

2015 YOUTH/YOUNG ADULTS WEEK OF PRAYER SERMONS

by Balvin & Anett Braham

eight sermons to remind and inspire us to join Jesus in His mission of reclamation

Reclaim!
God Wants You Back

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Reclaim!

God Wants You Back

by Balvin and Annet Braham

EIGHT SERMONS TO REMIND AND INSPIRE US TO
JOIN JESUS IN HIS MISSION OF RECLAMATION

2015

YOUTH & YOUNG ADULTS WEEK OF PRAYER SERMONS



Help them understand
complex truths in simple ways

2015 JUNIOR YOUTH Week of Prayer Sermons



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**2015 SENIOR YOUTH/YOUNG ADULTS
WEEK OF PRAYER**

THEME: **RECLAMATION**

TITLE: **RECLAIM!**

**8 DAILY SERMONS
(SABBATH - SABBATH)**

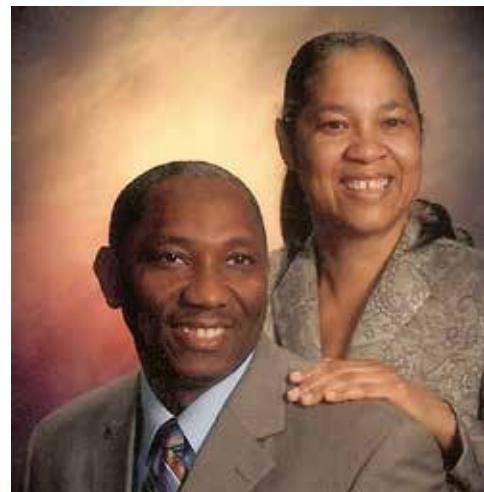
OFFICIAL DATE FOR THE WEEK OF PRAYER IS
MARCH 21-28, 2015

**GLOBAL YOUTH DAY
MARCH 21, 2015**

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Balvin B. Braham and Mrs. Anett Braham are natives of St. Elizabeth, Jamaica West Indies.

Anett is a trained teacher and registered nurse who tutors youth and young adults. They are the parents of two young adult daughters, Shavannie and Julaine, who keep them active, current, and relevant in the culture of youth and young adults.



Dr. Balvin B. Braham and Mrs. Anett Braham

Dr. Braham served the Church in the West Jamaica Conference as school teacher, principal, district pastor, Youth Director, Education Director, Communication Director and President. He also served as Youth Director of West Indies Union Conference and Associate Youth Ministries Director of the Inter-American Division. Overall, Dr. Braham has more than 27 years of experience working with young people.

He currently serves the Inter-American Division as Administrative Field Secretary, Assistant to the President, Director of Human Resources, Leadership Development Coordinator, and Associate Ministerial Secretary, responsible for Evangelism and Church Growth. He has been serving in positions of leadership both within and outside the Seventh-day Adventist organization for almost thirty years. He studied at West Indies College, now Northern Caribbean University, where he obtained both a baccalaureate degree in Theology and a diploma in Education. He obtained a Master's degree in Religion and a Doctorate in organizational leadership from Andrews University.

He and his wife have a passion to help young people become engaged in Christ, equipped for mission fulfillment, and live in readiness for Christ's soon return.

READ THIS FIRST

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. Choose songs that you all like and which fit the topic of each evening, or a theme song for the entire week.
5. **Plan a Homecoming Program.** The second Sabbath prepare a celebration homecoming program. Visit our website for help in planning this day.
6. **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.”
7. **Prayer Team.** The youth can pray for those who ask for prayers and provide contact cards and follow-up materials to those who make a public profession of faith.
8. **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 assis-

tant. 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.

9. **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.
10. **Special Nights.** The following are some suggested special emphasis nights that can be used as a tool for inviting friends, neighbors, and family to the meeting. Of course, we encourage churches to work hard all week getting folks out, but these are some special nights to be used as tools only to assist the youth/members in their efforts.
 - **Sabbath - Student Night** Youth who brings the most students from their school/neighbourhood gets a special gift.
 - **Sunday - Pack-a-Pew Night.** The youth with the most visitor gets a gift.
 - **Monday - Men's Night** Special emphasis on men bringing visitors this night. Of course anyone can and should bring visitors this night, however, only the men who bring visitors will be recognized...give them a special gift. (have more than one gift ready)
 - **Tuesday - Ladies Night** (Same as the above, only with emphasis on the ladies.)
 - **Wednesday - Talent Night** Mini concert of about 20 minutes in length. Poems, music, drama, etc. This should be open to everyone in the church and community. Great tool to introduce people to Christ.
 - **Thursday - Neighbour Night** Person who brings the most persons from their neighbourhood gets a special gift.
 - **Friday - Family Night** Special emphasis friends and parents. Encourage the youth to bring their friends and parents.
 - **Sabbath - Homecoming Day/Night** Visit our website for ideas on planning your Homecoming program.

How TO USE THIS Book WITH A SMALL OR LARGE GROUP

1. **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.

2. **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.
3. **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."
4. **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.

EDITORIAL

by Hiskia Missah (GC Youth Ministries Associate Director)



Dear readers,

Today we have iPods, iPads, iPhones, iMacs, laptops, desktops, netbooks, notebooks, PDAs, PCs, wearable PCs and . . . you name it! All are fantastic machines invented by mankind.

They are everywhere benefiting humanity directly or indirectly and society depends on them to manage the world.

In my young days many years back, we didn't have those sophisticated gadgets of high technology. For example, in the communication process, it took days or even weeks for a letter to be received by the recipient. However, with the incredible invention of the computer, electronic mail (e-mail) became a mode of communication which is incredibly fast. In only one click your letter can reach its destination. Not only that, everything you need for information, you can quickly find it simply by browsing through the internet. What a great blessing to the modern world!

Nevertheless, despite of the abundance of benefits computers bring to our lives, there are also countless degrading and harmful things coming out of them. Evil and temptations are looming over our heads. Just with a click of the mouse, or a touch on the electronic gadget, evil is right there—appearing before our eyes even without our consent.

God's messenger Ellen G White wrote in her book, Christian Education, p. 222: "**The youth are the objects of Satan's special attacks,**" further in Child Guidance, p. 471: "**The youth especially are in constant peril.**" She advised fathers and mothers that "**they should be on their guard against the wiles of Satan. While he is seeking to accomplish the ruin of their children, let not parents flatter themselves that there is no particular danger.**"

The devil is real. He is somebody (not something) who is obsessed with tempting humankind, especially the youth. Therefore, our youth need to be protected and guarded from evil. They should constantly be reminded that they are the children of God, the present and future leaders of God's church. Pray for them!

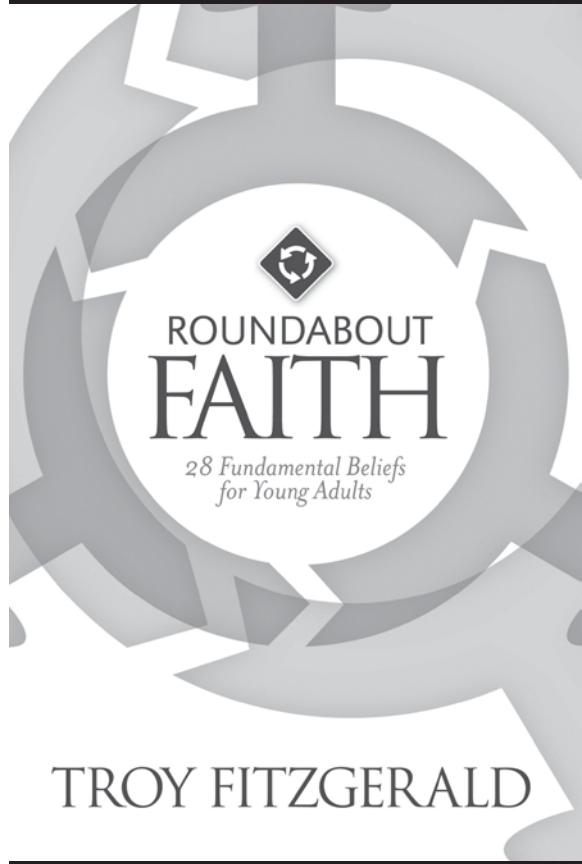
To the young people let me say this: the Week of Prayer readings have been prepared prayerfully to give you courage and discretion to face the devil's attacks, and to help you to live victoriously above sins and temptations. Please read it, meditate on it, and put it into practice. On top of this, pray for strength and power to resist temptations. Be the champions and conquerors of end-time innovation.

God bless!

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ROUNDABOUT FAITH

is a journey through 28 fundamental beliefs for young adults. Each chapter is framed in a format that celebrates the young adult search for meaning while challenging them to connect what they believe to how they live. In the same way that a roundabout flows in one direction around a center point, each lesson urges participants to yield their mind to Christ and merge their life with the word of God. This study can be used for personal study as well as with small groups.

INTRODUCTION

by Gilbert Cangy (GC Youth Ministries Director)

ESSENCE

No one would argue with the fact that Jesus was one of the most influential figures who walked this planet. As a teacher, he had no equal. Even non-Christians like Mahatma Gandhi have embraced His teachings on morality and have lived their lives in the light of his ethical standards.

As a teacher Jesus often used parables and generally speaking, each one of his parables taught a critical lesson about the Kingdom of God, about God's way of life designed for his people. On one occasion Jesus did something exceptional. He used three parables to teach just one lesson, a lesson of great significance.



That lesson is the subject matter of this week of prayer — it is about the way God feels about our brothers, sisters, friends who are lost even though they are still physically in the church, about those who have gradually wandered away through circumstances and some who have deliberately left to look for what appeared to be brighter lights.

The parable of the lost coin, the lost sheep and the lost son tell us how Jesus feels about us and what he has done for to bring us back home. Jesus is in the business of looking out for people and reconnecting them with their God-given destiny. He came to seek and save the lost, to RECLAIM His own unto Himself.

In a nut shell:

1. We matter to God.
2. He never stops looking for us until we are found.
3. There is great rejoicing over us when we are found.

This week, followers of Jesus, will be reminded and inspired to join Him in His mission of reclamation; those who are not followers of Jesus will be at the receiving end of his love and grace through us and we trust that there will be much rejoicing as we welcome many back home.

We will embrace this all-important lesson; we will indeed RECLAIM!

FOCUS : YOUTH AND TEMPTATION

**DAY 1: FIRST SABBATH
FOLLOWING FROM A DISTANCE**

BIBLE TEXT: LUKE 22: 31-34

**SUGGESTED OPENING HYMN:
DRAW ME NEARER**

BE READY FOR A GREAT TIME OF
DEEP DISCUSSION TO SHOW UP
WHEN YOU LEAST EXPECT IT.

