as revealed in Jesus Christ. We are called upon to mobilize our talents, our energies, and our resources to the one task of reclaiming territory for Christ within individual hearts and homes, within every nation and village on earth. Within the mental, emotional and volitional realm of individual human souls, Jesus has laid claim to the territory stolen by Satan. We, as His church, are to do the same. By forgiveness, compassion, gospel proclamation, feeding and clothing the poor, liberating the enslaved, and mostly and always by loving people the way Jesus loved them, we are to advance God's kingdom.

Scene Seven: The First Dominion Restored

"Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power" (1 Corinthians 15:24). Paul would have us understand that history is ultimately rushing toward the demise of all systems of coercion, domination, oppression and war, and to the establishment of a forever-flourishing, liberty-based kingdom of eternal love. The prophet Micah envisioned the future for us:

In the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it... They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation,

neither shall they learn war any more... And the LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even forever... Unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion. (Micah 4:1-8, KJV)

What an amazing picture!

We see here that God is anti-war and pro-peace, anti-force and pro-love. It is His ultimate goal to bring a complete end to all coercive regimes and to establish an eternal reign of freedom. "The first dominion", the one Adam and Eve lost, will be reestablished. When it is, God says, "they shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9). First, the inner territory that lies within our hearts is reclaimed by God's saving grace. Then, the territory of earth itself is reclaimed and made forever new. "Behold," says the One seated on the throne, "I make all things new" (Revelation 21:5). When that day comes, God's city, the New Jerusalem, will be transferred from the heavenly realm to our very own world. Planet Earth will become the new capital of the universe:

Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:2-4)

Ellen White describes the beautiful scene:

In the place where sin abounded, God's grace much more abounds. The earth itself, the very field that Satan claims as his, is to be not only ransomed, but exalted. Our little world, under the curse of sin the one dark blot in His glorious creation, will be honored above all other worlds in the universe of God. Here, where the Son of God tabernacled in humanity; where the King of glory lived and suffered and died—here, when He shall make all things new, the tabernacle of God shall be with men. (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 26)

That's where this story is going.

By God's grace, I intend to go with it, safely delivered by Jesus to the new earth as an eternal citizen of that fully restored first dominion. What about you?

DAY 2: Discussion Questions

1. The lesson says, “Every biblical doctrine, when correctly understood, functions as a perceptual lens into the heart of God, into the goodness of God, into the love of God.” Discuss the ways in which this has been true or untrue in your religious education and thinking so far.
2. How did Lucifer’s rebellion against God show that he didn’t believe God was acting on love? How does his language, as recorded in Isaiah 14, show that he believed God was selfish and arbitrary?
3. What is the difference between the *dominion* God gave to Adam and Eve (and therefore to us) and the *dominance* the devil exercises? Do you think it is possible that sometimes good people, even church leaders or teachers—or even you—unintentionally try to use dominance instead of dominion to advance the kingdom of God? Discuss.
4. Several times the author used the phrase “mental, emotional, and volitional territory”. Share some ways in which you see God and the devil warring over these components of your inner self. How can you determine who wins dominion in your soul? Be specific.

DAY 2: Group Activity

Add to or decorate your octagon model if desired.

As a group or divided into teams or pairs, role play each of the seven scenes in this lesson:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. <i>Scene One: Dominion</i> | 5. <i>Scene Five: The Unarmed Warrior</i> |
| 2. <i>Scene Two: Abdication</i> | 6. <i>Scene Six: The Church Militant/Triumphant</i> |
| 3. <i>Scene Three: The Promised Warrior</i> | 7. <i>Scene Seven: The First Dominion Restored.</i> |
| 4. <i>Scene Four: Organized Forces</i> | |

Allow only one minute per scene. These could be either quick role plays (let each use his or her imagination as to what to say or do), or they could be still tableaux that represent each phase of the Great Controversy. Rather than waiting until the end of the full presentation, you could do each scene at the end of its own section.

3

DAY 3: THE LAW OF GOD

Liberating Love

The Ten Commandments figure prominently into our doctrinal system as Seventh-day Adventists. While much of the Christian world preach what is called “antinomianism”—the idea that God’s law was “abolished” when Jesus died on the cross—we believe God’s law is eternal and changeless. So far, so good.

Except right here we are faced with a serious problem, because in our efforts to defend God’s law we have sometimes tended to reduce the topic to an argument against antinomianism, a proof-text formulation calculated to prove to other Christians that they ought to keep the law. And in the process, we have created a huge theological and experiential problem for ourselves.

Allow me to explain.

The Redemption That Is In Christ Jesus

Ellen White had a lot to say about our bent, as a group, toward a wrong view and wrong use of God’s law. Notice this very insightful and pointed statement:

On the one hand, religionists generally have divorced the law and the gospel, while we have, on the other hand, almost done the same from another standpoint. We have not held up before the people the righteousness of Christ and the full significance of His great plan of redemption. We have left out Christ and His matchless love, brought in theories and reasonings, and preached argumentative discourses. (*Faith and Work*, pp. 15-16)

That ought to make us pause big time.

Apparently, our history with the law isn’t all positive. While we have been busy defending the law with “argumentative” sermons against those who disregard it, we have overcorrected their heresy and created our own in the process. “We,” she says, “have not held up before the people the righteousness of Christ and the full significance of His great plan of redemption. We have left out Christ and His matchless love.”

People—that's heavy, to say the least.

And this isn't an isolated statement on her part. Over and over again she warned that we as a group were mishandling God's law. At one point she was so tired of hearing our preachers hammer away defending the law that she said this: "Let the law take care of itself. We have been at work on the law until we get as dry as the hills of Gilboa, without dew or rain. Let us trust in the merits of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" (*Sermons and Talks*, Vol. 1, p. 137). Here we see that she wasn't merely weary of hearing *too many* sermons defending the law. It wasn't a matter of talking about it too often, but rather that we were creating a serious theological problem for ourselves. We were preaching the law in such a manner that we were compromising our understanding of the gospel by losing sight of the merits of Jesus.

Getting more to the point, she explained her concern like this:

The danger has been presented to me again and again of entertaining, as a people, false ideas of justification by faith. I have been shown for years that Satan would work in a special manner to confuse the mind on this point. The law of God has been largely dwelt upon and has been presented to congregations, almost as destitute of the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His relation to the law as was the offering of Cain. (*Faith and Works*, p. 18)

Ouch! Adventist preaching compared to the offering of Cain!

In other words, in our zeal to defend the law, we are in danger of presenting a legalistic theological outlook. Alarmed at the situation, she went on to explain the direction our preaching needed to go: "There is not a point that needs to be dwelt upon more earnestly, repeated more frequently, or established more firmly in the minds of all than the impossibility of fallen man meriting anything by his own best good works. Salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ alone" (*Faith and Works*, p. 19).

Wow!

Imagine a series of evangelistic sermons like that.

She goes on:

Let the subject be made distinct and plain that it is not possible to effect anything in our standing before God or in the gift of God to us through creature merit. Should

faith and works purchase the gift of salvation for anyone, then the Creator is under obligation to the creature. Here is an opportunity for falsehood to be accepted as truth. If any man can merit salvation by anything he may do, then he is in the same position as the Catholic to do penance for his sins. Salvation, then, is partly of debt, that may be earned as wages. If man cannot, by any of his good works, merit salvation, then it must be wholly of grace, received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus. It is wholly a free gift. Justification by faith is placed beyond controversy. (*Faith and Works*, pp. 19-20)

But here's the deal: even in the face of these kinds of statements from Ellen White, we have tended to shy away from a strong emphasis on justification by faith in our evangelistic preaching for fear that it would weaken our argument in favor of obedience to the law of God. When we think within a legalistic framework, the pure gospel of God's grace registers as dangerous to the law. The legalistic mind reasons, or at least feels, something like this:

If salvation is a free gift of God's grace alone to be received by faith alone, and if there is absolutely no merit whatsoever in keeping the law, then why keep it?

We are afraid that if we make the good news too good by making salvation too free, people won't feel or see any reason to obey God's law. Actually, the opposite is the case—but until we get the gospel, I mean really get it, we are much more comfortable keeping it mostly out of sight and hammering away, proof-text-by-proof-text, on the necessity of keeping the law. *The truth is that obedience rendered out of a sense of obligation, with any notion that it contributes in the slightest degree to our salvation, isn't actually obedience.* It's a covert form of rebellion masqueraded as obedience. Not only that, it's an insult to God because it demeans His grace by supposing that anything we might do could earn His favor. God isn't a heavenly vending machine into which we put the appropriate coinage in order to get what we want from Him. Neither is God a pagan deity whose favor can be earned by rendering to Him our good deeds.

Far from it!

The glorious fact is there's absolutely nothing we can do to earn God's favor, not because His favor is hard to win, but because we already have it! God is bursting with eager grace, full-throttle love, and lavish mercy—and there's not a thing we have done or can do to earn it. This is why Paul proclaimed what he called “the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). Let the significance of this language register deeply in your heart. Salvation is an accomplished reality in the person and work of Christ, and there is nothing we can contribute to it. It's all there in Him.

Total package!

Done deal!

Accomplished fact!

In His condescending incarnation, in His perfect life, in His self-sacrificing death on the cross, in His triumphant resurrection and ascension to the victory position at the right hand of the Father, we behold redemption in its completed form. Jesus lived a life of pure innocence and perfect righteousness in our humanity, and when He pulled off this astounding feat, an entirely new humanity was forged out of the old, on our behalf.

Salvation, full and free *in Christ!*

That's the gospel.

The good news.

The glad tidings.

The happy message.

And the moment we attempt to add anything to "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" by our law-keeping, the good news evaporates.

Well, then, what about the law?

Glad you asked. Any thinking Adventist would.

The Letter Kills, But The Spirit Gives Life

Take a look at 2 Corinthians 3. If you are Adventist, it is likely you've never really given this passage serious attention, because it doesn't fit with the way we generally frame our view of God's law. It is almost certain you have never heard this passage preached in an evangelistic series, except perhaps to "answer" it with an argument to explain our way around it. We believe our church is called by God

to preach His law. The immutability of God's law is one of our fundamental beliefs. And yet, this passage is Paul's magnum opus on the law and it pretty much doesn't even figure in to Adventist teaching on the law. Here is Paul articulating his best gospel thinking on the law and yet this passage rarely, if ever, shows up in Adventist preaching. We simply don't know what to do with it because we are trying to say one thing about the law and Paul is trying to say something different. I boldly urge that what the apostle to the Gentiles teaches about the law in 2 Corinthians 3 is vitally needed amongst us as a people.

Let's start with verse six. With the light of the gospel blazing in his consciousness, Paul clearly stated what his evangelistic mission was, and what ours ought to be. He says that God has "made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." The ministers of God—which includes all of us as believer in Christ—are to be deliberate about communicating "the new covenant". That's the message God has called us to proclaim. In other words, we are to handle the law of God with an intentional new covenant orientation.

Why is this important?

Because, as Paul puts it, "the letter kills." To preach the law as merely a list of moral rules to be obeyed, leaving any degree of impression that law-keeping grants access to God—to His favor, to His love, to His acceptance—is spiritually dangerous.

"The letter kills."

Apart from a richly-proclaimed, impossible-to-miss, totally-clear proclamation of God's grace, the letter of the law only has power to destroy.

"The letter kills."

The law without the gospel messes us up because it distorts our picture of God. It leaves us with a heavy emotional sense of obligation to *do things for God* rather than *with a sense of gratitude to God for what He has done for us*.

"The letter kills."

Paul goes on to expound his meaning in verse 7 by calling the law "the ministry of death" and in verse 9 "the ministry of condemnation". Clearly, then, Paul is talking primarily about spiritual death, not

physical death. The law administers death by imposing a sense of “condemnation” upon the conscience. In Romans 3:20, Paul says it this way:

“By the law is the knowledge of sin.”

The law operates like a moral mirror to show us our sin by contrast to its perfect standard of selfless love. We look at the law, and we’re like, “Oh no, I’m sunk! I’m not like that at all. I’m totally messed up and bankrupt of moral goodness, if that’s the standard.” And it’s all true. *We are guilty*, and the law makes this clear. *But there is no life in the law’s revelation of our guilt, because guilt is not a sufficient motivator for genuine life-change.* If we remain in the psychological grip of our guilt and try to relate to God for salvation on the premise of the law’s requirements, all we will ever experience is spiritual death.

“The letter kills.”

If the law is preached in such a way as to make us imagine that we can actually keep it if we simply try hard enough, we will inevitably move in one of two directions:

1. We will become self-righteous Pharisees who police one another's behavior and live with judgmental attitudes toward those who don't measure up.
2. Or we will try, and try, and try to obey, motivated by a sense of fear and condemnation, until we finally give up in despair.

“The letter kills.”

By contrast, Paul, says, “The Spirit gives life.” The Holy Spirit is specifically at work within the realm of new covenant preaching, because that’s where real spiritual life is birthed and nurtured. This becomes clear as Paul expounds his point. Notice verses 7-11:

But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.

Paul goes deep here, but once we get it, what he's saying is really very simple and extremely liberating. Let's break it down.

First of all, we know Paul is talking about the moral law and not the ceremonial law because he specifies that the law he's dealing with was "engraved on stones". So we need to face the fact that whatever Paul is about to say has to do with the Ten Commandments. With brilliant insight, Paul goes on to describe the law given through Moses at Mount Sinai by saying that it had a certain kind of "glory". It was revelatory. It did bring vital truth to light. Yes, the law has a realm of legitimate operation, but the law is limited in what it can reveal and what it can achieve. So Paul says its "glory" was necessarily "passing away". It had to give way to something else.

This way of describing the Ten Commandments doesn't set well with us. We find it odd, even troubling, to encounter language like this regarding God's law right there in the Bible. The reflex we are inclined to as Adventists is to maneuver around statements like this or avoid them completely. However Paul is persistent and emphatic—not only here, but throughout his writings—in characterizing the law as transitional to something superior. In Romans 7:4 Paul says, "Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ." In verse 6 he says, "But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter." In Romans 10:4 he says,

"Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." In Galatians 3:24, 25 he says, "The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor."

There is some very important sense in which Christ is the end of the law for those who believe, some vital sense in which the law serves as a tutor to bring us to Christ, some crucial sense in which the believer becomes dead to the law through the death of Christ, some experiential sense in which the believer is delivered from the law. As Adventists, we need to process what Paul teaches about the law if we are ever to really proclaim the gospel with loud-cry, latter-rain power. In general Christian denominations have failed to see what Paul is really getting at regarding the law, and as a result they have gone the antinomianism route. They simply negate the law altogether.

Historically, Adventism came along and rediscovered God's forgotten law. As a people we have rightfully exalted the Ten Commandments as immutable, eternal, and changeless. However, while we have steered clear of antinomianism, we have also for the most part failed to grasp what Paul has to say about the law. As a result, our own prophet repeatedly rebuked us for preaching a wrong spin

on God's law. But if we push ourselves to deal with what Paul says about the Ten Commandments, avoiding the ditch of antinomianism on the left and steering clear of the ditch of legalism on the right, we will discover powerful insights to the gospel that we've never known before. Since the time of Christ and the apostles, antinomianism on the one hand and legalism on the other are the only options that have been prominently articulated for the world. There is a deep and beautiful and powerful genius in Paul's treatment of the law that remains largely undiscovered and un-preached.

So let's go back to 2 Corinthians 3 now.

After telling us that the law had a certain kind of glory, Paul tells us that the glory of the law must give way to a greater glory: "For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious." Paul is clear: there is a glory brought to the world in the person of Christ which "excels" so far beyond the law engraved on tables of stone that the law "had no glory" by comparison. When the angels saw the newborn Messiah, they shouted from the heavens, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men" (Luke 2:14). Approaching the cross, Jesus said, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified" (John 12:23).

Here is the glory that "excels": the glory of Mount Sinai is superseded by the glory of Mount Calvary.

In Christ something is given to the world that the law cannot give, and Paul now tells us what that is. Notice the words in verse 9: "For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory." God saves sinners by ministering "righteousness" to them rather than "condemnation". The Holy Spirit, operating within the new covenant framework and leveraging the achievements of Christ, communicates to our hearts a sense that we are righteous in God's eyes. Here is the great truth of righteousness by faith, which is equivalent to what Paul calls "the new covenant". In Romans 4:17 Paul says it like this: God "calls those things which do not exist as though they did". God call me righteous although He knows I'm sinful. He calls me innocent although He knows I'm guilty. This isn't legal fiction. It's relational genius! God relates to me as if I've never sinned, not to excuse my sin or to leave me in bondage to it, but to liberate me from it at the level of my deepest identity.

In 2 Corinthians 5:19 Paul communicates the same truth with different language: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them." Or, as translated in the New International Version, God saves sinners by "not counting people's sins against them". He reveals Himself in Christ as *already* reconciled to us. In His heart there is forgiveness full and free. We don't

need to do anything to get God there. He's already there. He loves every sinner in the world with a perfectly reconciled love that can't be bought. All that remains to be done is for each of us to see it, believe it, and be reconciled to Him. Said another way, the *objective* reality of salvation is an already-accomplished fact in the person and work of Christ. There is nothing we can do to contribute to it. The *subjective* experience of that objective fact occurs when we embrace it by faith, when we say *Yes!* to God's love, to His forgiveness, to His acceptance as it is revealed in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. Faith creates no new facts, it simply believes the facts as they are in Jesus.

Return again to 2 Corinthians 3 and take in Paul's grand finale in his explanation of the two views of the law. Verses 12-18:

Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Here Paul describes a human condition in which people know the Bible, but they don't *know* it. *They are textually literate and spiritually unenlightened at the same time.* They know the *word*, but they don't know the *Word*. They know chapters and verses and facts, but they don't know the deeper relational realities to which they point. "When Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Yes, Paul is referring to the people of ancient Israel. But, no, he's not referring *only* to Israel. He's also referring to any modern people who happen to know lots of "truth" and preach the law and, because of all the truth they know, see themselves as "rich, and increased with (theological) goods, and have need of nothing," while in reality they are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Revelation 3:17).

Preaching the truth without preaching *the* Truth! Blindness, indeed! But, dear fellow Adventist, there is bright illumination to be had... in Christ! "The veil is taken away in Christ," Paul proclaims. "When one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away." "Beholding, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord." Not a casual look, as if Jesus was one doctrine in a lineup sermons! Not a passing glance, as if Jesus were a district topic among many—say, night six in a 24-part series!

No!

“Beholding” is the word Paul used. He’s telling us to look upon, to ponder, to contemplate Christ as with transfixed gaze! To give Jesus our full, focused, undivided intellectual, emotional, theological attention. And as we do, he tells us exactly what will happen to us, in us, for us: We will be “transformed into the same image from glory to glory.” He had earlier explained that there are two glories before us—the glory of the Sinai event and the glory of the Calvary event; the glory of the letter ministering condemnation and the glory of the Spirit ministering the gift of righteousness; the glory of the law that brings death and the glory of the new covenant that brings life. Now he tells us that as we behold Jesus we will undergo the fundamental, essential, ultimate transformational shift from the one glory to the other, *from relating to God through the law for salvation to relating to God through Christ for salvation*.

Paul has placed before us two distinct options:

1. Old covenant experience, which was never God’s intention, is driven by an emotional sense of condemnation as the motivator toward obedience. Old covenant experience produces an outward appearance of obedience—a pretend, surface, hypocritical, judgmental obedience. Old covenant experience is characterized by a sense of externally imposed pressure to obey the law in order to get acceptance with God.
2. New covenant experience is driven by a deep sense of God’s love as the motivator toward obedience. New covenant experience produces an authentic internal upsurge of obedience to God’s law—true, heartfelt, free from all condemnation. New covenant experience, is characterized by a liberating sense that I already have God’s acceptance, before I render a single act of obedience to the law, which then creates in me a new power to obey that I’ve never known before.

Paul hasn’t done away with the law. He has simply and necessarily set forth the limits of the law’s power and placed it within its legitimate sphere of function. He has not negated the law altogether, but he has emphatically negated the law as a means of salvation. The law serves one purpose, and the Bible clearly tells us what that purpose is: “The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24, 25). A Pharisee of the Pharisees, Paul experienced the definitive theological epiphany: The glory of the law is superseded by the glory of the living Christ! Paul has made the shift, and he’s urging each of us to make the shift too—“from glory to glory,” from the glory of the law to the glory of the gospel. When we make that shift, Adventism will finally become the powerful theological revolution God intends it to be. And we’ll know when it’s happening, because when it does, “One interest will prevail, one subject will swallow up every other—Christ our righteousness” (Ellen White, *Review and Herald*, December 23, 1890).

DAY 3: Discussion Questions

1. The lesson says there are two ways humans relate to the idea that we must obey to earn salvation, or God's love or favor:

lockstep "obedience" that leads to Pharisaism and judgmental thinking, or trying and trying, failing, and giving up in despair.

- a. Which of these extremes has your life mostly leaned toward?
 - b. When did you come to truly understand the principle taught in this lesson—that our salvation is found *only* in Christ, *apart* from the law, and our joyous obedience is made possible by that miraculous acceptance?
 - c. If it was in the past, share a specific story of a change that happened in your life as a result. If you are just now coming to understand it, praise God and watch for stories to share. It *will* change your life!
2. Paul says there was glory in the law. Name two ways the Ten Commandments are glorious to you. He then says there is much more glory in Christ and His perfect, free gift of salvation. Name two ways that the glory of this free gift exceeds the glory of the law for you.
 3. What do you think the "veil" is that keeps truly well-meaning Christians from seeing this truth about grace and the law?
 4. Share three ways you can consciously, continuously behold Christ in your daily life. Commit to practicing these ways of keeping His loving face before you.

DAY 3: Group Activity

1. Add to or decorate your octagon model if desired.
2. Depending on the size of your group, you may want to divide into teams or pairs for this activity. Rewrite each commandment using positive language. When God says "don't", what does He mean for us to *do*? Write them out as promises.

4

DAY 4: THE SABBATH

Restful Love

In our previous message, we discovered vital insights regarding the law of God, allowing ourselves to be instructed by the apostle Paul. First, we saw that the only legitimate way to preach the law is in the form of the new covenant. Any sermon on the law that consists of simply proving that the law ought to be obeyed, without a clear declaration of the gospel of grace, is moving us in the wrong direction. Secondly, we noted that the law functions as a tutor to lead us to Christ so that we might be justified by faith and not by obedience to the law. It is within the scope of the law's function to reveal our sin and thus our need of a Savior, but the law has absolutely no saving power. Lastly, we learned that the law possesses a certain kind of glory. Paul describes that glory as the revelatory power to administer condemnation, or awareness, of our sin. But now, Paul says, the glory of the law is superseded by the greater glory of Christ's righteousness, which the Holy Spirit administers.

In the formative stages of Adventist theology and evangelistic approach, we as a people did not get this. We were heavily engaged in a defensive posture of trying to prove to the wider Christian world that God's law is eternal and therefore everyone ought to obey it—all of it, including the Sabbath commandment. We tended to see Sunday keepers as theological “opponents” who needed to be argued into obedience of the law, and as a result our own theology of the law went in the wrong direction. Because of our mishandling of the law, Ellen White observed that we as Seventh-day Adventists had earned an unfortunate reputation in the eyes of other Christians. Here's how she articulated the impression we had made: “...Seventh-day Adventists talk the law, the law, but do not teach or believe Christ” (Ellen White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 91-92).

We will return to this statement in a moment and consider its historical context. But right now, let's just feel the weight of her assessment. If there is any reputation the church does not want to bring upon itself, this is it. We are, after all, called to preach the everlasting gospel to the world, which is the good news of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and not by the works of the law. And yet, here was our own prophet, Ellen G. White, telling us that we had done precisely the thing we ought not to have done: we had given the impression that Jesus was nowhere on our radar.

And the bad press continues to this day.

Every Adventist evangelist and pastor has to battle the accusation that we are legalists. Our general response to the charge has been to deny the charge, true to our deeply entrenched Laodicean self-view that we are rich and increased with doctrinal goods and have need of nothing. But Ellen White didn't deny it. In fact, she spent a large part of her prophetic ministry confronting us with the fact that we had preached the law in a wrong light and had failed to preach the gospel with clarity. She went to her grave urging us as a church to change course, saying things like this:

The danger has been presented to me again and again of entertaining, as a people, false ideas of justification by faith. I have been shown for years that Satan would work in a special manner to confuse the mind on this point. The law of God has been largely dwelt upon and has been presented to congregations, almost as destitute of the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His relation to the law as was the offering of Cain. (*1888 Materials*, p. 810)

The preaching of Christ crucified has been strangely neglected by our people. Many who claim to believe the truth have no knowledge of faith in Christ by experience... There must be a life-giving power in the ministry. Life must be infused into the missionaries in every place, that they may go forth giving the trumpet no uncertain sound, but with heaven-sent, awakening power, such as can be found only in the preaching of Jesus Christ—His love, His forgiveness, His grace. (*1888 Materials*, pp. 842, 844-855)

These statements, and many more like them, flowed directly out of the 1888 General Conference Session, at which God tried to bring the gospel into Adventist theology through two young men by the names of Ellet Joseph "E.J." Waggoner and Alonzo T. Jones. In one of the most comprehensive and rich statements Ellen White ever penned, she assessed what these men preached like this:

The Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to His people through Elders Waggoner and Jones. [See appendix.] This message was to bring more prominently before the world the uplifted Saviour, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It presented justification through faith in the Surety; it invited the people to receive the righteousness of Christ, which is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God. Many had lost sight of Jesus. They needed to have their eyes directed to His divine person, His merits, and His changeless love for the human family. All power is given into His hands, that He may dispense rich gifts unto men, imparting the priceless gift of His own righteousness to the helpless human agent. This is the message that God commanded to be given to the world. It is the third

angel's message, which is to be proclaimed with a loud voice, and attended with the outpouring of His Spirit in a large measure. (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 91.2)

And it was in this context that she went on to say: “The message of the gospel of His grace was to be given to the church in clear and distinct lines, that the world should no longer say that Seventh-day Adventists talk the law, the law, but do not teach or believe Christ” (*Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 91-92). What an amazing outline of what Adventism could have become and still may become! Imagine how evangelistically powerful it would be if the first thing people thought of when they hear of Seventh-day Adventists was something like, “Oh, yeah, that’s the church that can’t stop talking about God’s love for everybody.”

Wow, that would be incredible—wouldn’t it?

People would be flocking to our churches. The loud cry and latter rain would happen without our incessant perennial efforts to make it happen, because we’d be preaching the very message the Holy Spirit would eagerly acknowledge with His power. In this present message we will discover how one of our doctrines has the potential to open our eyes and ignite true revival among us, based on the only truth that true revival can be based on—the great truth of justification by faith, also known as the gospel.

The doctrine I’m referring to is the biblical truth regarding the Sabbath.

As a people, we’ve tended to reduce the Sabbath to a right-day-versus-wrong-day argument. Ask the average Adventist congregation, “Do we have the truth on the Sabbath?” You’ll get an enthusiastic chorus of “Amen!”

Then ask, “What is the Sabbath truth?” People will call out answers like,

“The seventh day is the Sabbath, not the first day!”

“It’s Saturday, not Sunday!”

“The Catholic church changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday!”

All this is true and important, but it’s not *the* truth that resides within the Sabbath itself. When we limit the Sabbath to an effort to prove that people ought to obey the fourth commandment, we miss what the Sabbath actually means. In this message we will explore what the Sabbath is actually all about, and what we are about to discover is truly amazing. So let’s reexamine the Sabbath and see what a treasure trove of gospel insight we have right under our *Seventh-day* noses.

Rest Built Into the Story

Let's begin by taking a fresh look at the origin of the Sabbath in Genesis. But this time—rather than merely quoting chapter 2:1-3 as a piece of isolated evidence to prove that the Sabbath was given in Eden and therefore ought to be kept by all human beings and not just by the Jews—we will pause to take into account the narrative context in which the Sabbath was instituted. By looking at the full story in which the Sabbath emerges, we will discover the beautiful truth it signifies. In Genesis 1 and 2 we see that God proceeds with creation in an intentional artistic pattern: *forming* material spaces and then *filling* those spaces with life. On the first three days the Creator *forms* spaces by dividing the material elements of creation. On the next three days He *fills* those spaces with living things.