DON'T ASSUME
THAT BECAUSE YOU DON'T
SEE ANYTHING SUBSTANTIVE
HAPPENING ON THE OUTSIDE
THAT IT ISN'T.

JUST PLANT THE SEED!

STORY

Duron and Janet were brother and sister in their late 20s who were born in the Church and later got baptized in their early childhood. Their parents were committed members of the Church who were real standard bearers. Growing up, Duron demonstrated great love for the church and was actively involved. As a teenager, he developed a passion for computers and everything electronic; by the time he became a young adult he was a genius in creating applications for social media, and was known for his innovation and creativity. As his interest and success in computers and electronics grew he became more and more sporadic in his church attendance and his active participation became virtually non-existent. The sudden, accidental death of his mother added to the weakening of his faith and encouraged doubts about God. He eventually questioned the necessity and importance of church. However, he felt that just in case there is a revelation to come, he would continue his style of church attendance.

On the other hand, Janet liked to be with people. She was always in the crowd, leading out in activities at church, jovial, caring, especially to those more advanced in years, and quite popular among the members. Unlike her brother, the death of her mother did not seem to cast a shadow on her involvement at the onset. However, as time elapsed, she grew colder and colder in church, less active, and warmer and warmer to out-of-church friends and non-Christian activities. Responding to queries of church members about the apparent waning of her faith, she would always say, "I am still a Christian, do not worry." She became passively disengaged while her brother was actively disengaged.

FORECASTING TURBULENCE

Like Janet, Peter was always in the crowd, leading from the front, helping and caring, making commitments, walking on water to Jesus and exuberant and excited to share his faith. In one of those special interviews that Jesus had with all the disciples, Peter was quick to exclaim, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). In Luke 22:31–34 we read the dialogue between Jesus and Peter, "And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death." Then He said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me."

Jesus saw beyond the emotion and the immediacy of the moment. He saw the future with the temptations, challenges, difficulties and attractions that would appeal to the disciples and influence their allegiance. That reality led Him to engage them in discussion and to share with them His approaching betrayal and how those who were closest to Him would be impacted. He saw that they would renounce Him and turn back from following. The outspoken Peter vehemently and passionately exclaimed; "Lord, I am ready to go with you, both to prison and to death" (Luke 22:33–34; Matthew 26:31–33). In response to Peter's emotional outburst, Jesus told him that before the cock crew three times he would betray Him. Peter was sure that nothing, not even the threat of death, could shake his faith in Christ and commitment to Him. Jesus insisted however, and reinforced the message. **From Peter's experience we learn that the realities of life are powerful enough to shake our faith in God, influence discouragement, and induce us to become spiritually indifferent and disengaged.**

THE SIFTING

"Simon, Simon! Indeed Satan desires to have you and to sift you as wheat" (Verse 31) was Jesus' prediction to Peter. Here He painted a metaphorical picture to illustrate how by sieving, Satan desires to shake the faith of the disciples. Jesus used Peter's "pre-Christian" name instead of "Peter," the name he was given as a disciple. He was probably intentional, since he knew Peter would shortly revert to an earlier life-style and behavior, predating his following Jesus (6:13–14). The interpretation of this verse can be found in the analogy of Job 1–2, where Satan is permitted to test Job. Satan was seeking to shake the disciples violently as one sieves wheat and cause them to fall. The use of this metaphor was and is intended to indicate that there is a coming time of testing by Satan to unsettle the disciples and people of God to cause them to become unfaithful to the Lord. Every youth should be aware of this and make sure that they are covered under the prayer of Jesus.

Satan the accuser accused the disciples as he does us, pointing out their sins and frailties before God, just as he did with Job (Job 1:6–12). The sifting of Peter was an attack on him both physically, and spiritually in order to lead him to apostasy and loss of salvation. That is a cosmic strategy of the devil. Jesus with the power of his intercession stands on one side interceding while the accuser is shaking. **Many young people who are members of the Church are under the devil's attacks. Their spiritual interests and involvement in the Church are getting weak and Faith in God is being gambled for a season of pleasure and exchanged for the popular demands of a secular and materialistic world.** As we look around we see many who are being sifted or shaken by the crafty maneuvers of the devil. It should be frightening that we ourselves could likewise be sifted. It is in moments and experiences like these that young people need to spend more time focusing on Jesus, the intercessor, to develop a closer relationship with Him. His power is greater than that of the sifter and Satan's sifting power is limited and doomed!

THE FULFILLMENT

"Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him." But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said. A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." "Man, I am not!" Peter replied. About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean." Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:54-62, NIV).

Jesus told Peter that he was a target of the devil. Similarly, **every youth as well as children and adult in Church today are targets of the devil.** He utilizes the most appealing methods to attract attention and influence Christ's followers to gaze, and become disinterested in spiritual things (1 Peter 5:8). He was successful in influencing Peter. The once energetic, defensive, outspoken supporter, Peter, was now following Jesus "afar off" or from a distance (v. 54). That was not the end, he sunk so low in his spiritual walk with Christ, that he even denied knowing Christ. He lost his self-confidence, went to sleep when he should be praying (v. 45) and ended up sitting among the accusers of Christ (v. 55). He felt that if he followed from afar, many would not recognize him as one who is a follower of Jesus and might escape criticisms and eventual persecution. He even adopted and manifested behaviors of the secular crowd to demonstrate that he was not a follower of Jesus. Peter did not understand Jesus' comment "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it" (Matt. 16:25).

Satan was so committed to destroying Jesus that anyone who believed in Him and followed Him was targeted. When the maid said: "This man was also with him," Peter vigorously replied: "Woman, I know him not." **Jesus is looking for young people who will identify with Him and not deny Him irrespective of the consequences.** He enables such young people to stand for Him. He wants them to be loyal supporters who are His voice, to witnesses to others of his grace, so that they may accept Him as their Savior. What impact Peter might have had on the crowd if he stood up for Christ and answered positively, yes I am a follower? Instead, he denied him. Are you in that company of deniers? Or are you among the vast group of young people around the world who are standing up for Him and making His glory known? Are you among the young people in the global community who are stepping out of the backgrounds and out of buildings and out of secular crowds to become the Sermon, by proclaiming to those in local communities, towns, and cities that Jesus Christ is the Messiah and He will return any day now to take His people home to glory?

With all his good intentions, Peter turned back at a crucial moment when his testimony was needed. His confident, "Lord, I am ready to go with you, both to prison and to death" (Luke 22:33–34; Matthew 26:31–33) was just an emotional outburst. "...Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times'" (Luke 22: 60, 61). The crow of the cock was significant in the life of the gazing Peter. It called his attention to another look at Jesus, who never gazed. His eyes are always upon his children, even those who are not able to see Him because of the distance they are from Him.

When the eyes of Peter and Jesus met; Peter did not see anger, reproach or condemnation. Instead he saw grief, mercy, love, forgiveness, compassion acceptance and tenderness. Then he remembered the words. "But I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not: And when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" Luke 22:32. Ellen White said; "He had denied his Lord, even with cursing and swearing; but that look of Jesus' melted Peter's heart and saved him. He wept bitterly and repented of his great sin, and was converted, and then was prepared to strengthen his brethren" (Early Writings, p. 169).

WHY DO PEOPLE FOLLOW FROM A DISTANCE?

Obviously, Peter's distance was both physical and spiritual. It was about self-preservation, weakness and fear, because he had an innate desire to be with Jesus just like many who are here today. For Peter, it was about living in two worlds at the same time. So often we try to do that but it does not work!

Jesus wants us to live in the spiritual world with Him and to identify with Him at all time as we journey through this secular world. He wants us to be willing to suffer for Him and He will provide causes for us to rejoice. In the flesh, Peter's faith was weak. This was a weakness born of human frailty; however, he had interest in a personal relationship with Christ. He also literally wanted to have an up front and close view of the treatment that would be meted out to Jesus and to see how the Savior would react. After the Last Supper when Jesus took the disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane in anticipation of His arrest, He asked them them to stay awake and pray while He would go by himself to pray. Upon His return, He found them fast asleep. At that moment, He entreated Peter to remain awake and to pray, because even though he might have felt capable and strong, his flesh was weak. In spite of the counsel of Jesus, Peter went back to sleep. When the mob arrived to arrest Jesus, it was too late to pray for the strength to endure the test. As he wept at his denial, he was probably cognizant of his failure to appropriate prayer, which was the means to shore up his own weakness. He eventually learnt the lesson taught by Jesus about being watchful to the extent that he exhorts us in 1 Peter 5:8, "Be on the alert, because your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." He was "devoured" in part due to his weakness because when he should have been praying he was sleeping and underestimated his own weakness.

Peter must be credited somewhat, because while all the other disciples fled (Mark 14:50), he remained within the environment as he followed Jesus from a distance (Mark 14:54) after His arrest. He was fearful of the consequence he would have paid if he presumptuously identified with Jesus. He was gripped by fear. He watched Jesus being falsely accused, beaten and insulted from

the courtyard. He was concerned about the fate of Jesus, but he was also fearful for his own life. He knew that Jesus was hated by his detractors and he was not prepared to face similar ridicule and persecution that Jesus was suffering. The caution that Jesus gave the disciples while He was with them is applicable to us as well: "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first" ([John 16:18](#); [Matthew 24:9](#)). As Peter observed the ordeal that Jesus faced, he quickly realized that he was far from being as bold and courageous as he thought. Fear led him to deny the Savior.

When we fast forward to the young people of the 21st century, the question is; why do so many follow from a distance? The responses are diverse: There is the belief that some church members are intolerant of their curiosity; they do not feel the loving embrace of many members of the church; and there are too many restrictions that the church upholds in terms of what they should and should not do. While there are merits in all those excuses, self-preservation, human weakness and fear are basic and foundational to their mode of operation. Prayer is still the way forward in helping to overcome these human maladies.

Jesus knew how Peter would react before the actual situation. He did not accuse those who would be His accusers and Peter detractors. He did not justify Peter's would be reaction and neither did He condemn him. Instead **He extended to him an open arm. He affirmed him and embraced him. Today, that affirmation and embrace are also extended to every youth, child, and adult.** Whatever the reality of our situation, these words should be like music to our ears: "I have prayed for you."

I HAVE PRAYED FOR THEE

The assurance that Jesus gave to Peter was, "I have prayed for you." In the actual prayer that Jesus prayed in John 17: 9 He said to the Father, "I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours." In verse 15 He specifically said, "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one". **When He said to Peter, I have prayed for you, it is a part of His nature to**

hold us up in prayer before the father. Jesus is the Advocate for Christians. He is our great Defender. He currently fulfills an intercessory role for all His children (1 John 2:1). You may have wandered away from Him, and are here today feeling despondent and discouraged. Peter had a similar feeling, but Jesus was his defense lawyer and he is yours as well. The Apostle Paul in Hebrews 7:25 says, "Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them". And in 1 Timothy 2:5 he says, "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus".