On day one God *forms* the heavens and the earth and separates the light from the darkness, and then on day four He *fills* that space with the sun, the moon and the stars. On day two God *forms* the spaces of water and sky, and then on day five He *fills* those spaces with fish and birds. On day three God *forms* the space of the dry land, and then on day six God *fills* the land with animals and mankind. Then comes the climax of the entire process: God creates the Sabbath and fills it with Himself. The seventh day is a unique space, because it's not a material space, but rather a relational space, and it is not filled with material things, but rather with the blessing of God's fellowship presence.

Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made. (Genesis 2:1-3)

What's being described here is not rest from physical exhaustion, for which sleep is required, but rest in the sense of satisfaction, for which enjoyment is required. God isn't tired, He's happy, pleased, fulfilled. He's been giving, giving, giving; pouring out His energy to create. Now He has completed the task and is receiving back into Himself the pleasure of reciprocated love from His creation. Which is precisely His plan for us—that we would be “blessed” first by receiving from Him in a position of rest and then that we would engage in the expenditure of our energy to give out of ourselves back to Him and to one another. So God “sanctified” the seventh day. The word literally means *unique* or *distinct*. God gave us the Sabbath as a unique space in time for the enjoyment of fellowship between Himself and us, as a constant recurring reminder that the exact nature of our relationship with Him is one of reciprocal love.

But that's not all. The story is more beautiful still.

Notice that human beings were created on the latter half of the sixth day, after all God's "work" of creation was already "finished". Therefore, they did not participate in the work of Creation, nor did they even witness God engaging in the act of creating. Imagine the scene. Adam awakes to life, the face of his Maker just inches from his own. They make eye contact. What a moment! God says something like, *Hello! Welcome to existence! I'm your Creator and I made all this beauty for you.* In that moment something is necessary for the relationship to proceed: faith, belief, trust that what God is telling Him is true. Paul gets at this in Hebrews 11:1: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Then verse 3: "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible."

Adam did not see God create anything, but he finds in himself a confidence, a dependence, a delightful repose in the One addressing him. Faith is built into his nature. He senses that he is loved and God's love draws forth trust from his heart. God then creates Eve. But he doesn't turn to Adam and say, "Watch this," and poof, she is created in Adam's sight. No. He puts Adam to sleep, and then He creates Eve. She, like Adam, awakes to live by faith and Adam opens his eyes a second time to trust His Maker's word that this most beautiful of all creatures standing before him came forth from God's creative power. There they stood, the man and the woman, in a beautiful garden receiving by faith, as a free gift, all that surrounded them. And get this: the Sabbath was their first full day of life. They rested first, contemplating the reality of their utter dependence on their Maker, and then, energized by His love, they went to work tending the garden on first day of the week.

The story of the Creation, positioning Adam and Eve as recipients of a finished work, communicates a powerful message: *We human beings are creatures of rest before we are creatures of work. We are mentally, emotionally, and relationally engineered for receiving from God before we are able to give back to God and others.* "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). That's the nature of the Creator-creature relationship.

The Creation-Salvation Continuum

Okay, then, our first discovery regarding the Sabbath is that it is a memorial of God's finished work of creation, reminding us of our position in creation as trusting recipients of His love. Now we will discover that the Sabbath is also a memorial of redemption. The connection is obvious once we see it. There is a super logical reason why the Sabbath doubles as a memorial of both creation and salvation, and it is this: both are accomplished by the creative power of God alone. Salvation is, in

fact, an act of re-creation on God's part. Within the storyline of Scripture there is what might be described as a creation-salvation continuum. Watch as it beautifully unfolds.

The Old Testament opens with the words, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1), and then the story of creation follows, the "Let there be light," and so on. The New Testament Gospel of John opens with, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1), and then the story of redemption follows. In Genesis 1, the first declaration of the creative venture is, "Let there be light, and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). In the John 1, the first declaration of the redemption venture is, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:4, 5; ESV).

In Genesis 1, the first man is created for the purpose of bearing God's image: "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). In John 1, Jesus becomes the new man to redeem Adam's failure, and reveals God's glory/image without failure: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

In Genesis, once God "finished" the work of creation, "on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done" (Genesis 2:2). In John, as Jesus comes to the end of His salvation ministry, He employs the seventh day language of Genesis 2 and says to the Father, "I have finished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4). And as He hangs upon the cross, He exclaims, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). The next verse informs us that it was "the preparation day", or Friday, when Jesus declared His work of salvation "finished" and then he rested in the tomb on the Sabbath day.

We see, then, that the Bible seamlessly tells two inextricably interwoven stories—the story of creation and the story of recreation, and the Sabbath is the climactic point of resolve in both stories. This is quite astounding and powerful, actually, because when the Sabbath is seen in its natural narrative setting, it preempts legalism. By signifying not only the finished work of creation, but also the finished work salvation, the Sabbath negates the entire salvation by works enterprise and centers our total trust in Christ. It is unfortunate that we have skipped over this telling of the Sabbath truth and settled for a mere right-day versus wrong-day proof-text approach. If we had held the Sabbath forth as the reminder of God's saving grace that it is, it would have immunized us against legalism and our witness to the world would be much more winning.

The Pharisees of Jesus's day turned God's Sabbath into a legalistic rule with which to hammer, judge, and bind people. And we have repeated their history in our own way, from our own angle. Years ago

I heard a pastor ask an Adventist youth, "What does the Sabbath mean to you?" The boy thought for a moment and answered, "Sit down, shut up, and color, or you'll end up with the mark of the beast." While some may view it as humorous, for many Adventists this response nevertheless represents their overall impression about the Sabbath. Ellen White tried to prompt us to view the law in the light of the gospel. On one occasion she said: "The law of ten commandments is not to be looked upon as much from the prohibitory side, as from the mercy side" (*Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 235).

On another occasion she wrote: "The Ten Commandments, 'Thou shalt,' and, 'Thou shalt not,' are ten promises" (*Bible Echo*, June 17, 1901). This holds true for the fourth commandment. The Sabbath is not about what we can't do for a twenty four hour period of time each week. It's about what God has done and will do for us by His merciful grace. When understood within the context of the overall biblical story, the Sabbath is a constant reminder of our utter dependence on Jesus for salvation and, therefore, the very antithesis of legalism.

The Unforced Rhythms of Grace

It is not at all surprising, then, that Jesus defined salvation as involving rest from the anxiety of laboring to merit God's favor: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). The "labor" from which Jesus offers "rest" is not physical labor, but the emotional anxiety of laboring under a false picture of God's character, which leads us to believe that His acceptance must be earned. We know this is His point because He offers rest for our "souls", which is *psyche* in the original Greek text. He's literally saying, "*I want to release your mind from its labor.*" This is the deeper rest that we really need: the rest of knowing that God loves us and saves us by His grace, not because we have done sufficient work to make ourselves worthy of His love.

As we enter into the rest He offers, we discover that God is not a hard, exacting taskmaster at all. Far from it. When we get on the inside of God's heart, we find that serving Him is "easy" and "light". Why? Because that's just how love operates. It completely rearranges a person's perspective on what is *heavy* and *hard*. For the person who is in love, *heavy* and *hard* are nearly foreign concepts. Ellen White says it this way:

We must not trust at all to ourselves or to our good works; but when as erring, sinful beings we come to Christ, we may find rest in His love. God will accept every one that comes to Him trusting wholly in the merits of a crucified Savior. Love springs up in the heart. There may be no ecstasy of feeling, but there is an abiding, peaceful

trust. Every burden is light; for the yoke which Christ imposes is easy. Duty becomes a delight, and sacrifice a pleasure. (*Faith and Works*, p. 38)

Wow! That is so cool!

Can you imagine any better experience?

Of course you can't!

When Jesus says, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," He is offering the most liberated life imaginable. Another version of the Bible brilliantly captures the idea like this: "Learn the unforced rhythms of grace" (The Message).

Unforced...

I'm at rest.

Rhythms...

and yet I'm moving.

Of grace...

because God's unmerited love powerfully moves me from the inside out.

Non-coercive love is the fundamental principle that pervades the character of God and upon which His kingdom operates. Through the prophet Jeremiah God declared both His *heart* toward us and His *method* of saving us: "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness I have drawn you" (Jeremiah 31:3).

This is so amazing. Notice the logical relationship between how God feels about us and how He approaches us. Because God loves us, He seeks to draw us to Himself by the attractive influence of His loving-kindness, rather than to force us by His superior power or manipulate us by His superior wisdom. God's only goal is to attract and empower us.

That's all.

And that's a lot.

Monumental, in fact.

No greater achievement is conceivable, even for Almighty God, because, astounding as it may seem, you and I are free to literally say *no* to God. So He has embarked upon the delicate task of saving us from sin while leaving our freewill unmolested, intact, and operable.

What a God!

Ellen White ingeniously observed, “Love is the agent He uses to expel sin from the heart” (*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 76). Grace is the form God’s love takes in relating to sinners. The genius of grace is that it simultaneously frees me and captivates me. The moment I realize there is absolutely nothing I can do to earn God’s favor, I am free to say *No* to His will and yet I eagerly say *Yes*. But if I believe, intellectually or even emotionally, any form of the salvation-by-works lie, I am morally crippled, immobilized, and defeated. I labor toward God under feelings of guilt, and guilt weakens rather than strengthens my will. Ellen White issues this warning and encouragement:

We should not make self the center and indulge anxiety and fear as to whether we shall be saved. All this turns the soul away from the Source of our strength. Commit the keeping of your soul to God, and trust in Him. Talk and think of Jesus. Let self be lost in Him. Put away all doubt; dismiss your fears. Say with the apostle Paul, “I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” Galatians 2:20. Rest in God. (*Steps to Christ*, p. 71)

There is a stabilizing security in knowing that my salvation is His work and not mine. That is the rest Jesus offers. But it’s more than *just* rest He offers, because with rest comes energy! Resting in Christ alone for my salvation, His grace arouses me, energizes me, and motivates me with the pure and powerful motive of love as the only true basis for obedience. I am propelled from the inside out by the unforced rhythms of His grace. Suddenly the Sabbath makes more sense than it ever has before.

Theological sense, for sure.

But also emotional sense.

And relational sense.

I find myself face-to-face, heart-to-heart with a God who *already* loves me, *already* favors me, *already* accepts me, not because I’ve done anything to deserve it, but simply because He’s good. And right here, right now, in this realization, I rest. This is what the Sabbath truth is all about.

DAY 4: Discussion Questions

1. Unfortunately, we all know stories of Seventh-day Adventists (ourselves?) who have acted in judgmental and unloving ways. Take some time to share stories that you know personally of Adventists who have shown forth the glory of God's unconditional love in their actions.
2. The lesson says God created the seventh day and filled it with Himself. But God is in every day, right? In what way or ways is God's presence somehow different on the Sabbath? How can you tell?
3. Do you think of yourself as resting first, then working, or as resting to "get over" and recover from work? What would happen in your life if you completely gave yourself over to the former concept instead of the latter?
4. What is your reaction to the concept that the story of creation and the story of redemption are intertwined, and Sabbath is at the heart of both? How will this change you?
5. How can you begin to relax into the "unforced rhythms of grace"? Be specific.

DAY 4: Group Activity

Add to or decorate your octagon model if desired.

1. Divide your group into three equal groups.
 - Assign one group to argue against Sabbath.
 - Assign the second group to argue in favor of Sabbath.
 - Assign the third group to figure out ways to use the principles in this lesson to encourage the first group to experience rest, relaxation (whether they think they have earned it or not), and to feel the "unforced rhythms" of God's eternal grace and love.
2. One way to organize this, if you have time: First, have one person from group 1 and one person from group 2 argue it out for 30 seconds to a minute.
 - Ask person 1 *if his or her opinions have changed*. Then assign one person from group 3 to encourage the person from group 1 and ask again. Alternatively, you can allow the groups to work as a whole in the same order: groups 1 and 2 argue, then group 3 attempts to encourage, to give a gift of needed rest.

5

DAY 5: THE SANCTUARY

Merciful Love

When Ellen White was a teenage girl she had a mind blowing dream about a huge temple. She wrote:

“I dreamed of seeing a temple to which many people were flocking. Only those who took refuge in that temple would be saved when time should close.” In the dream, she felt urgency to take refuge in the building, but she was afraid of being laughed at by the mocking crowd. With self-conscious fear she made her way slowly to the temple. Upon entering, she immediately saw that the building was designed with an unusual and striking architectural feature: “On entering the building, I saw that the vast temple was supported by one immense pillar.”

Interesting!

Here was a large building, and the whole thing was being held up by “one immense pillar”. As she pondered what this might mean, she noticed something about the pillar: “...to this [pillar] was tied a Lamb all mangled and bleeding. We who were present seemed to know that this Lamb had been torn and bruised on our account” (*Early Writings*, pp. 78-79).

Ah, now we see the point of the vision.

Here God revealed to the young Ellen White that the entire temple of truth that He was revealing to the Advent people would find its “one immense pillar” of support in the cross of Christ. A riveted focus on the cross would be crucial for a proper grasp of the entire theological structure. Jesus must be kept in clear view as the real point of every point of truth. Referencing the “pillar” symbol, Ellen White later wrote that the cross “is the central pillar on which hangs the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory which is for those who accept the cross. Under and around the cross of Christ, that immortal pillar, sin shall never revive, nor error obtain control” (*SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7A, p. 457).

And on another occasion, with even greater clarity, she penned these words: “There is one great central truth to be kept ever before the mind in the searching of the Scriptures—Christ and Him

crucified. Every other truth is invested with influence and power corresponding to its relation to this theme” (*The Faith I Live By*, p. 50). Ellen White was specific, definite, and passionate about viewing all truth in the light that streams from Calvary. The cross of Christ, upon which Jesus suffered and died with perfect love for humanity, is the central pillar that supports the entire structure of doctrinal truth. The moment we reduce truth to a list of factual points to be argued and proven, we have emasculated the truth of its power to save. But as soon as we realize that every doctrine is a window into God’s love, that’s when its true beauty shines forth and real power is released into action.

Alright, then, with that little introduction before us, we are now prepared to explore the doctrine we commonly refer to as *The Sanctuary*.

A Path Lies Before Us

When King David looked at the sanctuary, he saw a *path*. In Psalm 77, verse 13, he said, “Your way, oh God, is in the sanctuary.” This is a super cool and powerful insight, so follow along carefully. The word here translated is *derek*. It means a *path* or a *journey*. The word conveys the idea of traveling to a set destination, moving from somewhere to somewhere else. The obvious next question is, from *where* to *where*? Well, if we just take a look at the basic layout of the sanctuary, sure enough, a path is immediately evident. Let’s take a quick tour to get a basic feel for the journey, and then we’ll take a more detailed look.

(NOTE: at this point the speaker should either put up a slide or draw a picture on a board to show the basic floor plan of the sanctuary.) Visit www.gcyouthministries.org for PowerPoint presentation of this lesson.)

First, there is the camp of Israel. This is where the people live in tents surrounding the sanctuary, three tribes of Israel on each side—North, South, East and West—with the sanctuary in middle of the encampment. God told Moses: “Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them” (Exodus 25:8). Everyone can see the sanctuary in the distance, from their “front yard”, so to speak. It is literally “among them” at the center of their traveling wilderness city. But it’s not just the building that is “among them”. The sanctuary houses the very presence of God in the form of the Shekinah glory. We’ll come back to this in just a moment, but for now we simply want to notice that God wants to be with His people, and He wants to make it possible for them to be with Him, even though at present, for their safety, He can only dwell with them behind a series of veils.

As we move from the camp toward the building, we notice that the sanctuary is enclosed by a high white linen wall. White symbolizes moral purity, righteousness, and innocence. The message of the

high white wall is clear: we are on the other side of innocence, on the outside of righteousness. We are sinners separated from God by our unlikeness to His character, which means, by our lack of love. But then we notice that God has provided a door of hope, a point of access, because on the east side there is an entrance through the high white wall, in the form of a beautiful curtain woven of blue, purple and red, in addition to white. As we enter in through the curtain, we find ourselves standing before a large, brass altar. A priest is there leading out in a ceremony. We see a man on his knees, his hands bearing down upon the head of a little lamb, almost crushing the submissive animal. The man confesses his sins, symbolically offloading his guilt to the innocent victim. Then the priest places a knife in the man's hand. With one rapid move, the throat is slit and the blood of the lamb flows from its body, some of which is caught by the priest in a bowl. The lifeless sacrifice is then placed on the altar and burned to ashes.

We move forward in the symbolic path and watch as the priest washes his hands and feet in the second piece of brass furniture in the courtyard, called the laver of washing. The priest then proceeds with the bowl of blood into the first room of the sanctuary, called the Holy Place. Standing in the Holy Place, as we look to the right, we see a gold table with two stacks of fresh-baked flatbread placed upon it. As we turn around and look to the left, we see a candlestick with seven branches, each one bearing a bright, flickering flame. As we turn and face forward in the path, we see a golden altar with incense burning upon it, filling the room with fragrance. We then notice that the priest is doing something that looks very planned and intentional: he is dipping his fingers in the bowl of blood and sprinkling the red liquid on the veil that hangs just beyond the altar of incense. He counts under his breath: one, two, three... He dips and sprinkles exactly seven times.

Curious as to what lies beyond the veil, we draw it aside and step into the second room of the sanctuary, called the Most Holy Place or the Holy of Holies. Within this room, there is one impressive piece of furniture. It is an ornately-designed rectangular box, called the Ark of the Covenant. Inside the box are the two tables of stone, on which the very finger of God has engraved the Ten Commandments. On top of the box is a solid gold lid, called the Mercy Seat. On either end of the Ark there are two solid gold angelic figures. These are called the two covering cherubs. As we turn and look around, we notice that the veil and the ceiling are embroidered with golden angels. Most impressive of all, above the Ark, radiating between the two covering cherubs is a bright light. This is the Shekinah glory, the visible presence of God.

Clearly, the path marked out in the sanctuary has three basic steps, or experiential phases:

1. The Courtyard
2. The Holy Place

3. The Most Holy Place

We can summarize what we've learned so far like this:

The sanctuary provides a *way*, a *path*, and an experiential *journey* for the people to get back into immediate, unveiled fellowship with God. It is God's plan for restoring intimacy between Himself and us!

Jesus Is The Journey

When we come to the New Testament, we learn that every symbol of the sanctuary pointed to Jesus, depicting the various aspects of His saving ministry to sinners. First of all, as we open the Gospel of John, we see that Jesus is described with sanctuary language. Notice John 1:14: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." The word translated here as "dwelt" literally means *tabernacle* or *sanctuary*. So Young's Literal Translation reads, "The Word became flesh, and did tabernacle among us." Getting even more personal, another Bible version says, "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood" (*The Message*).

And John tells why Jesus came: so that we might behold the "glory" of God. This is an obvious reference to the Shekinah glory that resided in the Most Holy Place of the Old Testament sanctuary. The translators of *The Complete Jewish Bible* got this. Notice how they translated the text: "The Word became a human being and lived with us, and we saw his Sh'khinah, the Sh'khinah of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth." John's intent is clear. Jesus is the reality to which the symbolic sanctuary pointed. As we've already seen, God said to Moses in the Old Testament, "Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8). Now this same God has shown up in the world dwelling among us in a tabernacle made of flesh and blood. Through Him, human beings are now being led into the Holy of Holies, into the immediate presence of the Shekinah glory.

But things get even clearer, and more amazing, as we move through the Gospel of John. In John 2:19-21 we read: "Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' Then the Jews said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?' But He was speaking of the temple of His body." Here we see that Jesus is explicitly identified Himself as the "temple" to which the ancient temple was pointing. He has come to the world to act out in reality all that the sanctuary presented in symbol.

Remember what we read in Psalm 77:13? “Your way, oh God, is in the sanctuary.”

Now notice what Jesus said about Himself in John 14: 6: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

Jesus claims to be the “way” or the path that the sanctuary depicted. The vital thing that we realize here is that the destiny to which the sanctuary path pointed, and to which Jesus takes us, isn’t merely a place, but rather a person. Jesus says He is the way “to the Father”. The sanctuary doesn’t convey dry theological facts. It presents before us an experiential journey deeper and deeper into the heart of God. And Jesus is that journey. Literally every symbol of the sanctuary pointed to Him and the great work of salvation He would embark upon to get us back to Most-Holy-Place intimacy with God.

Watch this as we make the connections.

Each of the three phases of the sanctuary could only be accessed through a veil. Jesus said of Himself, to Him and the great work of salvation, “He who comes to Me, he will be saved” (John 10:9). And the apostle Paul said that through Jesus we have “a new and living way, which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh” (Hebrews 10:20).

- The main ceremony of the sanctuary was the sacrifice of the lamb on the brass altar. Pointing to Jesus as the sacrifice for our sins, John the Baptist proclaimed, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).
- The laver that was used for ceremonial washing pointed to Jesus as “the living water” (John 4:11) and teaches us about “the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5).
- The bread on table in the Holy Place pointed to Jesus, who said, “He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).
- The seven-branched lampstand was kept burning to provide light in the sanctuary. Jesus said of Himself, the sacrifice for our sin, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12).
- The altar of incense pointed to a specific aspect of Christian experience: “He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of the saints” (Revelation 8:3). The fragrant incense burning in the sanctuary symbolized our prayer arising to God through Jesus.
- The Ten Commandments, God’s ten laws of self-giving love, were kept inside the Ark of the Covenant, symbolizing God’s desire to write the principles of His love in our hearts

and minds: “I will put my laws into their minds, and in their hearts I will write them” (Hebrews 10:16).

Describing the roundtrip journey He made from the Father to our world and back again, Jesus said, “I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father” (John 16:28). Jesus came from the Most Holy Place into our sinful, separated encampment here on earth. He then took hold of our wayward hearts and made the journey back to the Most Holy Place, inviting us to follow Him on the path He has marked out for us.

So what is the sanctuary all about?

It's all about Jesus!

It's all about Jesus fulfilling the many dimensions of His saving ministry on our behalf!

It's all about Jesus leading us step-by-step back to a completely restored relationship with the Father!

Salvation History

Okay, let's back up now, take a deep breath, and look at the sanctuary from another angle. What we've seen so far is that the sanctuary symbolically represents the personal journey of the individual believer in Christ. But the sanctuary also represents salvation history as a whole. The Courtyard, with its altar of sacrifice directs, our attention to A.D. 31, when Jesus was crucified on our behalf. After His resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven where He took up His role as our heavenly High Priest in the Holy Place of the “true tabernacle” in heaven. This phase of His ministry began in A.D. 31 and continued until 1844, at which time He moved into the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary to engage in the final phase of His High Priestly ministry.

Within the scope of the Jewish year, there were two basic ceremonial services that depicted the entire story of redemption: the *daily* service and the *yearly* service. *The Daily Service*, which is outlined for us in Leviticus 1-4, was a very simple but meaningful series of ceremonial enactments. The process centered around the priest making regular sacrifices for the sins of the people and symbolically transferring their sins into the sanctuary by sprinkling the blood on the veil before the Most Holy Place. This pointed to the perfect sacrifice for sin that was to be made by Christ when He would die on the cross. There was an illuminating genius in this daily symbolic service. While the surrounding pagan nations were engaging in the heinous practice of human sacrifice, prompted by demons

masquerading as gods (Deuteronomy 32:16-17; Psalm 106:37), the Hebrew people were being taught through the sanctuary that God would give Himself to suffer and die for humanity.

God was communicating the awesome truth that our salvation cannot be earned by any sacrifice we might make. God cannot be appeased, because He already loves us. We don't need to persuade Him by our deeds to save us, because He has already determined to save us at any and all cost to Himself. Day by day throughout the year the ceremony was repeated, reinforcing in the people's minds that God would make all the sacrifice necessary for our salvation. The ceremony was a constant, receptive declaration from God, saying, *I love you so much that I will suffer and die to rescue you from sin and death.*

The Yearly Service is outlined in Leviticus 16. On the last day of the annual sacrificial cycle, the symbolism of the sanctuary service reached its completion. The event was called, *Yom Kippur*, the *Day of Atonement*. On this climactic day, a special ceremony was enacted to symbolize the final resolution of the sin problem—complete atonement and the total eradication of evil. As all of Israel gathered before the sanctuary, two goats were brought to the high priest. One was designated “for Lord” and the other for “the scapegoat”, *Azazel* in Hebrew. The Lord's goat was slain, again pointing forward to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross as the only means of salvation. Again, God was saying, *Me—not you! I will make the sacrifice for your salvation, not you.* Some of the blood of the Lord's goat was brought into the Most Holy Place and sprinkled seven times on the mercy seat over God's broken law, thus indicating that final and full atonement was made for all the sins Israel had confessed throughout the year in the daily service. Thus, the Day of Atonement equated to a final, irrevocable judgment in favor of the people, in favor of their salvation, in favor of their perfect standing before God.

Then the high priest placed both hands on the head of the scapegoat and confessed over it the sins of the people. However, *Azazel's* goat was not slain. Rather, it was led into “an uninhabited land” to perish in “the wilderness” alone. Since the scapegoat was explicitly *not* “the Lord's goat”, and since its blood was *not* shed as a sacrifice, *Azazel* must symbolize another figure that bears responsibility for the existence of evil and the fall of humanity. The ancient Hebrew people understood that *Azazel* represented Satan, the originator of evil and the tempter of mankind, and Jewish scholars to this day hold this view. So, then, we see that the Day of Atonement pointed forward to the day of final reckoning or judgment, during which each person's case will be sealed and Satan will bear responsibility for evil as its author. The part that gives some people nightmares is the idea that they must face the judgment. And yet, it is precisely here that we encounter one of the most beautiful pictures of God imaginable.

The Judgment

John works the judgment through for us with a series of powerful insights. Follow his excellent gospel-calibrated reasoning. In 1 John 3:20, 21, he says this: “For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God” (1 John 3:20, 21). First, John wants us to know that an internal sense of condemnation is natural to the sin problem. Yes, our hearts condemn us, and rightfully so. We are sinners, after all. We carry a sense of guilt in our consciences for the wrongs we have done. But then John says, “God is greater than our hearts.” That is, God’s love is more powerful than the condemnation we feel for our sins. He knows everything about me and you and He loves us still. When we believe this, the condemnation in our hearts recedes and we have “confidence toward God”.

Then, in chapter four, John expands the idea. Take in every line:

Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the Day of Judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us. (1 John 4:15-19)

What a picture!

Boldness in the Day of Judgment—Not fear! Not even timidity!

But boldness!

How can that be?

What John teaches us here is so absolutely vital to a healthy understanding of the judgment. He wants us to understand that when we are grounded in God’s love—when we “know and believe the love that God has for us”—we will “have boldness in the day of judgment”. God’s love “casts out fear” from our hearts and takes up all the emotional space inside of us. I do not enter the judgment with confidence in my righteousness, but with utter dependence on His. This is the glorious secret of the Most Holy Place, the delightful truth of the Day of Atonement. As we enter that inmost room for judgment, we see that the law of God, which is the righteous standard of the judgment, is covered with the mercy seat, and the mercy seat itself is covered with blood.

Here, in symbolism, is the great truth of “Christ’s Our Righteousness”. The law that points out our sin and declares our guilt is answered by the mercy of God. Jesus lived a life of perfect righteousness, and God regards me as righteous in Him. Jesus died for me. His blood was shed for me, revealing that God’s love supersedes my sin and guilt. Paul says it like this: “Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (Romans 5:20). This is breathtaking good news!

But with all this bright light about God’s mercy, there is a danger and a warning. James informs us that there is one way we can thwart the power of God’s mercy toward us in the judgment, and it’s by being unmerciful to others: “For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13). *If I relate to others with condemnation for their sins, I reveal that I have not really embraced God’s mercy toward me for my sins.* God’s mercy is there for me in the judgment, but I won’t be able to see it if I block it from my vision by being unmerciful to others. By being hard on people, I set up in myself mental and emotional walls that make it impossible for me to perceive God’s love for me. Condemnation of others for their wrongs creates narrow psychological parameters in the mind so that God’s mercy cannot be perceived or received. It is clear, then, that having a judgmental attitude toward others is literally the most dangerous thing a human being can do.