The prayer came before the sifting and even through the sifting the prayer was in place. **To Peter as it is to every young person today it is a great assurance; The Lord Himself has prayed for you.** Jesus is our Advocate and great High Priest. He assures us that He has already prayed for us. Before we face any temptation He has prayed for us. He has made provision for all the future challenges that we will encounter in that prayer already prayed. The prayers of our parents, Pastor, Church elder, friends and other during this week as well as before and after this week are very important. In fact Jesus encourages that we pray for others. That is one of the reasons we have these special times each year to focus on prayer. To pray for others! However, **nothing brings greater joy and satisfaction than knowing that Jesus Himself has prayed for us.** Even though we will be tossed about by the sifting of Satan, we know that the prayer of Jesus is powerful to carry us through the turbulence. If in the process our lives are taken, it does not end there because the Great High Priest, Jesus who has prayed for us will save us in His kingdom if we will only but submit our lives to Him and allow Him to nurture our faith.

The chief object of the Prayer of Jesus is that our faith does not fail. It was Charles Spurgeon who said; "Faith is the standard-bearer in every spiritual conflict. And if the standard-bearer fall, then it is an evil day—therefore our Lord prays that the standard-bearer may never fail to hold up His banner in the midst of the fray" If our faith in the Lord fails then we lose courage, patience, hope, love, and joy. Jesus said, "I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not." This also informs us of what to pray for during this week – Faith! Not emotional faith, but genuine faith.

EMOTIONAL FAITH

Emotional faith is a spontaneous outburst of confidence that is not established on a solid foundation. Externals and a great amount of sheltering from inexperience and parental security nurture such faith. At one of those Pathfinder survival camps we had the pathfinders were being taught to swim. With their coach they did well and eagerly looked forward to exercise their competencies without the swimming instructor. One camper who was perceived not ready to go too far on his own was so over confident in his ability and insisted that he be sent on his own. The moment arrived and joyfully he went out supposedly doing what he was trained to do. However, within ten minutes of the exercise, he lost control and went under. Luckily it was within reach and sight of experienced swimmers who rescued him from the water and brought him to shore. It took them the next 45 minutes to perform CPR, which eventually resuscitated him. In our walk with the Lord, an emotional outburst will not suffice. Ellen White said; "An impulse, an emotional exercise, is not faith or sanctification" *Signs of the Times*, March 24, 1890 paragraph 3. She said, "**All should constantly seek for the true faith that works, not by an earth-born, emotional element, but by love that purifies the soul.** This love cleanses the soul-temple from pride, and expels every idol from the throne of the heart" (*Review and Herald*, March 11, 1902 Paragraph 3). Faith in God without a personal ongoing relationship with Him is emotional faith that will not and cannot hold in the time of storm, tests, and turbulence.

GENUINE FAITH

Genuine faith comes through dependence upon God. It is not self-made. Human beings do not create it. It is not time sensitive in the sense of saying you have to be with Jesus for so many years to obtain it. Peter and his companions were with Jesus for three years yet Jesus said to Peter, "when you are converted". Genuine faith is a gift that must be sought of the Lord. We pray for it and must be patient for the acquisition. It is an important ingredient that builds strong Christian life and emboldens Christian living. Through the

empowerment of genuine faith, the followers of Christ know when to say no! And when to say yes! Being in the actual presence of Jesus does not make one converted as was evident in the life of the disciples. It is made possible by genuine acceptance of the death and resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of His Spirit. It is a gift that must be accepted, (Ephesians 2:8, NIV). “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.”

Jesus is willing to endow every young person as well as children and adults with this genuine faith that will enable them to stand tests and trials and be courageous to identify with Him as their Savior and Lord. In this life we will lose loved ones, we will be tempted to evil by authority figures, we will become dispossessed of the things we love and hold dear, we may be jilted, the attractions of a secular world may lure us to embrace things that are profaning and incompatible to our Christian walk. However, genuine faith in Christ and dependence upon the Holy Spirit will empower us to stand with courage and defend our beliefs, overcome the temptations and be triumphant. As triumphant youth in Christ, you have a responsibility to strengthen others whose faith is faltering.

STRENGTHEN THE BRETHREN

Jesus said to Peter, “...when you are converted, strengthen the brethren.” By saying, “when you are converted”, Jesus is actually saying to Peter, “...when you return to the former state of walking with me. When you return to that point where you are able to identify with me, then you have a responsibility to strengthen the brethren.” Jesus wanted him to play a significant role in building back the scattered team of disciples because they should form the nucleus for extending the gospel commission.

We do not live on an island by ourselves. Jesus was emphatic in giving the message to Peter; your conversation must affect those around you positively.

The Christian is not sent to sow discord among brethren (Prov. 6:19), it is not simply preaching to the unsaved and performing miracles. We strengthen the others by loving and encouraging them. Jesus recognized that Peter would demonstrate signs of weakness due to his humanity; however, He encouraged him not to allow his weakness to drive him to a devastating end. He placed in him and saw in him the ability to become a valuable asset to others. **The forgiveness and acceptance that was extended to Peter by Jesus are ours to be extended to others.** There is a place for everyone in the kingdom of God. Today he calls the children, youth, and adults and those who have been following from a distance to come near. Accept His forgiveness, love, and grace and be catalysts in extending the same to others.

Conclusion

After the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy, and when Peter became converted, he wept bitterly (Luke 22:62). *The Lord Forgave him and restored him.* Peter became a mighty force against the strong holds of the devil. He influenced thousands to the kingdom of God by preaching and living the gospel of Jesus and extending invitation to countless numbers of persons to accept the crucified and resurrected Lord as their savior. You, too, can be an influence to others by returning to Him today!

Appeal and Prayer: _____

Suggested Closing Song: Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine

Benediction: _____

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some specific incidents that Adventist young people face that could be considered sifting?
2. Why did Peter align himself to the vibrant group of Jesus' accusers and neglect Jesus—was it because he had greater interest in being popular with the crowd than to be bored in a relationship with Jesus?
3. What role did faith play in Peter's reaction in this scenario?
4. Differentiate between emotional and genuine faith. Is there a place for emotional faith in the Christian experience?
5. How can Adventist young people be involved in strengthening others, both within and outside of the faith?

FOCUS : YOUTH AND TEMPTATION

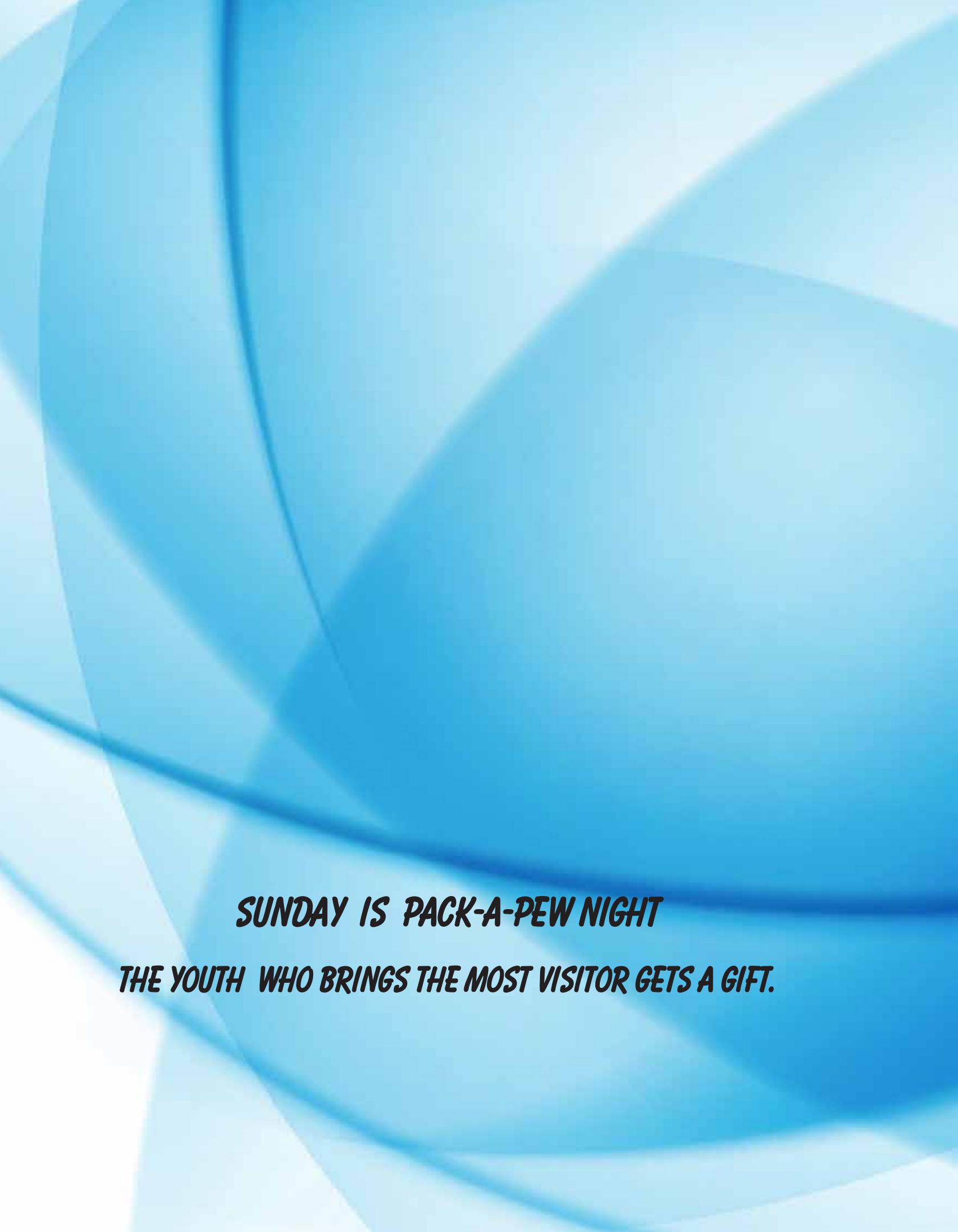
DAY 2 : SUNDAY

LET THE CELEBRATION BEGIN

BIBLE TEXT: LUKE 15: 1-7

SUGGESTED OPENING HYMN:

JUST OVER THE MOUNTAIN IN THE PROMISED LAND



SUNDAY IS PACK-A-PEW NIGHT
THE YOUTH WHO BRINGS THE MOST VISITOR GETS A GIFT.