The truth of the judgment is a call to receive and give mercy. And that makes it extremely good news, unless, of course, I choose to live in condemnation of others. But why go that route? There is a beautiful, healing path stretched out before each of us in Christ:

through the door of His inviting love,
to the altar of sacrifice, there to receive complete forgiveness for all our sins,
making our way over to the laver to be washed clean of a guilty conscience,
into the Holy Place to feed on the bread of life, to live by the illuminating light of God’s goodness that streams from Jesus, and to lift our grateful prayers to God mingled with the fragrance of Christ’s righteousness,
and finally onward into the Most Holy Place to be judged by God with eternal favor and to have His law of love written in our hearts.

Come on! Let’s take the journey set before us by God’s merciful love.

DAY 5: Discussion Questions

The lesson says being judgmental and condemning of others is “the most dangerous thing a human being can do.” What if you are not that way toward others, but only toward yourself? Is that any better? Why or why not?

Share stories from your life that exemplify when you:

1. came into the courtyard of God’s love;
2. entered the Holy Place of prayer and communion with Him, and
3. entered the Most Holy Place where you have full relation with the God of the universe.

If possible, set up six stations in the room, perhaps with things that symbolize the first curtain, then the altar and laver, the second veil followed by the bread, candlestick, and incense, and the third veil leading to the Ark of the Covenant.

1. Silently and prayerfully, walk along this path together. Enter through the door of His inviting love, pausing at the altar of sacrifice, there to receive complete forgiveness for all your sins. Make your way over to the laver to be washed clean of a guilty conscience, then into the Holy Place to feed on the bread of life, to live by the illuminating light of God’s goodness that streams from Jesus. Lift your grateful prayers to God mingled with the fragrance of Christ’s righteousness.
2. Finally, move onward into the Most Holy Place to be judged by God with eternal favor and to have His law of love written in your hearts.

DAY 5: Group Activity

1. Add to or decorate your octagon model if desired.
2. The activity is built into this lesson. Create a sanctuary using paper or blocks, **or** walk one out in the room, using furniture, **or** (last resort) simply draw one. If you choose this method, have each person draw one and take it home to use in their devotions this week; ask them to share their insights later in the week.

Leader to share with the youth ahead of time:

This coming Sabbath we will have a special homecoming celebration. Our theme is the 2nd Coming of Christ. This could be an opportunity for your friends who have disengaged from our church community, to experience their second coming to our church community.

6

DAY 6: DEATH & HELL

Selfless Love

In this Week of Prayer series, we've been circling the temple of truth, looking in through a few of the doctrinal windows that compose the Seventh-day Adventist belief system. What we've discovered over and over again is that each individual Bible truth points to the one big Truth of God's love embodied in Jesus Christ. Every true biblical doctrine serves as a perceptual lens through which God's character of self-giving love is more clearly revealed. Ellen White brilliantly summarized the entire Bible as "the book that unfolds the character of God" (*Signs of the Times*, March 3, 1898). In keeping with this view of Scripture, she also summarized the Adventist message as the "revelation of His character of love" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 415). The value of any given doctrine lies in its ability to communicate something regarding kind of person God is. Any truth claim that contradicts the foundational premise that "God is love" (1 John 4:8) proves itself false by virtue of that contradiction.

Notice how Ellen White describes the whole point of Bible study: "You should search the Bible; for it tells you of Jesus. As you read the Bible, you will see the matchless charms of Jesus. You will fall in love with the Man of Calvary, and at every step you can say to the world, 'His ways are ways of pleasantness, and all His paths are peace.'" (Life Sketches, p. 293). So cool!

Study the Bible, she says.

But why?

Because it reveals the matchless charms of Jesus!

And what will happen to you as you encounter Jesus in Scripture?

You will fall in love with Him!

Problem is, we often study and preach the Bible with Jesus nowhere in sight, or if He is in sight, it is as a footnote. If there is anything we need to be clear on, it is this: Jesus is not part of our message. *Jesus is our whole message.* To the degree that He is not, we are not preaching “the truth,” no matter how much we imagine we are. Our state-of-the-dead doctrine is an example of a biblical truth that has massive potential to reveal God’s amazing love in Christ. Sadly, however, it has often been reduced to a mere a text-by-text argument for the sake of proving that people are unconscious when they die and winning the argument that no one goes straight to heaven or hell. Let’s be clear: that part of the picture *is* vital, but *why* is it vital? Simply to prove the fact that the dead are really dead? No! Rather, it is vital because the biblical truth about death opens a window of understanding into the true nature of Christ’s suffering and death at Calvary, which in turn reveals the true nature of God’s love with breathtaking clarity.

So let’s dive into this remarkable subject and see what we discover.

Death According To the Bible

The first thing we need to understand about death is that in the Bible we are taught that there are two kinds of death. In the book of Revelation, we are told that there is something called, “the second death” (Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8). We can logically deduce from this language that if there is a second death and then there is of necessity a first death. In Matthew 10:28 Jesus explains the basic difference between the two: “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” The first death is merely the killing of the body. This is the common death that everybody dies, that all human beings are familiar with. As Seventh-day Adventists we understand that the first death puts a human being into an unconscious, sleep-like state. When a person dies the first death, he or she does not go immediately to heaven or hell.

However, this is not the end of the story, because when a person dies the first death that is not his or her end. From the first death, there is a resurrection, both of the saved and the lost. Jesus stated this explicitly: “The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28, 29). Okay, so people die the first death and then they are resurrected, but there is a reason why they can be resurrected. The reason is that when a person dies the first death, in some form God preserves the essential personality and character of that individual, although the body is in an unconscious, completely lifeless state. The Bible says it this way: “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

Of course, the “dust” refers to the body, which returns to the earth as organic matter after the first death. The “spirit” that returns to God is the total content of each individual’s personality, thoughts, feelings, motives—everything that defines the unique identity and moral character of the person. The “spirit” that “returns” to God when a person dies first death God simply preserves in an unconscious state while awaiting the resurrection, when God will reconstitute the physical body with the spirit, at which point conscious life resumes. Ellen White explained it like this:

“Our personal identity is preserved in the resurrection, though not the same particles of matter or material substance as went into the grave. The wondrous works of God are a mystery to man. The spirit, the character of man, is returned to God, there to be preserved. In the resurrection every man will have his own character. God in His own time will call forth the dead, giving again the breath of life, and bidding the dry bones live” (*Heaven*, p. 40).

It's kind of like taking a hard drive out of a computer, which has the record of all the unique information that the owner of the computer had collected and configured, and setting it on the shelf for a while and then later on installing all that information in a new computer. When a person dies the first death, the body decomposes in the earth and God preserves the specific makeup of the individual for the resurrection. At that point, each individual faces one of two destinies: to be given the gift of immortality or to experience the second death.

So what about the second death? What is it? How does it happen?

Let's return to Matthew 10:28, where Jesus distinguished between the first and the second death: “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” The word that is here translated “soul” is *psyche* in the Greek text. It basically refers to the mind in all of its content, what we referred to earlier as a person’s character, or the total content of one's individual identity. Whereas the first death merely involves the killing of the body, or the biological aspect of a person, the second death involves the complete eradication of the individual’s body and soul from existence. It constitutes the final annihilation of the wicked, “as though they had never been” (Obadiah 16).

The crucial part to understand is how the second death happens and what causes it. Jesus gave us a pretty clear indication in John 5:29. The wicked come back to life from the first death in what He called “the resurrection of condemnation”. Condemnation is a psychological phenomenon. It happens in the mental and emotional process when a person faces the reality of his or her guilt for the relational violations he or she has committed. When the wicked are resurrected, they won't simply be physically

destroyed a second time. They will face their life's record with full, unbuffered clarity in the contrasting light of God's self-sacrificing love for them. Revelation 20 vividly describes the scene:

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15)

This is a very heavy and extremely sad passage of Scripture, because it describes the final destruction of the wicked, every one of them a human being that God loved dearly; every one of them an individual who was given the gift of eternal life in Christ; every one of them a person that persistently rejected God's love to their internal ruin. What we want to notice in this passage is precisely how the wicked experience the second. There are four basic features brought to view:

Number One

The second death is initiated by a full revelation of God Almighty, seated upon "a great white throne" with His "face" fully exposed to the astonished gaze of all. Paul calls this event "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Romans 2:5). Wrath occurs in the light of *revelation*. The revelation proceeds from God and takes on the form of self-awareness in those who behold it.

Number Two

As the wicked stand before God, there will be found "no place for them". These are no doubt the saddest words in all of human literature. The second death is total aloneness, a deep inner sense of complete un-belonging. The wicked, standing before God's throne and gazing upon His countenance, realize with intense vividness that they are so out of harmony with God's kingdom that there is absolutely "no place for them". Those who are irrevocably bent toward selfishness don't fit into a universe governed by the absolute rule of selfless love. They cannot exist among or interact with a society of beings who live wholly for one another. They can't even comprehend such a society. The beautiful ebb and flow of giving and receiving is beyond their ability to engage in or even appreciate.

Sin has hollowed their hearts of the very capacity for love. Rebellion has stripped away them the gentle impulses of the soul. Selfishness has eradicated their sensitive humanity.

The second death confronts the wicked with the bleak reality of an ultimate meaninglessness, for there is no meaning to life apart from life's Author. Complete loneliness is all they can feel, for there is no satisfying relationship apart from the One to whom we are most closely related. A sense of total worthlessness pervades their souls, for there can never be any real sense of personal worth apart from the God who created our value in His own image. *Living for self ultimately leads to self-hatred.* Selfishness is, by its very nature, isolation from all others, stealing from the soul the perceptions and emotions necessary to give and receive love. In a universe where the essential life-sustaining principle is selfless love, "there is found no place for them". They sink with regretful self-disgust into acute feelings of total abandonment.

Number Three

As the wicked stand before God, "the books" are "opened" and they are "judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books". In other words, they face the full reality of their sin and all the guilt that it entails comes upon their consciousness with perfect awareness. This is what Jesus was referring to when he said that they are resurrected to "condemnation". Every selfish deed of their lives passes before their minds with vivid clarity. The second death brings the soul face-to-face with the full, ugly reality of one's sin, untempered by any sense of divine mercy. Sin, once committed, is an existing reality in the mind. It is on record in the conscience and must be resolved either by forgiveness or by suffering. Forgiveness is possible only by means of embracing God's merciful love. Suffering is the only alternative to forgiveness, which is why God can only forgive by means of enduring in Himself the suffering inherent in sin.

The weight of sin's terrible condemnation crushes out all the vital life forces of the soul. All human beings are sinners. Therefore, all are under condemnation. That condemnation will eventually, ultimately impose an unbearable shame upon those who refuse to see the healing reality of God's pardoning love. A conscious sense of God's love and acceptance is the only power with the capacity to neutralize the power of sin and prevent it from destroying the soul. In order to grasp what the Bible means when it says, "the books were opened... and the dead were judged," try to imagine what it would be like if you were made perfectly conscious of every sin you've ever committed—every wrong thought and feeling and action. Perfect awareness, all at once, with every ugly detail staring at your inner soul with no way of escape. Then add to that horrendous picture an absolute absence of mercy. No concept of forgiveness. No sense of acceptance. No picture of a God who freely and eagerly pardons all sin.

What would that moment in time be like for you? I know what it would be like for me. There are no words adequate to describe the mind-shattering ordeal. The only reason we have never had to face the full potency of our guilt is because the plan of salvation, set into motion by a loving Creator, has erected a veil of mercy in the human conscience to act as a buffer to preserve us from sin's full effect.

Number Four

Then, as the wicked face their life's records and experience the total weight of their guilt, they are destroyed by fire.

Throughout the Bible God is associated with fire.

- Moses encountered God in a burning bush (Exodus 3:2).
- God's Law is called a "fiery Law" (Deuteronomy 33:2).
- God's "glory" is described as "fire" (Exodus 24:17).
- God's throne is ablaze with fire and from it proceeds a river of fire (Daniel 7:9, 10).
- God's love is said to be a flame of fire (Song of Solomon 8:6, NASB).
- And Paul simply states, "Our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29).

God's total being is described as a consuming fire for one simple reason: because the pure reality of His selfless love stands in distinct contrast to all that is contrary to love. Being what and who God is, self-serving beings cannot enter His presence without experiencing total mental and emotional disintegration under the crushing weight of their shame. Ellen White got straight to the core of this reality:

The word of the Lord to Israel was, "I will turn My hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy sin" (Isa. 4:4; 1:25). To sin, wherever found, "Our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). In all who submit to His power the Spirit of God will consume sin. But if men cling to sin, they become identified with it. Then the glory of God, which destroys sin, must destroy them. (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 107)

Humans were originally created in a perfectly innocent state of being, capable of living in God's immediate presence with total peace and pleasure (Genesis 1-2). When sin entered our psychological make-up, all we could experience in God's presence was the torment of our shame (Genesis 3:7-10). God explained to Moses, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and

live” (Exodus 33:20). The dynamic here is not, “If you see Me, I’ll kill you,” but rather, “If you see Me, you’ll die of the contrast between My holiness and your sinfulness.” Sin cannot survive the presence of God. However, when we jump to the end of the story, Scripture says of the redeemed: “They shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads” (Revelation 22:4, KJV). By the power of God’s grace, a restoration of innocence has occurred “in their foreheads”, in their minds. In this way the redeemed will live in God’s presence and experience no shame.