Some months ago I preached on the Intentionality of God's Grace and what it does for all human beings; many persons turned their lives over to Christ. After the service, my wife and I stood at the door with others and greeted the congregants as they left the sanctuary. Twenty-four-year-old Juan was one of the young men who responded to the alter call. He told us that he was a second year University student who had not been to church for many years but recently it had been on his heart very strongly that he needed to return to the Lord. He woke up that morning, and just had a feeling that he should attend church; he took three buses to get there that Sabbath morning. He passed many churches along the way, but ended where he felt the Spirit of the Lord led him. He said he was satisfied that he attended the right church at the right time. He was over just bubbling with joy to learn that Grace included him in God's plan". We eventually introduced him to the pastor and one of the elders of the Church. He stayed for lunch at church and spent the rest of the day there. He participated in the afternoon Bible Study conducted by the Church pastor, and enjoyed the special youth service that followed; one of the elders took him home after the meetings.

INTRODUCTION

"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:4-7). This parable as told by Jesus is a hypothetical story that does no disregard the ninety-nine that remain in the pasture. In fact the ninety-nine plus the one comprises the entire flock of sheep and is represen-

tative of the whole membership of the church. He used this parable because in the uplands of Perea, raising sheep was a common occupation, and many of His listeners were shepherds so it resonated very well in conveying the message He wanted to communicate. While the emphasis of this parable seems to be on the lost sheep, we must not lose the inherent messages about a) the ninety-nine grazing sheep, b) the one lost sheep away from the flock, c) the shepherd, and d) the celebration.

THE NINETY-NINE GRAZING SHEEP

We have chosen to focus on the ninety-nine grazing sheep before the one that was lost. Luke 15: 7, "Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." There is a comparison made in this verse between the ninety-nine grazing sheep and the one lost one away from the flock. Impression may be gleaned that there is no care for the sheep that is in the fold and that greater emphasis is placed on finding the lost and rejoicing upon the occasion of the recovery of the lost. If Jesus' use of this parable was intended to represent the Church and hence the Kingdom of God, then the ninety-nine are significant because they have the function of making the shepherd significant. They are the flock for Him to boast about and take care of. They make the shepherd pleased about them. They are his treasure. God is, after all, also pleased with the members of the Church who remain. He is pleased with the righteous (Luke 1:6) or those who aspire to be righteous. Ellen White said, "The Son of God stooped to uplift the fallen. For this He left the sinless worlds on high, the ninety and nine that loved Him, and came to this earth to be "wounded for our transgressions" and "bruised for our iniquities" (AA. P. 432).

This parable is more concerned about the joy of the Lord than the attitude of the sinner. **When a young man or a young lady or anyone for that matter, re-**

mains in the faith and lives the repentant life every day, there is joy in heaven.

When all the members of the church live that sanctified life, joy is multiplied in heaven every day. Everyone is special and significant to the Lord. Conversely, Jesus' message conveyed through Luke's theology is that only those who repent will be saved and not the seemingly righteous; joy is now in heaven over the repentant, rather than just at the final judgment. It must be noted, that among the ninety-nine that remain, there are those who think they are righteous and have no need to repent. They are so self-assured and self-confident that they see all the faults in others are able to determine who is converted and those who are just playing church, and how the Lord has already spewed them out of His mouth.

There is a relevant story of a man who developed an affinity for sheep and wanted to become a sheep. He went to the shepherd and told him he would like to become a sheep and inquired what shape-shifting actions he needed to achieve such metamorphoses. The shepherd took it for what he thought it meant and moved on as he thought the man was just gloating in his love for mythology. However, at his insistence, the shepherd told him he had to look like sheep so he went and got himself dressed in sheep's skin and went among the sheep. When he approached them, they ran, so he went back to the shepherd in disgust. This time he told him he had to walk like the sheep. He watched them, practiced the walk and then went walking among them. Again they ran. He went back to the shepherd who told him he had to talk like them. He practiced and again, when he went into their presence they ran. Back to the shepherd he went, who told him he had to eat like them. That he did, but the reaction of the sheep did not change when he went into their presence. Exhausted and disappointed, he went back to the shepherd who finally said to him, "You look like a sheep, you walk like a sheep, you talk like a sheep, you eat like a sheep, but you are not a sheep. That is why they reject you."

Among the ninety and nine who are the members of the church, there are those who are like that gentleman. They do everything like Christians. They read the scriptures, they pray, they attend the various services of the church; they may even have leading roles in the church and are vegetarians. Some

are prayer warriors. They may be supporters of the church financially, return tithe and offering and always contribute to various initiatives of the church and so do not see themselves in need of anything. Yet they lack that heart conversion. That total commitment to Jesus. They fail to spend time alone with Him and are more concerned about fame, popularity, conceit, and secular things. Because we grew up in the church and have never left does not mean heaven is rejoicing about us. Are our lives testifying to the glory of God? Are we sharing our faith in meaningful ways to others? Are we genuine? Can people take our words? Do our words and our action match up? What happens when we are out of the sight of others, what is our deportment like? **There are some sick sheep within the fold among the ninety-nine who need the attention of the shepherd.** He is reaching and calling and beckoning by means of the Holy Spirit, and the sheep need to respond.

There are those who consider themselves among the ninety and nine who are actually aware that only their physical presence are there, but their minds and thoughts are away from the flock. The others must do what they can to nurture them. Not to push them away. **Everyone's conversion experience does not come the same way and at the same time. That is why the sanctifying experience of those in the faith should serve as an influencing catalyst to the weaker vessels.** That is why Jesus said "Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, 'Gather up first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn'" (Matthew 13:30). The difference between the actual wheat and human beings is that the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit is able to transform the unconverted into powerful disciples. The Christian community is replete with stories of young people who were shallow and frivolous in their spiritual walk but who are stalwarts of the faith today because they remained in the company of the ninety and nine and were inspired, influenced and motivated by the Holy Spirit, the Grace of Christ and the encouragements of the spiritual community. He is also interested to see repentance among the ninety and nine by sharing the joy of the Lord in celebrating the salvation of sinners.

In this parable, Jesus was also emphasizing that ninety-nine self-righteous people who keep all the rituals, festivals, and rules bring no joy to heaven,

but one sinner who confess his sins and repent sets off party time in heaven. **God is concerned about the lost that will admit they are lost and through the aid of the Holy Spirit return to Him.** He wants to help all of us put our sinful life behind and follow Him. Pharisees or hypocrites will never do this, because they do not realize they are lost! They always count themselves among the saved, even though they have never repented of their sins. **Today, the ninety-nine need to get the party in heaven going.** We must repent of our sins and be saved, not just the one lost sheep away from the flock. Jesus wants the whole flock, one hundred, not ninety-nine and neither is he only interested in one. Nonetheless, to get to the one hundred, He begins with one!

THE ONE LOST SHEEP AWAY FROM THE FLOCK

In telling this parable, Jesus did not specify if the lost sheep away from the flock was a ewe or a ram. However, He wanted to emphasize the Shepherd's interest in those sheep that go astray irrespective of their gender. He specifically emphasized one that developed an interest in other pastures and whether suddenly or gradually left the company of the ninety-nine. Bowe Robert Bergdahl is a US soldier who was held captive by the Taliban-aligned Haqqani network in Afghanistan from June 2009 until his release in May 31, 2014. The circumstances under which Bergdahl went missing and how the Taliban captured him became a subject of intense media scrutiny. While there were numerous theories about his disappearance, the facts suggested he was captured off base. Under Taliban control, he knew he was captured, he knew the circumstance of his capture, he was indoctrinated controlled and oppressed by his captors and had even lost the ability to speak his own language fluently. However, the United States was committed to leave no soldier behind and went in search until they entered in an exchange deal to get him back into their ranks. This is an apt illustration of what happens to many young people of the Church. **While God did not enter into an exchange, he sent His only begotten Son whom He loves dearly (John 3:16) to come in a combat situation to reclaim them all. What Love! And what great rejoicing when they return.**

In one Sabbath School lesson that we studied many years ago, it was explained that in a flock of sheep, it was normal for each one to remain with the flock for up to eight or nine years, which was long enough for the shepherd to name them and for them to recognize their shepherd's own signature call. Every night when the flock enters the fold, the shepherd holds his rod across the entrance a few inches above the ground. As each sheep passes under the rod, the shepherd inspects it for injuries and illness. In that way, the shepherd identifies his own sheep very quickly. John 10:3 (NIV), which corroborates this reasoning, says, "The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listens to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."

It was further explained that the shepherd also counted his sheep and would know immediately if even one was missing. The Clear Word Devotional Bible renders Luke 15:4 accordingly: "If you owned a hundred sheep, wouldn't you be concerned if one of them were missing? Wouldn't you leave the ninety-nine who are peacefully grazing in someone else's care and go looking for that one lost sheep until you found it?" Jesus knows every member of the Church. He knows us by name. He knows our special marks and temperaments. He knows our desires and aspirations. He knows our tests and our trials. He knows our strengths and our weaknesses. He knows what makes us happy and what makes us sad. We are His and He is our shepherd. When one goes missing, He does not leave the ninety-nine unprotected to go in search of the one. However, He goes in search! Let us remember that Jesus the great shepherd is omnipresent. He can be everywhere at the same time. He is omniscient, there is nothing that He does not know and He is omnipotent, there is nothing that He cannot do. **None of us needs to feel that because He is attending to the other sheep, He does not have time for us.** "For this is what the LORD Almighty says: "After the Glorious One has sent me against the nations that have plundered you—for whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye" (Zechariah 2:8, NIV). All members of the Church are under the watchful protective care of the great shepherd and that is good news. Nothing happens to us except it happens in His presence. He will defend us and vindicate His name and authority.

In Jesus' parable, the sheep away from the flock knew that it was lost. It was crying for help. It apparently wandered away from the flock. Like many young people and older Christens, it was probably looking for greener grass. Probably tired of the set order of the daily routine and as one youth said to us some years ago, she "needed new experiences and more exciting and interesting things". It may be that the pressure of work or study or discouragement brought on by inactivity or some social realities made them so tired that one Sabbath they decided to stay home and sleep and eventually, never recovered from that intoxicating temptation. It may even have been a sexual experience that caused the eyes to open in a wrong direction. Some are away because they suffered indignity, abuse, unfair treatment, and neglect that aroused their desire to wander. Many young people who are getting cold and wandering from the fold of the Church still believe that the seventh day is the Sabbath and should be kept holy. They still believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the fold to which they belong. They still are being bugged by their consciences every day to return to the fold. However, the indoctrination and intoxication to which they have become addicted influences them to become spiritually indifferent, careless, and absorbed with the cares of everyday life.