This is not the case with the wicked. The Bible informs us that all human beings, both the righteous and the wicked, are destined for the fiery reality of God’s presence, but both will not experience the fire in the same manner. While those who are restored to innocence will finally enter God’s presence and be perfectly at home there, for the wicked, God’s presence will be a “consuming fire.” Describing the final destruction of the wicked, Ellen White says this:

This is not an act of arbitrary power on the part of God. The rejecters of His mercy reap that which they have sown. God is the fountain of life; and when one chooses the service of sin, he separates from God, and thus cuts himself off from life. He is “alienated from the life of God.” Christ says, “All they that hate Me love death” (Ephesians 4:18; Proverbs 8:36). God gives them existence for a time that they may develop their character and reveal their principles. This accomplished, they receive the results of their own choice. By a life of rebellion, Satan and all who unite with him place themselves so out of harmony with God that His very presence is to them a consuming fire. The glory of Him who is love will destroy them. (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 764)

What we have just discovered is the true nature of hell. Hell is equivalent to the second death. God will not subject the wicked to eternal torture in the flames of some underworld or some remote region of His universe. They will be resurrected to face the record of their lives in one final reckoning, then they will be eternally annihilated “as though they had never been” (Obadiah 16). Here’s the most remarkable thing of all: not one person need experience the second death, because Jesus experienced it for all of us—and conquered it. He alone tasted the second death for every person and He alone could not be held in it because He alone was sinless.

Oh, What Love!

Now, then, once we understand the nature of the second death in contrast to the first death, we are prepared to comprehend what Jesus endured for us as He agonized in Gethsemane and died on the cross. Both the first death and the second death are the result of sin, but the first is temporary and occurs by means of physical causes, such as disease or tragedy or old age. The second death,

however, does not occur on merely a physical level, but on the psychological level as well, due to the lethal power of one's guilt. The first death, in a sense, is not really death at all. Jesus called it sleep. Consider, for example, the young girl that Jesus resurrected. As He approached the girl's home, after being asked to come and heal her, Jesus said to the mourners, "Do not weep; she is not dead, but sleeping" (Luke 8:52). Notice Jesus did not merely say the girl was sleeping, but He went a step further. "She is not dead," He plainly stated. Not understanding His meaning, "they ridiculed Him, knowing that she was dead" (Luke 8:53), but Jesus was not off in His diagnosis. He knew the girl was dead in the first-death sense, but He also knew she was not dead in the ultimate, second-death sense. In order to demonstrate His point, He proceeded to awaken the girl from her first-death sleep.

When the Bible says "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), it does not merely mean the first death. When the Bible says of Jesus "Christ died for our sins" (1 Corinthians 15:3) and that He went to the cross so that He "might taste death for everyone" (Hebrews 2:9), it does not merely mean the first death. The ultimate wages of sin is the second death. It logically follows that Jesus can only save us from what He has endured and conquered for us. If Jesus only experienced the first death, then he can only save us from the first death and we must still face the second ourselves. However, the glorious good news is that Jesus faced the full, horrific reality of the second death. Pay attention as Jesus and His disciples enter the Garden of Gethsemane. Something astounding is about to happen.

No, that's an understatement.

Something far more than astounding is about to happen. All of history is about to converge at a single point of destiny, toward which each day and every event have been relentlessly rushing. Just now, in the next relatively brief period of time, the zenith revelation of God's love will unfold in the suffering and death of Jesus. And the world, indeed the universe, will never again be the same.

Watch.

Jesus is staggering under the weight of some invisible burden. The disciples can see that something is wrong. Jesus explains what's happening to Him: "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death" (Matthew 26:38). Here He opens to our understanding the nature of His suffering. Notice that He used the same word He had employed earlier to describe the second death as distinct from the first death: "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Again, the word here translated "soul" is *psyche* in the Greek text and that is precisely the word Jesus uses now to communicate what He's enduring. In Gethsemane, Jesus says He is dying at the psyche level of His being. He is dying from the inside out, under the lethal power of our sin and guilt.

No physical abuse has yet been inflicted upon Him. And yet, He is dying! No blood has yet been drawn from His flesh by violence. And yet, He is bleeding! Luke tells us: “And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44). He is bleeding through His pores due to the intense internal stress the shame of our sin is imposing on Him. Isaiah 53 offers astounding insight to what Jesus endured for us. Notice verse 6: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” Then verse 10 says “His soul” was made “an offering for sin”. And, finally, look at verse 12: “He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

This is nothing short of astounding, because this means that *Jesus* entered the dark realm of *our* sin and shame. He took it all into His own conscience as if He were the guilty party instead of us. From Gethsemane, Jesus is taken to the cross. Yes, nails were hammered through His hands and feet. Yes, His body was tortured. And yet, He never uttered a word about the physical pain, because His mental suffering was so intense that it nearly eclipsed His physical pain. Take in every line of this amazing statement by Ellen White:

Many have suffered death by slow tortures; others have suffered death by crucifixion. In what does the death of God's dear Son differ from these? It is true He died upon the cross a most cruel death; yet others, for His dear sake, have suffered equally, so far as bodily torture is concerned. Why, then, was the suffering of Christ more dreadful than that of other persons who have yielded their lives for His sake? If the sufferings of Christ consisted in physical pain alone, then His death was no more painful than that of some of the martyrs.

But bodily pain was but a small part of the agony of God's dear Son. The sins of the world were upon Him, also the sense of His Father's wrath as He suffered the penalty of the law transgressed. It was these that crushed His divine soul. It was the hiding of His Father's face—a sense that His own dear Father had forsaken Him—which brought despair. The separation that sin makes between God and man was fully realized and keenly felt by the innocent, suffering Man of Calvary. He was oppressed by the powers of darkness. He had not one ray of light to brighten the future. (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 2, p. 214).

Wow!

Bodily pain was but a small part of the agony of God's dear Son? He had not one ray of light to brighten the future? What does this mean? What, really, did Jesus suffer for you and me? Ellen White blows our minds with this deeper insight: "The Savior could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that their separation was to be eternal" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 753). Astounding! For a sustained period of time, as our guilt enveloped His heart in impenetrable emotional darkness, Jesus could not see life for Himself beyond the grave. But here's the amazing thing: He was not trapped. His back was not up against a wall with no way out. There are two things He said before the cross that indicate that He was not trapped:

"Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father" (John 10:17, 18).

And in Gethsemane He told Peter:

"Do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? (Matthew 26:53).

Don't miss what all this means. Jesus faced the prospect of eternal death, and yet, for love of your soul and mine, He did not pull back. He was literally willing to die for ever and never be reunited to His Father to save us. No wonder Paul called what happened at Calvary, "the love of Christ which passes knowledge" (Ephesians 3:19). When Jesus gave His life on the cross, He demonstrated with astounding clarity and beauty that God literally loves all others more than His own existence. This is the incredible truth the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of death and hell opens to view. This is the truth that the false doctrines of natural immortality and eternal torment block from view. Someone will say, "But Jesus could not have experienced the second death, because the second death is eternal destruction, from which there is no resurrection." Ah, but here's the glorious good news: Jesus did not simply experience the second death. He conquered it as He experienced it.

Peter declared: "Whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it" (Acts 2:24). Notice the language here. "It was not possible" for death to hold Jesus. But why? For one simple and profound reason: "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law" (1 Corinthians 15:56)... *but Jesus never sinned*. Under the fiercest temptations to save Himself, He kept on loving all of us at any cost to Himself. That selfless love, maintained with unbroken integrity straight through Gethsemane and Calvary, constituted perfect harmony with the law of God. By love alone, Jesus triumphed over the second death. Therefore, it was impossible for

the second death to hold Him. His resurrection is proof of His victory over our sin, our guilt, and our death.

Tears come to my eyes and adoration surges in my heart as the true significance of the Savior's sacrifice dawns upon my mind.

How could He love me so deeply, so passionately, so selflessly?

Is this really what God is like?

Can it truly be that the Almighty God of the universe is this incredibly beautiful?

Calvary answers with a resounding *yes!*

Leader to share with the youth ahead of time:

This coming Sabbath we will have a homecoming celebration. Our theme is the 2nd Coming of Christ. This could be an opportunity for your friends who have disengaged from our church community, to experience their second coming to our church community.

DAY 6: Discussion Questions

1. What is your internal reaction to this lesson? Is this the same or different from your previous ideas of death and judgment? Explain.
2. The author speaks of guilty ones facing “the relational violations they have committed”. What do you think he means by that? Could those be the most important sins? Why or why not?
3. Have you truly confessed to God from your heart the sins you have committed? If not, you may still do so. If so, have you truly accepted from your heart that Jesus covered those sins completely and your forgiveness is as complete as if you’d never sinned? What would help you to accept this completely?
4. Name some specific ways you can pass on the glorious gift of total forgiveness.

DAY 6: Group Activity

1. Add to or decorate your octagon model if desired.
2. Supplies needed: several thumb drives, hard drives, DVD-ROMs, etc. Pass these out and discuss how useful they are. Do they “know” anything? Can they do anything? What would it take to make them useful again? How is this like or not like death?
3. Supplies needed: any one of the movies about Jesus’s life, preset to the Gethsemane scene. Watch together, then discuss your emotional (not intellectual!) response.

7

DAY 7: THE END TIME *Non-Coercive Love*

Leader to share with the youth ahead of time:

Tomorrow we will have a homecoming celebration. Our theme is the 2nd Coming of Christ. This could be an opportunity for your friends who have disengaged from our church community, to experience their second coming to our church community.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we are a people of end-time Bible prophecy, or what theologians call “eschatology”. First, we believe that the movement we’re part of was foretold in Bible prophecy. Second, we believe we’re living in the final phase of human history. These are big claims that have the potential to either illuminate or darken people’s minds, depending on how we communicate them. Ellen White discerned that there is a potential danger we need to deliberately avoid in our preaching of last day events:

The shortness of time is frequently urged as an incentive for seeking righteousness and making Christ our friend. This should not be the great motive with us; for it savors of selfishness. Is it necessary that the terrors of the day of God should be held before us, that we may be compelled to right action through fear? It ought not to be so. Jesus is attractive. He is full of love, mercy, and compassion. He proposes to be our friend. (*Signs of the Times*, March 17, 1887)

What an insightful and necessary caution for a people called to proclaim end-time prophecy!

Preachers should not present Bible prophecy in a manner that arouses fear. God's purpose in revealing end-time events is not to scare us, but to prepare us; not to freak us out, but to pull us in; not to impose anxiety upon us, but to generate hope and peace within us. If I try to get right with God because time is short, I don't actually know or love God. I am merely on a self-preservation trip. While I may look like I'm serving God, I'm really serving myself. There is only one legitimate motive for serving the Lord. In Ellen White's words: “Jesus is attractive.” His love is the actuating motive we

need to keep in focus as we preach end-time prophecy. The attractive loveliness of His character, when we see it, moves us from the inside out! Listen to King David on this matter:

One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell 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. For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; in the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock. (Psalm 27:4, 5)

Notice that David's focus is not on the time of trouble, but rather on the on the beauty of God's character. In the context of that focus, he has a sense of confidence, not fear, regarding the time of trouble. Now that is a healthy perspective on the time of trouble, and on all end-time events! Each of us needs to ask ourselves if we resonate with David's sentiments toward God. Are we captivated by the "beauty" of God's character? If not, we need to make it our highest priority to obtain a vision of God's love so true and clear that we are swept off our feet into the love of our amazing Creator. *Outside of this experiential context, last day events can only arouse fear in our fragile hearts.*

It is literally impossible for us to rightly interpret end-time events when we allow the events to eclipse Jesus. Doing so inevitably distorts the eschatological picture into a disfigured composite of fear-based speculations and false alarms calculated to get people hyped up on predictions about the future rather than settled into Christ as their security. A fixation on end-time events will inevitably develop an unhealthy appetite for exposing the bad guys, magnifying the threat of danger, and driving people into uncertainty regarding whether or not they can make it through the time of trouble. Eschatology is a vital part of our message. That's for sure. But, like all of our doctrines, it only serves its God-given purpose when we allow it to function as a window through which we discern God's love.

So let's approach end-time events from that perspective and see what we discover.

The Core Dynamic of End-Time Events

We will begin our exploration of eschatology by asking a simple question:

What is the core dynamic we can expect to see unfold in the final events of human history?

Jesus gives us the answer in John 16:1-4:

These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think

that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me. But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them.

Wow!

Don't miss what Jesus is telling us here, because it is hugely significant. Essentially, He says, "This is what's gonna go down at the end of the world: there will be those who hold a picture of God that will drive them to kill in God's name. Their theological construct will dictate violent actions. They will engage in a mass persecution campaign, all the while imagining that they are serving God as they do it." But if they knew God as God really is, they would never exercise force in His name. You see the implications, don't you? This means that the most crucial issue you and I need to address is the picture of God's character that we hold in our hearts. It also means an accurate revelation of God's character is the message we need to be passionate about giving to the world!

Why?

Because, according to Jesus, we humans are liable to misinterpret the character of God in a way that will allow us to justify exercising coercion in His name. In fact, this is the prevailing theological perspective that has dominated human history and led to so much of the violence that has characterized our world's dark saga. In the ancient pagan form, people believed that God required their suffering to appease His wrath. Sometimes that meant doing certain deeds to inflict harm on one's self. Sometimes it meant performing a set of deeds prescribed by religious leaders. Sometimes it meant going to war in God's name. And sometimes it even meant offering human sacrifice. This is what we might call appeasement theology.

The basic idea is very simple and terribly dark—that God's basic posture toward humans is one of condemnation and wrath, and He afflicts us with destructive judgments unless and until we offer some form of sacrifice to placate His anger. The appeasement quest may take the form of individual deeds of penance: emotional groveling, physical self-harm, paying money to a church, or performing a set of deeds prescribed by a religious system. It may take the form of a corporate scapegoating crusade, in which a person or a people group becomes the sacrifice we offer to God. However, the God of the Bible—the one and only true God—explicitly told Israel of old that He is not an appeasement kind of God:

For they have forsaken Me and made this a place of foreign gods; they have burned incense in it to gods that neither they nor their ancestors nor the kings of Judah ever

knew, and they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent. They have built the high places of Baal to burn their children in the fire as offerings to Baal—something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter My mind. (*Jeremiah 19:4, 5*)

Notice that last phrase: “nor did it enter my mind”. Appeasement theology is completely foreign to God’s nature, but it is deeply imbedded in the human psyche because it is the natural product of our guilt. Our sense of shame causes us to interpret the bad things that happen to us as God’s arbitrary punishments, which in turn drives us to seek God’s favor by means of sacrifice in various forms. Now think this through very carefully, because we are about to have a major epiphany regarding the deeper issue involved in the unfolding of final events. Jesus was, in fact, crucified by religious people on the premise of a salvation-by-works, appeasement picture of God. The religious leaders realized that they were losing control of the people to Jesus. Through the rationale of their appeasement orientation, they made a calculated, pragmatic decision that naturally arose from their distorted picture of God: “It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish” (John 11:50).