Sheep have a strong instinct to follow others in front of them and so are young people. They will follows, even if it is not a good decision, sometimes even to the slaughter. If one sheep jumps over a cliff, the others are likely to follow. They often times know where they are, that they are not in the right place but returning is not the easiest thing. **To come back the sheep needs help and encouragement. Those who are of the ninety-nine must be deliberate in contacting and wooing them back to the fold.** As members of the Church, we need to go in search of the lost sheep away from the fold. We go in our prayers. We go by contacting them through social media. Send them a text, write on their wall, mention them in a tweet, and send them an e-mail. Keep in touch through WhatsApp! We must go after those who have left the faith and love them back to the Church. This is where they belong. The church must be open and warm and caring and forgiving, and accepting. We must plan intentionally to find them and bring them back. What did

the shepherd do? Ellen White said, "The sheep that has strayed from the fold is the most helpless of all creatures. It must be sought for by the shepherd, for it cannot find its way back. So with the soul that has wandered away from God; he is as helpless as the lost sheep, and unless divine love had come to his rescue he could never find his way to God" (COL. P. 187).

THE SHEPHERD

From the question that Jesus asked in Luke 15:4, the shepherd went in search of the one sheep. In stating that the shepherd left the ninety-nine, Jesus was intent on emphasizing that the shepherd was diligent, thorough, purposeful and intentional about bringing back the one lost sheep. None is to fall by the way. None is to be lost. All must be in the protective, loving care of the master. He wants all. This parable more than any of its emphases, focuses on the caring, loving shepherd.

How interesting to note that the shepherd did not hire laborers to go in search of the lost sheep. It was a personal search. He went himself and did not give up until he brought back the wandering sheep. How persistent was the shepherd. Jesus is persistent in His search for all the young people who are wandering from him. It may not be that some of us have been absent from church for one Sabbath or for any of the services of the church. We may even be active leading in the Adventurer Club, serving as counselors and instructors in the Pathfinder program. Some of us might even be the senior youth leader, winning the Bible Bowl and are champion youth in the cause of the Lord, doing innovative and creative things and are active in community impact, yet in our relationship with the Good Shepherd, we are that lost sheep. It is time to take stock. Time to do that introspection to evaluate our standing with our Savior. He wants to and He will celebrate with all those who allow Him to take them back to the fold.

THE CELEBRATION

There is always a partying in heaven! Jesus said, "That's the way things are in heaven. When one sinner sees that he's doing wrong, confesses his sins, and decides to change his life, the celebration in heaven over this one person is something you can't imagine. The rejoicing is over the one who repents, and not over the ninety-nine who are at home and don't need to repent" (Luke 15:7, Clear Word Translation). The ninety-nine need not worry because they had their rejoicing and they are enjoying the trip to the kingdom and the fellowship of others in the flock. **It is now time to rejoice with those who have just returned. No time now for self-pitying. It is time to celebrate the return of those who wandered.** Young people, you are special in heaven and on earth. The church loves you and is in need of you. Come with your talents; you have a vital part to play in the finishing of the gospel and in helping to nurture others in the faith.

You who have returned to the fold of Christ, welcome to the celebration! It is in two dimensions and there is a third. It happens now in heaven as you return. It is happening in the church as each member is overjoyed to see you return to the faith, but the greater part of the celebration is yet to come. Jesus will be coming back for you, for all. He will not come alone, but with retinue of angels. We will be taken together to the kingdom and receive the crown of glory at a great coronation that will happen at the gate of the city. Ellen White said we will also receive our harp from the hand of the Savior where we will join the heavenly choir in singing the song of the redeemed, "Home at Last"! Yes, we will walk the golden streets of heaven and what a great reunion it will be with family, friends, and loved ones. To look in the face of the lovely Jesus and see the scars in his hands which were just for our salvation. What a celebration it will be when we take up residence in the mansions He is now preparing for us. It will be an eternity of celebration!

Let the celebration begin! Welcome home! Welcome home! Welcome home!

Appeal and Prayer: _____

Suggested Closing Song: *There Were Ninety and Nine*

Benediction: _____

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think is the attitude of heavenly beings toward those who remain actively committed to Jesus in their lifestyle and consecrated hearts?
2. Explain how young people who are actively engaged in the mission of the church can be among the lost sheep of the flock.
3. What are some temptations young people face today that influence them to display visible signs they are on the verge of straying from Christ and what can be done to rescue them before they fall by the way?
4. Identify some ways that the members of the Church can celebrate the spiritual birth and experience of the new, returning, and standing members of the faith.
5. How do good shepherds go in search of young people who have wandered from the flock today?

FOCUS : YOUTH AND HOME

DAY 3 : MONDAY
HANG ON TO JESUS

BIBLE TEXT: LUKE 15: 11-32

SUGGESTED OPENING HYMN:
LOVE DIVINE ALL LOVE EXCELLING

MONDAY - YOUNG MEN'S NIGHT

**SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON YOUNG MEN BRINGING VISITORS
THIS NIGHT. OF COURSE ANYONE CAN AND SHOULD BRING
VISITORS EVERY NIGHT, HOWEVER, ONLY THE YOUNG MEN
WHO BRING VISITORS WILL RECEIVE GIFTS.**

INTRODUCTION

My wife and I met Orlando when we served in our first pastoral district. We were absolutely impressed with him. He was present at church for every service. Sunday night evangelistic meetings, Wednesday night prayer meetings and all the Sabbath services, from Sabbath School to Vespers. He was exceptionally active in the youth department, serving as AY leader and Pathfinder Director interchangeable. Everyone knew that he was a committed member of the church who was greatly loved by the children, young people and adults. After we left the district, we would see him on occasions, talked to him about his faith and other social interests that he had and affirmed him spiritually. Years elapsed; we lost contact with him until one day we were going visiting a particular city where we met inadvertently. This time, he was not dressed according to his custom, and the bottle in his hand certainly did not reflect the spiritual cause he represented. When we asked him what was going on in his life both spiritually and socially, he said prophecy had fulfilled on him. We asked what he meant and his response was a paraphrase of 2 Timothy 3:2–4, “For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy... without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.” He said he was no longer a member of the Church; he wanted to return to Christ and his former love for the church, but it was like climbing an impossible mountain and often he felt angry with himself.

This experience is reminiscent of the parable of the lost son told by Jesus. Luke 15:11–32 highlights more than just the lost son. There are at least three important characters and a joyful celebration that are essential to be emphasized from this parable. The three characters are the lost son away from home, the prodigal father and the lost son at home. The celebration is a focus on the great rejoicing that takes place when the wanderer returns to the love at home.

THE LOST SON AWAY FROM HOME (LUKE 15:11-21)

In the parable, Jesus made mention of no name except to say a certain man had two sons. One of those sons became tired of the discipline, rules, guidelines, dos and don'ts of home. He became jealous of and attracted to the lifestyle of his peers and contemporaries who in post-modern life could be likened to the hipster culture, a fad that now controls the souls of many young people. He felt that their value of and obsession for independent thinking was just ideal for him. The counter-culture movement that idealized creativity, intelligence, and wit gave him an insatiable craving for indulgence. The progressive politics and excessive appreciation for art and indie-rock that consumed their engagement were just what he desired to be involved with. The autonomy they had and ability to make decisions independent of parental coercion made him yearn for freedom. The external appearances that made them seem to be enjoying the luxuries of life captured his attention and instilled within him a boredom that home could not dispel and only independence of will, freedom of movement and uninhibited choice of decision making could satisfy. Their dressing enamored him, as well as the pleasure, entertainment and apparent trendy lifestyle that seemed cool.

He wanted to be like them. Drinking, pop music, dancing, smoking, movies, sex, partying, fraternities, social networks, designer clothing and brand names such as Levi James, Michael Kors, Porsche cologne, and Nike caught his fancy. With such mental intoxication he demanded of his father: "...give me my share of the estate..." (verse 12). He was interested in his father's wealth, but not in the emotional, social, physical or spiritual health of his father. Without a struggle, his kind, loving, compassionate and compliant father divided to him the wealth that he demanded. What an experience it was for him, liberated at last! "And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living" (verse 13).

He was cool, but excessive and extravagant in the way he spent what had been given to him. The text says, "He squandered his property in reckless living." Another translation says that he "wasted his possessions with prodigal living". He blew his money carelessly and soon lost his wealth. He was irresponsible, wasteful and reckless. **This is the tendency of human beings, prompted by the powerful satanic forces to become impatient of divine control, desiring to be independent of God, seeking to be his own master—that "sin of sins", in which all subsequent sins are included.**

Like the son who left home with riches, many young people are living in squander-land. Like wayward Christians they drift away from the church and live like the lost son away from home to that far country where they can seek to silence their conscience and squander the moral and spiritual wealth and values that they were taught at home and church. They are interested in God's goods but not in Him. They are interested in the food He places on the table but not in God. They are interested in the air He provides for them to breathe but not in Him. They are interested in the good health that He gives them but not in Him. They are interested in God's gifts; the boyfriend and the girlfriend, the money and the natural talents and abilities, but they are not interested in God.

"And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'" And he arose and came to his father..." (Verses 14–20, ESV).

In that far country, the lost son beyond all danger of interference from home, intoxicated with his new found resources, and eager for the luxury of using them at-will squandered his wealth and lost his dignity and the members of

the fraternity. He did not realize the value of what he had at home, in his father's house. He felt he was missing out on the fun and gossip out there in the cosmopolitan centers of the society. When he lost it, he lost them. No more could he eat well and eat clean. No more Broadway shows and shopping spree. The days of the cologne and deodorant were over and the only role-on he had was that which the pigs rolled over him.

Althea was in Church with no job or husband, life was hard and things were not going well. She was tired of the dos and don'ts of a boring Church with boring preachers and boring programs and boring members. She left church to be in friendship with a young man who was without God or interest in Church. Not long after, she became pregnant and never saw the young man again. Now she ended up out of church, without a job, without a husband, with a child without a father, no money and no one to take care of her. She depended on handouts and ended up in a mental institution.

Many young people and adults ask: "Why do we need church now? There are more fun things to do and church is just not interesting. It's my life, some say, and we'll live it the way we want! It is like saying, God, I wish you were dead! In fact, God, you are dead to me. Have you been there? Have you done that? Do you have the t-shirts or some souvenir to show? Are you just about sporting, working, eating, enjoying? No time with the life-giving Word of God? No communion with the Heavenly Father? No fellowship with the family of God?

In some sense we probably have all been there—probably not in outright vice and bawdy living, but at least in drifting away from God and living for our own desires. That's the lost son away from home in us all, wasting and squandering our birthright. Hard times actually caught up with him. Jamieson and Brown, in their *Critical and Explanatory Commentary on the Whole Bible* said, "This was his lowest depth. He was perishing unpitied, alone in the world, and ready to disappear from it unmissed! But this is just the blessed turning-point; midnight before dawn of day." Now he decided to return to his father not as a son, because he knew there was no life in those relationships. He desired to return home for a job that pays: a hired servant. Once it was, "Any

place rather than home." Now, "Oh, that home! Could I but dare to hope that the door of it would not be closed against me, how gladly would I take any place and do any work, happy only to be there at all." Ellen White said: "Miserable as he was the prodigal found hope in the conviction of his father's love. It was that love which was drawing him toward home" (CSA 12.6).

THE PRODIGAL FATHER (LUKE 15:20-24)

We often refer to this parable in Luke 15:11–32 as the story of the prodigal son, but the word PRODIGAL is mentioned nowhere in the scriptures. The term can be applied to the Father as much as it can be to the sons. According to the Free Online Bible – Prodigal is from a Latin root that may be both an adjective and a noun. As an adjective there are two principal meanings: 1) Recklessly wasteful or extravagant: By that it means that you could have prodigal expenditures on unneeded weaponry; or you could live a prodigal life. 2) Giving or given in abundance; lavish or profuse: You could therefore give prodigal praise to someone.

As a noun, it is one who is given to wasteful luxury or extravagance. When we are talking about the "prodigal" son – we use the term in a negative sense. That son was excessive and extravagant in the way he spent what had been given to him. The text says, "He squandered his property in reckless living." Another translation says that he "wasted his possessions with prodigal living." That's what it means to be "prodigal" in the negative context of the son. He blew his money carelessly. He was irresponsible. He was wasteful and reckless in how he lived. **On the other hand, the father was "excessive" or "extravagant" in a more neutral or even a positive sense. He was "recklessly extravagant" in his love. He was lavish and abundant in his love, in his grace, in his giving. To both sons, he gave profusely and generously.**

How was he a Prodigal Father? The younger son asked for his share of property. Usually, this distribution is made after one's death. He was still alive and

here the son was asking for what was not due. It is almost like saying, "Well dad, since you are dead, at least to me, I need my portion now." Can you recognize the emotional detachment here? For many individuals, God may well be dead, as long as they get what they want! What an insult, what a slap in the face to tell the father, "I want my share of the inheritance and I want it now!"

In our day, the father could be justified if he slapped such an impudent son! Instead, he acceded to the demand. Here the father demonstrated patience and forbearance and his costly, excessive love dominated. Years passed and now the situation had changed. The son was returning home without a gift, without money, without change of clothing, without the desired goods, brand names and fame that he went in search of. Returning to a father whom he wished was dead and all he had was a prepared speech for acceptance to a humiliating and demeaning position.

What was the anticipated reaction? He expected rejection, anger, and a tongue-lashing. Instead, before he was able to recite his memory gem, he saw a father, coming down the road, coming to meet him. He was not angry! He was running to meet him with a happy look on his face. Before he got a chance to speak he got a big hug, a warm embrace, and a kiss on his neck. By the time he began to recite his memory gem, listen to the father's reckless, happy, extravagant, lavish love: "...bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoe on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found..." (Verses 22–24).

Here we see the true "prodigality" of his father. This is a father's excessive, extravagant grace. He does not deserve this! He says, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (verse 21). By the time he got to this point, the words melted into happy tears. He now realized that his idea was not working. There was a better plan.

His father did not want him as a hireling. He was not getting what he deserved. His father wanted his son back! Full restoration. This was lavish, extravagant love on the part of this prodigal father! Costly love! Giving love!

LOVE FULL OF GRACE AND TENDERNESS, ACCEPTANCE AND FORGIVENESS.

The father demonstrates love through his actions. He conceals his son's humiliation or nakedness with his best robe, he places upon him the signet ring, and shoes which are symbols of belonging to the family. The young man is welcomed back into the family and to seal the deal he is honored with an extraordinary feast.

This is an apt representation of the character of our heavenly Father! **God does not strike us down when we deserve it. He loves us so much that He sent his only Son, Jesus Christ in the flesh, to show us how much He loves us.** Jesus came as the friend of wayward, running away from home sinners. He came to demonstrate the Fathers grace and mercy and to welcome us back to the family. By looking to the cross we see the extravagant length that God will go to restore us to his family. Probably you have not left home. You may have been with the family of God physically and are actively or passively involved, but are disheartened. To you too, the prodigal father extends such costly love.

THE LOST SON AT HOME (LUKE 15:25-30 ESV)

"Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!'"

While the father and his employees were rejoicing and celebrating that the lost son was recovered the brother at home was sad, having a fit and refusing to participate. He sarcastically referred to him as “this son of yours”, thereby refusing to acknowledge his own brother. Jealousy and material possession clouded his joy because his heart was not in the right place. He was recklessly callous and heart hardened. He was extravagantly emotionally and spiritually disconnected. He was lavishly disheartened at the return of his brother. The demonstration of his disgust and unhappiness was extravagant. He was the prodigal son at home or the lost son at home. How sad, that many of us could be in church, yet we are lost! There could be many at home who are having a fit—not celebrating, because they think the soul that has returned to the Lord is not repentant and not converted.

Like the son at home, many live their lives in the Father's house and yet they are submerged in spiritual drought, pain, disappointments, and social calamities. They could even be feeling dishonored, discredited and by-passed. They cannot see or feel any reason for celebration. Self-pity is likely to settle in and they may even be tempted to leave home, especially when they see the treatment that the run-away receives.

Then comes the father to the at-home, self-pitying one, – He entreats and invites him saying, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It is fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.” Ellen White said, This elder brother has not been sharing in his father’s anxiety and watching for the one that was lost. He shares not, therefore, in the father’s joy at the wanderer’s return. ...He makes it plain that his own service has been that of a servant rather than a son. When he should have found an abiding joy in his father’s presence, his mind has rested upon the profit to accrue from his circumspect life. His words show that it is for this he has foregone the pleasures of sin.” (COL 207.3) **God is interested in an intimate relationship with all of us, rather than just a superficial and emotional experience that is prompted by milk and honey, streets of gold and mansions.**

THE JOYFUL CELEBRATION (LUKE 15:32)

"But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (verse 32, NIV). In actual fact, the prodigal father is saying to the son at home, "...but we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found."

What rejoicing there is! A festive celebration! **We advocate that when one comes to Jesus the members of the church should have a literal celebration.** Baptisms should be held at prime time in the services of the church that captures the attention of every member. Except in rare cases where the circumstance does not warrant otherwise, baptism should not be a sunset affair where just two or three are gathered in the case where numerous persons are involved in the faith. We must kill the fatted calf. There must be rejoicing in church, rejoicing on earth when one returns to the Lord. We all come into the party the same way, only through the extravagant, excessive, lavish, reckless, costly love of our Prodigal Father. And there is and will be celebration in Heaven, so let the party begin! We should have prayer breakfasts, welcome socials, and assimilation receptions.

Our prodigal Father has meals for the stay-at home and the returned-home to enjoy here and in the hereafter. Our celebration here is only a foretaste of the heavenly banquet to come. Our prodigal Father is preparing mansions for us. Our prodigal Father has eternal life to invest us with. It is excessive, extravagant, and glorious—this is how it is! For this is how our heavenly Father is..... We have not seen our best days yet!

And in a little while – He will send Jesus:

- Jesus: The one who gave up the glory of heaven to come and meet us by the way, He will come to meet us in the air!
- Jesus: He will come with angels!
- Jesus: He will come as a conquering lion to snatch us from the grasp of the pleasure of the enemy
- Jesus: The rock of ages will come for us!
- Jesus: Will take us to the heavenly celebration in the kingdom!

Will you come back to him this moment?

Appeal and Prayer: _____

Suggested Closing Song: Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling

Benediction: _____

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What outstanding distinctions can be noted between the lost son away from home and the lost son at home?
2. Identify some attitudes and behaviors of the members at Church that could influence young people to leave the church.
3. Explain how young people can resist the negative emotions expressed to them by church members and continue in the faith.
4. What are some significant characteristics about the prodigal father that make home attractive?
5. Give your personal testimony on temptations to leave home (the Church) that you have faced and how you managed to overcome and remain in the faith.

FOCUS : YOUTH AND MORALITY

DAY 4 : TUESDAY
ALONE IN HIS PRESENCE

BIBLE TEXT: JOHN 8: 1-11

SUGGESTED OPENING HYMN:
I COME TO THE GARDEN ALONE

TUESDAY - YOUNG LADIES NIGHT

**SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON YOUNG LADIES BRINGING VISITORS
THIS NIGHT. OF COURSE ANYONE CAN AND SHOULD BRING
VISITORS EVERY NIGHT, HOWEVER, ONLY THE YOUNG LADIES
WHO BRING VISITORS WILL RECEIVE GIFTS.**

INTRODUCTION

He had an enormous craving for alcoholic beverages, smoking of anything that was possible to smoke, and delightfully indulged anything obscene. He lived carelessly. To be in a state of soberness and not in drunkenness was rare. Two young ladies who were active members of a small witnessing group in their church targeted this young man for whom they had great compassion and desired to see change his lifestyle, and for him to live happily in hope of the second advent of Christ. On one of those rare occasions when he was sober, they visited him and began discussing the topic of love. His interest was piqued and he asked them to return to continue the discussion. He promised them he would make sure to be sober for the visit. The visits and discussions continued; eventually they got to the point of discussing the love of God. They began Bible studies with him until eventually he began attending church. His smoking, alcoholic drinking, and obsession for things X-rated gradually subsided until they became none existent. He became endeared to Jesus and to the church where he had developed friendships and was actively participating in church activities. Noel finally requested baptism and the Pastor carried his name to the church board for approval. One of the strong pillars of the church, Sister Lovington, opposed his baptism on the grounds that she thought he was not converted and it was too quick to baptize him.

A majority vote on the board approved his baptism, however, and the Church Pastor eventually baptized him.

One evening, a few weeks after his baptism, Sister Lovington who lived across from a nightclub, spotted his car parked almost in front of the club. She kept a watch for as long as she could to see at what time he would leave the area. Of course, at no time during her watch did she see Noel. Neither did she see what time the car left the area. The next day, she called the pastor and other members of the Church to tell them that her opinion of Noel was not valued by the Board and the Lord allowed her to witness that he spent almost all night in the nightclub across from her home. She insisted that he was not ready for baptism and that the Church should discipline him for his continued secular lifestyle that was not representative of the gospel and of the

Church. When Noel was called to the Board, Sister Lovington told the members that the newly baptized brother spent many hours in the nightclub and her evidence was his parked car. Surprised, Noel asked the sister for whom he had much respect and admiration as a member of the Church if she saw him in the club. She responded, "No, but your car was parked there". The next night, Noel went and parked his car at the gate in front of her house. The fact is, his car developed mechanical problem and could not drive, that's the reason it was parked near the nightclub.

John 8:1–11 (NLT), "Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd. 'Teacher,' they said to Jesus, 'This woman was caught in the act of adultery. The Law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?' They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, 'All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!' Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust. When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, 'Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?' 'No, Lord,' she said. And Jesus said, 'Neither do I. Go and sin no more.'"