They imagined that killing Jesus would avert the disaster they saw coming their way. Similarly, according to Jesus, the final persecution campaign of human history will be fueled by a distorted picture of God that will allow the persecutors to rationalize they are serving God by means of their coercive political-religious system. Jesus stated clearly what’s going on when people seek to force others in God’s name: “These things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me.” In other words, to know God as God really is rules out using coercion in His name.

Amazing!

Now we understand the core issue that will play out in the end-time events of human history. When the world is finally divided into the persecutors and the persecuted, every person will act out their picture of God.

Now let’s go a little deeper.

A Different Kind of Power

In Matthew 24 Jesus delineated a list of what we call “signs” of the end times. In verse 14 He named the final and most significant sign of all: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” When Jesus said this, He was

using very specific and familiar language to the people of His time. In using the word translated as “gospel”, which is *euaggelion* in the Greek text, He was employing the common term for military victory. When an ancient empire would win a battle by force of arms, *euaggelion* was the word used to herald the “good news” of victory. Jesus came along and deliberately employed the common word for military victory, flipping its meaning in order to signal the arrival of a new kind of kingdom based on a new kind of power. His kingdom is like no other. It is, in fact, totally opposite to our world's power structures.

Jesus came to our world and founded His church upon the principle of non-coercive love. In the popular language of His time, He called the relational dynamic of His kingdom, “agape”. Describing the ultimate outworking of this principle, Jesus said, “For God so loved (*agapaō*) the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Giving totally defines God's mode of existence.

At the cross God gave Himself to the point of suffering and death in order to demonstrate His love for us, and that love is the power—the one and only power—He exerts for our salvation. The cross reveals that God is only interested in drawing human beings to Himself by the attractive power of His love. Conversely, He is not interested in outward compliance under coercive pressure. Jesus also applied the principle of non-coercive love to human relations in general and to church relations in particular. Take a look at Matthew 20:25-28:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

This is what Jesus intended His church to look like, how He meant for it to operate. And through His church, this is how He wanted the world to see His character. Jesus is decidedly pro-freedom and anti-force. His life, death, and teachings set in motion a relational system characterized by a “power-under” dynamic rather than “power-over” manner of relating. His kingdom stands diametrically opposed to imposing theological, emotional, or civil coercion upon human beings in matters pertaining to one's individual relationship with God. After Jesus departed from the world, having established His church on the premise of what we might call the love-freedom relational dynamic, His disciples advance His peculiar upside-down kingdom in two ways: (a) by preaching the gospel, or the

good news of God's non-coercive love as the only legitimate basis for human relationship with God and (b) by living out His love within the church as a covenant community, meaning that men and women only joined the church on the premise of voluntary response to God's love.

The church was not to be a civil system imposing its beliefs by means of law, but rather a covenantal system setting forth the attractive beauty of God's character as an invitation to which all were free to say yes or no. Once we understand that non-coercive love is the foundational principle of the gospel, we are prepared to discern, by contrast, that every political and religious system that attempts to use force in the name of Christ is, in fact, anti-Christ. And this brings us to the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.

Daniel and Revelation

Daniel and Revelation tell the story of Jesus conquering deception and force with truth and love. That's the core logic embedded in Bible prophecy. If we miss that, we've missed the whole point.

Let's break it down.

Daniel shows us a series of world empires. Each one seeks to advance its claim of superiority by means of brute strength, and each one inevitably falls to the dominance of another. Daniel describes the self-defeating cycle of violence in Daniel 8:4-9:

I saw the ram pushing westward, northward, and southward, so that no animal could withstand him; nor was there any that could deliver from his hand, but he did according to his will and became great. And as I was considering, suddenly a male goat came from the west, across the surface of the whole earth, without touching the ground; and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. Then he came to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen standing beside the river, and ran at him with furious power. And I saw him confronting the ram; he was moved with rage against him, attacked the ram, and broke his two horns.

There was no power in the ram to withstand him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled him; and there was no one that could deliver the ram from his hand. Therefore the male goat grew very great; but when he became strong, the large horn was broken, and in place of it four notable ones came up toward the four winds of heaven. And out of one of them came a little horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land.

Notice the escalating pattern of self-exaltation Daniel outlines:

- “great”
- “very great”
- “exceedingly great”

And also notice the language of power and violence:

- “with furious power”
- “confronting”
- “moved with rage”
- “attacked”
- “cast him to the ground”
- “trampled him”

Each kingdom advances over the other by means of force. Describing the last kingdom in the prophetic lineup, Daniel says this in verses 24-25:

His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; he shall destroy fearfully, and shall prosper and thrive; he shall destroy the mighty, and also the holy people. Through his cunning he shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule; and he shall exalt himself in his heart. He shall destroy many in their prosperity. He shall even rise against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without human means.

As with the kingdoms that preceded it, destruction and deceit are the means by which this kingdom exalts itself. But then Daniel shows us something new, something totally different. This powerful system conquers everything in its path until it rises “against the Prince of princes”, which is the Messiah. In Jesus, self-exaltation has met its match, but not in the way we might think. As this kingdom comes against Jesus, Daniel says that it will be “broken without human means”. In other words, Jesus does not conquer by the same principles commonly employed by human power structures. He operates on principles that run directly contrary to the principles employed by the kingdoms of this world. They use deception and force. His weapons are truth in love.

In chapter 9 Daniel gives us a more detailed description of the Messiah’s path to victory, and it is astounding. Notice verse 26: “Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself.” And verse 27: “Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.” This is a prophecy foretelling the self-sacrificing death of Jesus. The one true king of the world would voluntarily give His life at Calvary—“but not for Himself”.

Powerful!

Daniel wants us to understand that King Jesus operates by a different kind of power. Jesus went to the cross for His enemies, for all of us as rebellious, fallen human beings. He allowed us to vent our rage upon Him and He kept on loving us. The way this prophecy played out was that Jesus gave Himself without resistance to the combined power of church and state. The religious system of Judaism and the political power of Rome united to kill Jesus. Astoundingly, He was crucified by a church-state alliance. The amazing thing is that being God, He actually had power over them, but He freely submitted to their violence. In John 10:18, Jesus said, "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself." In Christ we have before us the king of the universe conquering the kingdoms of our world. But how does He do it? By sacrificing Himself to our hatred and rage!

Human nature and all the kingdoms of our world operate on the premise of self-preservation at all costs.

Kill or be killed.

Tit for tat.

Blow for blow.

You hit me, I'll hit you back.

And whoever has the superior brute strength, wins.

Jesus comes along into this system of cyclical violence and does something completely counterintuitive to human nature: He loves in the face of evil. Peter explains in 1 Peter 2:23, 24: "When He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed." Only love for one's enemies has the power to crush the enmity and birth a new relational dynamic. And that's precisely the healing genius of the cross. What we see on display in Jesus is a love that cannot be overcome by hate and violence.

All anti-love forces are crushed by His love!

No matter what we do to Him, He will never stop loving us. When we come up against God's love, we have encountered a force more powerful than force. We can vent our rage on Him until it breaks,

but it will not break Him. Our knuckles bloody and our breath exhausted, He just stares with forgiveness into our angry eyes until we are either subdued by His love or irrevocably at odds with it. That's the central message of Daniel's prophecies.

When we come to the book of Revelation, we see the same story playing out: love conquering evil. John opens Revelation by telling us that the Star of the book saves and rules by means of self-sacrificing love.

Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (Revelation 1:4-6)

John wants us to understand that Jesus is a king like no other. His dominion arises from the fact that He laid down His life for us. This message becomes clearer when John describes what's going on in the throne room of the universe. Let's read Revelation 5:6, 7:

And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

Now notice verses 11-13:

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!"

Jesus is the center of focus and praise precisely because He gave His life for us. It is against this backdrop of victory through self-sacrifice that Revelation brings to view the final events of history. In contrast to the One who saves and rules by the power of non-coercive love, John warns that "the great dragon", that "serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan", will wage war against Jesus and His followers (Revelation 12:9). The striking point of the story is brought into sharp focus in Revelation 12:11: "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and

they did not love their lives to the death.” The message is clear. The people of Jesus will overcome the force of Satan’s end-time persecution system by responding with the love of Christ rather than retaliating. In the story of Jesus, the true winners win by losing, because non-violent love is the deep secret principle of true conquest.

Love that refuses to respond to evil with evil!

Love that submits to abuse rather than resorting to abuse!

Love that would rather die than hate the haters!

Responding to hate and violence with hate and violence only serves to perpetuate hate and violence. Force breeds force. As long as each act of violence is responded to with more violence, the cycle will literally never end except with the complete mutual destruction of both sides. In Revelation 13 we encounter the Sea-beast and the Land-beast, Roman Catholicism and Protestant America. The prophecy warns us that these two powers will eventually unite to enforce upon the world the “mark of the beast.”

- Worship laws will be enacted that will seek to coerce conscience in the name of God.
- Religious liberty will eventually be overturned and the lamblike beast will “speak like a dragon.”
- Protestant America will become the political engine that will bring upon the world a crisis of individual conscience and character.
- The system will dictate that “no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name” (verse 17). In other words, the system will leverage its economic power against all who would resist its dominance.

There are two kinds of power on display in Revelation: Lamb Power versus Dragon Power. The power employed by Satan and the earthly systems that follow his lead is that of force. In total contrast, the power employed by Jesus is self-sacrificing love. Love versus force! That’s the whole story of Daniel and Revelation in a nutshell. And if that’s the story, then the crucial question that come through to each of our hearts is simply this: Do you and I really know Jesus as the true revelation of God’s character? When the final events of history unfold upon the world, each of us will act out our picture of God. Each of us will either side with those who violate the principle of religious freedom in order to preserve ourselves, or we will stand faithful for liberty of conscience in harmony with God’s non-coercive love.

And on that note, the world will end.

DAY 7: Discussion Questions

1. Share some stories of times you have been tempted to use coercion in the name of love, or times you have seen others do so. What was the result? What do you think is the remedy?
2. Is it possible for Adventists to fall into the trap of trying to *make* others (within or outside the church) believe or act in certain ways? How can we confront and change this without giving into force ourselves?
3. Is it possible to go too far in the other direction and become a doormat because we are trying to “submit to abuse rather than abusing”? What are some safeguards against this?
4. In what way have you “acted out your picture of God” during the past month?

DAY 7: Group Activity

Add to or decorate your octagon model if desired.

1. As a group, come up with one way that you have seen an Adventist group or individual use coercion to get people to believe or act in the way they think is right. Realize this is almost always done with the best of intentions: what are those?
2. Now come up with at least two ways this same group or person could have used non-coercive love, and what you think the result would have been. Include what you think this person or group’s response would need to be if their targeted person or group does not choose to follow God’s way.

Now... how can you practice this in your own life? Be specific.

8

DAY 8: THE SECOND COMING

Longing Love

Leader to share with the youth ahead of time:

On this homecoming Sabbath our theme is the 2nd Coming of Christ. This could be an opportunity for your friends who have disengaged from our church community, to experience their second coming to our church community.

As Seventh-day Adventists, the biblical truth of the second coming of Jesus is built into our name, which is pretty cool, as we are about to discover. The word “advent” simply means “arrival”. When we say we are Adventists, we are identifying ourselves as a people who cherish the brightest hope imaginable. Our name declares that the same Jesus who came to our world 2,000 years ago—born of Mary in Bethlehem, crucified on a Roman cross, resurrected on the third day, and ascended to heaven—is coming again to end all evil and pain and usher in a whole new world of perfect relational harmony.

However—if we’re not careful, we are liable to miss the why of His coming as we become preoccupied with proving how He will come. Traditionally, we have devoted most of our evangelistic focus to the *manner* of His coming against the secret rapture doctrine. Yes, we need to clearly proclaim the true manner of our Lord’s return, *but not to the neglect of why He’s coming.* The goal in preaching the second coming should not be to merely prove what it’s not, but rather to paint a beautiful, inviting picture of what it is. We shortchange ourselves and the world when we reduce our preaching on the second coming to merely proving the secret rapture false. In our second coming doctrine we have some really, really, really good news to proclaim. Like all biblical truths, the second coming serves as a window into God’s love. So let’s take a look through the window.

Heavenly Lover

When Jesus came the first time, He was specifically identified by John the Baptist as the heavenly lover seeking His earthly beloved. When John’s followers were manifesting jealousy over people turning their focus from him to Jesus, John had this to say: “He who has the bride is the bridegroom;

but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears Him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:29, 30).

Did you catch that?

John called Jesus "the bridegroom," and he identified himself as "the friend of the bridegroom," or what we call "the best man".

We are super familiar with the idea that Jesus came to our world as our Savior from sin and guilt, and we praise God for that, but here we are given an additional insight. Not only did He come to save us from sin, He also came to draw us into His love. The plan of salvation does not merely get us out trouble, it gets us into God's heart. Our redemption has an aim, a goal, and a purpose. We are delivered out of a really bad situation into a really good one. Out of sin into love! Not only does God pity us, He wants us with the passion of a pursuing lover. That's the bigger picture.

In Ezekiel 16 God tells us a very emotional story. Notice verses 4-8:

"As for your nativity, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed in water to cleanse you; you were not rubbed with salt nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you; but you were thrown out into the open field, when you yourself were loathed on the day you were born. And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' Yes, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' I made you thrive like a plant in the field; and you grew, matured, and became very beautiful. Your breasts were formed, your hair grew, but you were naked and bare. When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine," says the Lord God.

It is just amazing that the Almighty Creator of the Universe is the kind of God that would tell a story like this! He obviously wants us to understand something and to feel something. Let's take in the picture. So God finds a baby abandoned in an open field—naked, bloody, and unwashed. The umbilical cord is hanging from its body, as if the child was ripped from the womb without any sympathy. "No eye pitied you," God says. Another version says, "No one loved you." What a graphic and revealing depiction of our terrible predicament as human beings. We realize here that it is a lack of love that defines our fallen condition.