The pressure and resentment that that many young people of the Church face stem from the assumptions that others develop and share about their conduct and deportment. Some remain in the church with these resentments while others leave the church and follow Christ from a distance. Some find it difficult to feel the mingling of love, justice, and mercy from those who should be redemptive and serve as spiritual mentors, coaches and guides. This story that the Apostle John relates, has great lessons for practical Christian living in these post-modern times from which both the youth and adults, and especially those in leadership can learn. I want us to bring your attention to

three main characters in this biblical story: a) the accusers, b) the accused woman, and c) Jesus the Supreme Judge. The reaction of the accusers and the last words of Jesus to the accused woman are of inestimable value to all Christians, irrespective of age. We must all leave something behind and stand alone in the presence of Jesus for therein, and therein only, do we find salvation and hope for eternity.

THE ACCUSERS

The scripture identifies the woman's accusers as the teachers of religious laws and the Pharisees. They were the official interpreters of the Law of Moses. They were the leaders of the councils of justice back in the day. They considered themselves a cut above the rest in matters of spirituality and upholding of moral standard. They conceived their function to be that of enforcing the Law of Moses. Their radar system covered a wide geographical expanse so very little passed their attention. They were the ones who called the Apostle Paul to the council for judgment, having accused him of: a) teaching against the law, b) bringing gentiles into the temple, c) polluting the temple, d) being a mover of sedition and e) being a ring leader of the sect of the Nazarene (Acts 21:28; 24:5,6). The Apostle Paul reminded them, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, as were all my ancestors! And I am on trial because my hope is in the resurrection of the dead!" (Acts 23:6).

When John was baptizing, some with ulterior motives went to be baptized, so John the Baptist exclaimed, "You brood of snakes! Who warned you to flee God's coming judgment?" (Matthew 3:7). In one of His teaching moments, Jesus said to His hearers, "But I warn you, unless you obey God better than the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees do, you can't enter the Kingdom of Heaven at all! (Matthew 5:20) When Jesus went to the house of Matthew, the tax collector, and many who would not be considered conformist to the law attended and Jesus ate with them, the Pharisees were indignant and questioned the disciples of Jesus, "Why does your teacher eat with such scum?" (Matthew 9:11). So legalistic they were that one day they, the Pharisees, along with others went to Jesus and asked Him, "How come we fast, but your disciples don't?" (Matthew 9:14).

They even accused Jesus of demon possession and of using such demon empowerment to cast out demons (Matthew 9:34). Again with ulterior motive they opposed Jesus for healing the sick on the Sabbath day (Matthew 12:10). The teachers of religious laws and the Pharisees were so confrontational and perfect that they even called a meeting and discussed plans for killing Jesus (Matthew 12:14). They closed the door to the kingdom for those whom they considered non-conformist. Under their administration, there was no room for error or mistake. Nothing but absolute perfection was binding for being a member of this spiritual community and forgiveness and acceptance was not an option. It was this caliber of individuals that brought the supposedly accused woman to Jesus with the following accusation, conviction and method of execution: "...this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The Law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?" (John 8:4, 5).

Have you ever been accused? Have you encountered what you may term ship-wreck in your Christian journey? Are you assailed by problem and difficulties in your personal and Christian walk, brought on by the temptations, pressures and assumptions of others? Has your Christian voyage become dangerous? Are your life in general and your Christian experience in particular, going in the wrong direction? How about your career choice, is it leading in a direction that could create fuel for those who would accuse you? What about the crowd that you are in, does it contribute to the accusations? If you have been wrongfully and unjustly accused, you are in good company. **But we must be careful also, for it is easy to see ourselves as being accused and not to recognize, that we ourselves could also be accusers of others.** We must be careful not to do to others what we ourselves do not want to be done to us.

The Spirit of Prophecy said. "Those who are most guilty of wrong are the first to see wrong; therefore let every church-member see to it that his own heart is pure before God, that his name is not only written on the church books, but registered in the Lamb's book of life. Then he will not be a judge of his brethren, he will not be a despiser of those whom he considers defective" (RH January 10, 1893, par. 7).

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Plan a Homecoming celebration Form a Barnabas Support Group

Barnabas strongly believed in giving people a second chance. When Paul was converted the Church was afraid to just throw the door open and let him in. It was Barnabas who put his reputation on the line for the terrorist-turned-Christian, Paul. When Paul decided that he did not want to take John Paul on a journey with him, because he had let him down before, it was Barnabas who decided to give the young John-Mark, who some thought of as a failure, a second chance.

So strong was their disagreement that Barnabas and Paul separated for a while. Later on Paul saw the value in this young man, and even sent for him to help him in his missionary journey. Sometimes young people who make mistakes just need someone to believe in them. Form a Barnabas Support Group to encourage and help those who may have grown up in the church, but decided to leave. You don't need to know the reason. Just decide to pray, 5 minutes a day, every day for one young person you know who has left the church.

The Bible says, “Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and strong in faith. And many people were brought to the Lord.” ([New Living Translation](#)).

Will you be a Barnabas today?

Will you encourage a young person to come back Home?

Help them find their way back home!

for ideas on planning your Homecoming program visit: **gcyouthministries.org**

THE ACCUSED WOMAN

In telling the story of the accused woman, John chose to conceal much of her identity. He did not mention her by name, if he knew it and the accusers did not say much about the case except to say she was caught in the act of adultery. According to the Law of Moses as recorded in Leviticus 20:10, "If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death." In this reported case, nothing was said of the man. Where was he? Why was the woman the only one brought to the tribunal?

The Mosaic Law prescribed the method of death for both the man and the woman in the case of adulterous violation "If there is found among you, within any of your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, a man or woman who does what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, in transgressing his covenant... Then you shall inquire diligently, and if it is true and certain that such an abomination has been done in Israel, then you shall bring out to your gates that man or woman who has done this evil thing, and you shall stone that man or woman to death with stones. On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness. The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst" (Deuteronomy 17:2-7).

There is a place for the administration of discipline where there is blatant disregard for the moral principles clearly expressed in the Word of the Lord. The scriptures are clear however, that such discipline must be administered with clear justice. **There must be proper investigation, so decision should not be taken without the facts and all concerned are to be a part of the system of justice.** There should be no one-sidedness in the administration of justice. The teachers of religious law and the Pharisees were not thorough and fair-minded in their administration. They were corrupt, partial and driven by malice, hate and grudge. Their relationship with the Lord was questionable and rather than seeking to uphold the principles of righteousness and truth they were intent on satisfying their own depraved self-interest.

There is always a place for Jesus in the administration of justice. There is always room for accommodating divine counsel and that is why Jesus' method of resolution in this situation is exemplary.

JESUS THE SUPREME JUDGE

"...but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust." (John 8:6-8, New Living Translation [NLT]). It is of interest to note that Jesus the Supreme Judge did not say that justice should not be done. Jesus did not deny them their request. He only wanted them to do a personal reflection before they administered what they considered justice. Many speculate about what Jesus wrote on the ground and the implication of that for both the accusers and the accused. Ellen White said, "Impatient at His delay and apparent indifference, the accusers drew nearer, urging the matter upon His attention. But as their eyes, following those of Jesus, fell upon the pavement at His feet, their countenances changed. There, traced before them, were the guilty secrets of their own lives" (DA 461.2). By writing on the ground it was a means of delaying action and giving time for personal reflection.

At their insistence Jesus responded, "Let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" This is a direct reference to Deuteronomy 13:9; 17:7 (cf. Lv. 24:14)—the witnesses of the crime must be the first to throw the stones, and they must not be participants in the crime itself. According to Ellen White, "The woman had stood before Jesus, cowering with fear. His words, 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone,' had come to her as a death sentence. She dared not lift her eyes to the Savior's face, but silently awaited her doom." It is obvious that Jesus was different from the other religious leaders and the Pharisees of His time. He demonstrated a decision-making skill that brought not just the guilt of the woman to the fore, but that of her accusers as well. There he skillfully revealed to them that as guilty as the woman was, so were they, and the conviction that she was worthy of, so

were they likewise guilty to be convicted of something. **Instead of throwing stones, Jesus threw compassion, forgiveness, love, grace, mercy, tolerance, and acceptance.** Can you do with some of that at this moment?

THE REACTION OF THE ACCUSERS

John 8:9 reads, "When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman." Many believe that the accusers were "convicted by their own conscience" and their stunned departure testified as much. They had come with their ulterior motive to shame Jesus by using this woman as the scapegoat, however they left in shame, and the woman stood alone in the presence of Jesus!

There comes the time when young people, children, and adults must leave something behind to be with Jesus. This is that time. The accusers left the woman behind them. They ran for their personal refuge. Were they converted when they left? We do not know. Probably some were. Not all who turn away from the accusation were converted. Some left with the same opinion still. In leaving her behind, some recognized that it was there time. It was not about the woman it was about them.

This week of prayer is a time for us to contemplate and do that personal reflection. To focus not so much on those who accuse us, but to find out is the accusation true or false? Is it wrong or right? Am I giving reasons for these accusations? If it is true, what shall I do about it? If it is false, what shall I do about it? The accused had to address it. The accusers had to address it. This is that moment for personal reflection. **Others must not be more significant in our lives and experiences than our relationship with Jesus!** What did the woman do in the face of accusation when all accusers were gone to their homes? She stood alone in the presence of Jesus! It was a humbling experience for her to be standing alone in the presence of Jesus, but it was a privileged experience. The ring around her had melted away, and she was standing there alone!

STANDING ALONE WITH JESUS

Alone with the woman, Jesus addressed her for the first time. His form of address, "Woman", was entirely respectful and customary in those days. He did not ask her if she was guilty. He knew the truth of the case. In fact His final words in verse 11 bear out this assumption. His question to her was, "Has no one condemned thee?" She answered with a direct, "No one, sir" (Gk. Kyrie), which meant, "No one, Lord". It was at that point that Jesus came close to answering the question that was first set before him.

Regardless of the exigencies of the Law of Moses, in this instance Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you." Ellen White said, "In astonishment she saw her accusers depart speechless and confounded; then those words of hope fell upon her ear, 'Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.' Her heart was melted, and she cast herself at the feet of Jesus, sobbing out her grateful love, and with bitter tears confessing her sins" (DA 462). The confidence and personal absoluteness of Jesus' words not only call to mind that Jesus came not to condemn but to save (3:17; 12:47), but prompt us to remember the Synoptic accounts that assign Jesus, like God himself, the right to forgive sin (Matt. 9:1-8). The proper response to mercy received on account of past sins is purity in the future. **There is a place for forgiveness, forgiveness of guilt, forgiveness of those who accuse, and forgiveness even in innocence. Forgive!**

Young people, take your stand in the presence of Jesus. It is not in the crowd that salvation is found but in that one to one relationship where the conversation can be live and direct with no intervening commentators. Just Jesus and you! That is what all of us need, that one on one standing with Jesus our Savior, Messiah and Redeemer. How do you stand alone with Him? By finding time for personal prayer, by spending time in the reading and study of His Word, as well as the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy and other inspirational materials. By meditating on Him and regularly witnessing of saving grace in your life.