We... Need... Love!

That's what God sees in us.

What He sees in our lostness.

And He knows that His love alone can save us.

So He says, "And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' Yes, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!'" We were dying in our sins, but God came along and took us up into His arms—the abandoned the baby that nobody loved—and He spoke the word of life over us. He says to us: "Live! Live!" Then, under the influence of His nurturing care, the baby thrives and grows up into a beautiful woman. "Indeed your time was the time of love," God says. Another version says, "I saw that the time had come for you to fall in love" (Today's English Version).

Wow!

Don't miss the heart of God here. As He looks upon us, He's looking for something specific and special. He longs for us to grow up spiritually to the point where we fall in love with Him in response to His love for us. Ellen White got this. According to her, falling in love with Jesus is what we're supposed to get out of the Bible. Check this out:

You should search the Bible; for it tells you of Jesus. As you read the Bible, you will see the matchless charms of Jesus. You will fall in love with the Man of Calvary, and at every step you can say to the world, 'His ways are ways of pleasantness, and all His paths are peace.' You are to represent Christ to the world. You may show to the world that you have a hope big with immortality. (*Life Sketches*, p. 293)

Now come back to the story in Ezekiel 16. When God sees that we are ready for love, He says, "I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine."

Amazing!

Here we see God essentially saying, "I love you so much I want you to be My wife." God gives us life—or salvation—by loving us into a condition of thriving. Then He swears a marriage oath to us with the hope that we will say "Yes" and love Him back. That's the real goal of the plan of salvation.

The prophet Hosea opens our understanding further on this point. He describes the fallen human condition as sexual promiscuity in 2:13: “‘She decked herself with her earrings and jewelry, and went after her lovers; but Me she forgot,’ says the Lord.” All sin is spiritual adultery, because all sin basically boils down to a lack of love. Every sinner is a whore, pursuing illicit love affairs with things that displace God from the center of our affections and passions. So what is God going to do? How is He going to save us? By forcing us? By manipulating us? No.

Force and manipulation are contrary to the ways of love and therefore contrary to the character of God since “God is love” (1 John 4:8). So He has a different plan. Through the prophet Hosea, God described His course of action. Look at Hosea 2:14: “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her.” God the allurer! Not the picture most people envision when they think of God! And yet here it is, plain as day. God intends to save us by alluring us. This is a prophecy of the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, the one John the Baptist called the bridegroom who had come to Earth searching for His bride. We should not be surprised, then, when Jesus speaks of His death on the cross in the language of attraction. Notice John 12:32: “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.”

Upon the cross, giving His life in total self-sacrifice, Jesus gave the ultimate revelation of His love for us. And that love, if we look upon it, will exert a drawing power upon us. It will generate attraction in our hearts toward Him and allure us to His heart. Now come back to Hosea 2:16: “And it shall be, in that day, says the Lord, that you will call Me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer call Me ‘My Master.’” What an incredible God! This is the most powerful being in the universe and yet He refuses to overpower us. He does not want a master-servant relationship with us, but rather a husband-wife relationship. In other words, He wants voluntary love to be the motivating power that defines our relationship with Him.

In verses 19 and 20 God pledges Himself to be our faithful spiritual husband: “I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in loving-kindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord.” Jesus came to our world to fulfill this prophecy. Standing before us with the promise of unwavering faithfulness, He offers Himself to us for an eternal union that will never be broken, which just happens to be what His second coming is all about.

To Be With Us

Let’s return now to John 14:1-3, this time noticing this the famous second coming passage:

Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

Now that we've seen the matrimonial context in the Gospel of John, and in the whole of Scripture, what Jesus said here about His second coming makes perfect sense. What we're seeing here is that Jesus foretold His second coming by employing language that invoked the marriage customs of His time. First, there was the wooing phase. If a man loved a woman, he would interact with her in such a way as to draw her to himself. Once drawn to him, the couple would enter into the courtship phase, getting to know one another and growing in their love. Then the man would propose. If her answer was yes, the man would then depart from his bride-to-be with a promise to return for her. The reason of his departure was practical. He would go away so that he could prepare a place for her in his father's house.

In other words, Jesus did not merely promise to return, He promised to return for His bride. He is coming back to Earth for one reason: because He deeply, passionately, longingly loves us and wants to spend eternity in intimate fellowship with us. Don't miss the fact that He says, "I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." Later, just before He was to die on the cross, Jesus again expressed His heart in John 17:24: "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am."

"With Me"

That's what He wants. Jesus desires that you and I would simply be "with" Him. Think of someone you like to be with, someone whose presence you desire and enjoy—your spouse, your mom or dad, your best friend. The point is simple and beautiful: we like to be with those we love. That's who we are to Jesus. He longs for our presence, for our friendship, for the enjoyment of our love. When the apostle Paul talks about marriage, he uses it as a symbolic springboard to describe the love of Christ for His church. Let's read Ephesians 5:25-33:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are

members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

That last sentence is key: “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

Paul is saying that the marriage relationship holds before us a deep, secret truth regarding our relationship with Jesus as His eternal bride. God has something in mind for us beyond our wildest dreams. Some things must be experienced in order to be understood. Such is the case with our marriage to Christ. It defies mere intellectual comprehension. So Paul calls it a “mystery”, a deep, secret truth. Even so, the more fully we experience the love of Jesus, the more we will come to grasp the glorious wonder of who we really are in God’s plan, who we really are to God’s heart. Presently, we are in the courtship phase of the relationship. He is wooing and winning us, revealing to our minds the beauty of His character so that we can mature in our love for Him. The total reality of our identity as the bride of Christ will not dawn upon us until the wedding itself. A point will come in salvation history when the church is spiritually “ready” to enter the marriage with her Lord. The whole on-looking universe will witness our readiness and make the wedding announcement. Look at Revelation 19:6-8:

And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

The entire biblical story rushes forward to a single point of climactic beauty: Jesus returning to earth to receive the church as His eternal bride.

Eternal Shalom

The Song of Solomon is a prophetic love song that offers a unique window into the love of Christ for His church. In this most epic of all love songs, we get a penetrating glimpse into God’s matrimonial love for His people and where it ultimately leads. Chapter by chapter, verse by verse, expressions of devotion are exchanged between the man and the woman. They describe one another’s virtues with lyrical dexterity. They compliment one another with exuberance. They ache with passion to be with one another. And just as we’re thinking that this is just another one of our world’s silly love songs, wondering why it’s in the Bible, the climactic point of the song has the woman saying something very profound to her man:

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised. (Song of Solomon 8:6, 7; ESV)

Suddenly, we are led to realize that the deepest love known to human beings—that which exists between a bride and her groom—tells us of God's love for His church, and His hope that we love Him back. Dying on the cross, Jesus did, indeed, reveal to us a quality of love that is stronger than death, a love that no force in the world can quench. Still, there is something more to notice. There is a poetic pattern to the song. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, King Solomon paints a picture of two lovers with—get this—the same name. His name is Solomon, which is the masculine form of the Hebrew word *shalom*. She is identified as Shulamite, which is the feminine version of *shalom*. And watch this. The love between Solomon and Shulamite reaches its climactic point when she has this amazing realization in 8:10: "Then I became in his eyes as one who found shalom" (*Song of Songs* 8:10).

With poetic beauty and high spiritual significance, the song reveals Solomon courting the heart of Shulamite until shalom defines their union. We most commonly translate shalom as "peace". In Hebrew the word carries the idea of complete fulfillment, wholeness, a sense of total well-being from which nothing is missing. In the song Shulamite finds a sense of complete wholeness in Solomon's love. He is what she desires and exactly what she needs. Within his love she is totally fulfilled. Solomon and Shulamite are a perfect match. Shalom, the woman finds shalom the experience in Shalom, the man. She is at home in him, for he is the perfect companion to her deepest heart's desire. The Bible on a whole is the story of the perfect match between the human heart and the divine heart, between the One who is the source of all true love and those who desperately need His love for their eternal wholeness and wellbeing.

Solomon is a messianic type of Jesus.

Shulamite is a type of the church.

Salvation is the plan by which Jesus allures our hearts back to Him and establishes eternal shalom between Himself and us. And the second coming of Jesus is when the lover of our souls comes back to get us so we can be with Him forever. Now that's good news! We are Seventh-day Adventists and that means we eagerly long for the return of Jesus in the light of the fact that He looks upon us with longing love. He wants to be with us. That's why He's coming back. The question is... do we want to be with Him?

DAY 8: Discussion Questions

Discuss: Did John the Baptist really decrease by giving his ministry and fame over to Jesus? Do we increase or decrease when we submit fully to God? Be specific.

Those who are willing, share some stories of ways in which Jesus “found you in your blood”, like the story in Ezekiel 16: raised you up, nurtured you, and bound you to Himself.

What is it like, being “engaged” to Jesus and waiting for Him to prepare your home and come back for you? How do you maintain and grow your relationship in the meantime?

Read Song of Solomon 8:6, 7 in several versions of the Bible and discuss the imagery. Do you feel you are bound on God’s arm like a seal? Do you recognize His love and jealousy for you that are stronger than death? How can you encourage each other to grow in this awareness?

DAY 8: Group Activity

It is helpful, if possible, for the members of this group to commit to future support for each other. This could happen in many ways: a small group or Sabbath School class, prayer partners, phone calls, or whatever each person desires.

1. Make any final changes you wish to your model from the first night. You will need it for tonight’s main activity.
2. Supplies needed: small pieces of paper or file cards, pencils, a basket or decorative box, candles and lighter, music (live or recorded). Put the box or basket and the candles at the front of the room or altar area.
3. Using the model you made on the first night, take a minute to review the eight windows into God’s love: *The Trinity, The Great Controversy, The Law of God, The Sabbath, The Sanctuary, Death and Hell, The End Time, and The Second Coming.*
4. Pass out paper and pencils. Give three to five minutes of silence while each person silently and prayerfully determines which of these need deeper commitment in his/her life and write a pledge on their paper that they will seek to more deeply accept God’s promise in that area or areas.
5. Light the candles, have the leader pray a prayer of invitation, then let each person bring his or her paper to the box or basket. In a circle, holding hands if desired, pray a group prayer of consecration. Have music softly playing throughout this time.
6. Sing together at the end.

HOME COMING SABBATH

MARCH 26 / 2016

“...LET’S HAVE A FEAST AND
CELEBRATE”

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March 19, 2016

The Lord God has told us what is right and what he demands: “See that justice is done, let mercy be your first concern, and humbly obey your God.”

Micah 6:8 —Contemporary English Version (CEV)

Suggested “Acts of Kindness”

Each church should focus on creating a GYD campaign that will inspire daily acts of kindness throughout the entire church. The goal is to integrate daily acts of kindness into our lifestyles, both as individuals and as a church.

Visit the Homeless

- Pack toothbrushes, toothpaste, soap, deodorant, snacks, gloves and warm socks, literature (books, magazines, etc.) and hand them out to the homeless in your church community.
- Prepare healthy snack bags (sandwiches, fruits, water, drinks, etc.)
- Donate new or good used clothing
- Give literature (check with your Personal Ministries Department ahead of time)

For Sick / Shut-ins / Persons in need of assistance

- Prepare food baskets
- Share literature (The Great Controversy, Steps to Christ, Desire of Ages, magazines, etc.)

At the Orphanage

- Share Bible stories
- Hand out toys (toys must be new or in very good, usable condition)
- Clothing (clothes must be new or in very good, usable condition)
- Share songs (sing-alongs)
- Give age appropriate books

Visit a Nursing Home

- Arrange to play an instrument or sing at a nursing home in your area.
- Help with crafts.
- Help serving meals.
- Pray for someone.
- Take flowers for the ladies.

Call or Visit Someone Who is Sick

- Call and ask how they are.
- Surprise them with a visit and bring flowers or a card.
- Bring a meal over.

Use Technology

- Post on Facebook the Act or Acts of Kindness you've done during the GYD.
- Post on Twitter the Act or Acts of Kindness you've participated in during the GYD.

Donate Your Locks

When you can't donate your blood, there is another way of donating a part of you. Donate your hair! If you have long hair, you can cut your hair short and donate your hair to a foundation that uses it to make wigs for people with cancer. For the best results braid the hair before you let the hairdresser cut it off. It will be easier to make a wig out of it! (put it the braided hair in a bag and bring it to church for donation that Sabbath) <http://www.locksoflove.org/donate.html>

Keep it Going. This can become a sustainable project and can be done individually. If you have a local organization that makes wig for children with cancer, you can become friends of the child who will be receiving a wig made out of your hair.

Food Drive

Organizing a food collection drive is an excellent way to help build a stronger community and show others that they really do matter. Through your generosity others will know that you, your youth group, and your church care.

There are so many ways to help your Food Drive project.

- Collect can goods and other non-perishable items.
- Every time you go to the grocery store, add a few cans or other non-perishable items to your list. Make a bin at home and put the items in there, when it is full donate it. Make giving a regular part of your shopping.
- Go door-to-door in your neighborhood and collect non-perishable items that can be donated to a food bank.
- Organize a can food drive at your office, school, or the local grocery store. Every can counts!

This is a sustainable project and can be done individually or as a group. You can volunteer at the Food Bank itself by stocking goods, preparing meals or manning the check-out counter. Remember, stock up at home so that when the chance arises you are prepared to donate to the food drive.

Check out the *Global FoodBanking Network* website: <http://www.foodbanking.org/>

Read to a Child

Time = Love. Giving your full attention to a child is a simple way to show them they are loved. Reading together can also be a very relaxing, and can serve as a bond with a child or children you care about.

Keep it Going. This is a very easily and inexpensive sustainable project. You can begin on global youth day and continue it throughout the year. You can spend quality time with the children, sharing positive messages with them, and ensuring that they are learning values they may not be learning elsewhere

Acts of Appreciation

Thank-you baskets or other acts of appreciation to the police and/or fire departments of your city/town

GLOBAL YOUTH *day*

BE
THE
SERMON

MARCH 19
2016



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