JESUS' LAST WORDS TO THE WOMAN

The last words Jesus spoke to the woman, as she stood alone in His presence were, "Neither do I condemn you, but leave your life of sin" (verse 11). It reminds us of Joseph's experience. Out of grudge, jealousy, hate, and envy his brothers sold him as a slave to Egyptian merchants. His faithfulness to God based on the times he spent alone with the Lord paid great dividends. Though he passed through the pit, was sold and treated like an animal, terrorized and tempted, thrown into jail, he eventually became governor in Egypt. To the surprise of his brothers who had to obligate themselves to him for survival and were remorseful of their action and astonished at his position and authority he said, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Genesis 50:20).

The accusers brought the woman to Jesus. They meant evil, but it gave her an opportunity to be alone with Him and what an outstanding result it brought to her. Jesus' verdict, "Neither do I condemn you," was not rendered as a simple acquittal or a non-condemnation. The verdict was in fact a strict charge for her to live from this point on very differently—to sin no more. The liberating work of Jesus did not mean the excusing of sin. He established the point directly, even if the expression almost painted the woman as a habitual profligate person. He said to her, "Go home; you are alive, but leave your life of sin." An encounter with Jesus always demands the transformation of life, the turning away from sin. The paralytic in John 5:14 was similarly warned to "sin no more", but in that story the man was also confronted with the devastating consequences of failing to heed the warning. Jesus does not treat sin lightly, but He offers sinners the opportunity to start life anew.

Young people, will you accept this opportunity right now and make that decision to start your life anew with Jesus? God's purpose in sending his Son into the world was not to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him (John 3:17). Will you accept Him now? Will you make that commitment this moment, to be alone with Jesus? Very soon He will be coming back for those who are committed. The entire world will not be saved, but whosoever

chooses will be saved and salvation is for young people, too. This is your moment to accept God's free gift of salvation and commit to Jesus your Savior.

Appeal and Prayer: _____

Suggested Closing Song: *I've Wandered Far Away From God*

Benediction: _____

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever been wrongfully accused? How does it feel?
2. Considering this message about the woman caught in adultery, how should one who is wrongfully accused defend him or her self in the process of self-defense?
3. What are the best means by which young people can protect themselves from indulging in corruptive moral activities and situations?
4. Discuss how you would encourage a youth who is either wrongly or rightly accused about some moral issues and is facing actions by the Church Board.
5. Explain what you think Jesus meant when He said to the guilty woman, “Neither do I condemn you; go and leave your life of sin.”

FOCUS : YOUTH AND IDENTITY

DAY 5 : WEDNESDAY

CONTENDING FOR THE MIND

BIBLE TEXT: LUKE 8: 26-39

SUGGESTED OPENING HYMN:

REDEEMED, HOW I LOVE TO PROCLAIM IT

WEDNESDAY - TALENT NIGHT

**MINI CONCERT OF ABOUT 20 MINUTES IN LENGTH.
POEMS, MUSIC, DRAMA, ETC. THIS SHOULD BE OPEN
TO EVERYONE IN THE CHURCH AND COMMUNITY.
GREAT TOOL TO INTRODUCE PEOPLE TO CHRIST.**

Verona was a very intelligent young lady who was a good debater, loved to argue, strongly opinionated, friendly and always liked to be in the company of others, especially those who considered themselves post-modern and cool. She enjoyed questioning standards and practices of the Church and liked to be considered a voice for the voiceless or for those who are too timid to speak. She was very socially aware, and considered herself responsible for networking with peers, to keep them abreast of current events. She accomplished this through her online blogs, where she gave her honest opinions on topical issues. She stayed on top of the relevant news and trends through her very active twitter account. Her obsession with computers, the Internet and curiosity to acquire knowledge led her to an on-line Ouija (Wee Gee) Board which is a flat board marked with the letters of the alphabet, the numbers 0–9, the words yes, no, hello, and goodbye, as well as various symbols and graphics. It is also known as a spirit board or talking board.

The board uses a small heart-shaped piece of wood or movable indicator to indicate the spirit's message by spelling it out on the board during a séance. Participants place their fingers on the wood and it is supposedly moved around the board by the spirit to spell out words. This board is associated with demonic possession, and people are cautioned to have nothing to do with it. However, Verona developed an attraction to it and invited a friend to join her in the games one night. While playing, she suddenly became possessed by evil spirits. She began to growl and thrash around as though she was in a trance. She became erratic, began hallucinating, showing signs of muscle spasm and difficulty swallowing. She became very difficult to manage, assumed superhuman strength and began talking with a very coarse voice, courser than that of a matured man. She made several attempts to find sharp objects and seemed desirous of taking her life and hurting others around her.

In our world today, Satan and all his demons are looking for people to target with their darts. They look for both the weakness and strengths in individuals and launch their darts precisely at those points where they are able to overpower them. As satanic involvement among young people and adults continues, the primary goal of the devil is to alter their values and turn them against themselves, their beliefs, family, God, and society. These demonic

forces influence people to seek after knowledge of unknown information, knowledge that is gained beyond the five senses and received through some supernatural involvement or connection.

Luke Chapter 8:26–29 is a relevant text that addresses our topic, “Contending for the Mind”. “Then they sailed to the country of the Gadarenes, which is opposite Galilee. And when He stepped out on the land, there met Him a certain man from the city who had demons for a long time. And he wore no clothes, nor did he live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out, fell down before Him, and with a loud voice said, ‘What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me!’ For He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had often seized him, and he was kept under guard, bound with chains and shackles; and he broke the bonds and was driven by the demon into the wilderness.”

DEMON POSSESSION AND MENTAL ILLNESS

For centuries, many are of the opinion that mental illness is demon possession. Chris Cook's article about demon possession and mental illness, published in the Autumn 1997 *Christian Medical Fellowship Journal* argued that it would seem reasonable to suggest that demon possession may be an aetiological (cause) factor in some cases of mental illness, but it may also be an aetiological (cause) factor in some non-psychiatric conditions, and in other cases it may be encountered in the absence of psychiatric or medical disorder. Furthermore, demon possession is essentially a spiritual problem, but mental illness is a multifactorial affair, in which spiritual, social, psychological and physical factors may all play an aetiological (cause) role. **Based on real life realities, mental illness must not therefore be categorically considered demon possession.**

Demon possession may be more pronounced in some parts of the world today than in others. Differential diagnostic skills play a major role in of-

ferring help to those whose problems could have demonic or medical/psychiatric origin. In the case of demon possession, spiritual discernment is of great importance in addressing such matters. On the other hand, in the case of mental illness, medical/psychiatric care is invaluable. Whether demon possession, mental illness, physical illness, social illness or spiritual illness, Jesus has power over them all and through consistency in prayer and dependence upon him by faith, healing and restoration is possible. This story of demon possession has spiritual implications for young people, children and adults today.

There are extremes, which should be avoided in relation to demon possession or with reference to satanic movements. C. S. Lewis said: "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devil. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight" (p.3).

THE DEMONIAC

According to this text, Jesus' welcoming committee to the country of the Gadarenes consisted of one man who was totally possessed by demons. It is apparent that this was a serious problem in the time of Luke, since the gospel writers mentioned numerous such cases. The way he appeared could probably be compared to the "Incredible Hulk", that television creation. Although his symptoms would have appeared to be those of an insane man, the various gospel writers tell us that it was a case of demon possession. Driven by his terrible condition, the man abandoned his home, alienated himself from people and associated himself with the dead by living in the cemetery, which certainly is not a place anyone in his right mind would choose to live. Nudity was his preferred mode of dressing and he moved about in the community with rage and fury that engendered fear on the part of the residents. So strong he was when he got into his rage that even when they bounded him with chains he was able to burst them and set himself free (verse 29).

There were at least six disorders that the demonic possession inflicted on their possessor (1) personality disorder in which his identity and individuality were consumed by the demons. (2) Anti-social behavior that was manifested in his banishment to live in the seclusion of tombs, away from the civilization of human beings. (3) Unusual spiritual insight that made him alert in recognizing Jesus as the Son of God and gave him unusual spiritual intelligence. (4) Super-human strength that made him uncontrollable by normal methods of human control. He broke all attempted confining apparatus and set himself loose. (5) Torment by causing those who fell victims to him to agonize constantly and (6) the tendency towards self-destruction by continually doing harm to himself, using stones and other objects.

GUARDING THE MIND AGAINST DEMONIC POSSESSION

Satanic influence on the mind can influence individuals to do unthinkable things. Some leave their home, family and friends and the members of their church to live in loneliness and isolation. Some indulge in various kinds of unchristian conducts. They become addicted to substance abuse, among which is alcoholic drinking and smoking. They become caught up in pornography, fornication and effeminate behaviors. Some with very good intellectual abilities give up school and the pursuit of career and meaningful life vocation to become preoccupied with unambitious pursuits.

The Apostle Paul counsels that we should not take lightly the ability of the devil and should be armed against his spiritual attacks and demon possession. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after

you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people" (Ephesians 6:10–18, NIV).

"Those who would not fall a prey to Satan's devices must guard well the avenues of the soul; they must avoid reading, seeing, or hearing that which will suggest impure thoughts. The mind should not be left to wander at random upon every subject that the adversary of souls may suggest. 'Gird up the loins of your mind,' says the apostle Peter, 'be sober... not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of living.' Says Paul, 'Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.' This will require earnest prayer and unceasing watchfulness. We must be aided by the abiding influence of the Holy Spirit, which will attract the mind upward, and habituate it to dwell on pure and holy things. And we must give diligent study to the word of God" (MYP. P. 285).

WHAT IT MEANS TO COME TO JESUS

"When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before Him and said with a loud voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.' For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many a time it had seized him.) He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert. Jesus then asked him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Legion,' for many demons had entered him" (Luke 8:28–30).

Ellen White said, "The mind of this wretched sufferer had been darkened by Satan, but in the Savior's presence a ray of light had pierced the gloom. He was roused to long for freedom from Satan's control; but the demon resisted the power of Christ. When the man tried to appeal to Jesus for help, the evil spirit put words into his mouth, and he cried out in an agony of fear. The demoniac partially comprehended that he was in the presence of One who could set him free; but when he tried to come within reach of that mighty hand, another's will held him, another's words found utterance through him. The conflict between the power of Satan and his own desire for freedom was terrible" (DA 255).

When you come to Jesus, He opens conversation with you that could take your life into a new and different direction. When you make Jesus your friend the possibilities for cleansing, healing, restoration, achievement of progress, and success are endless. The people who have no special concern for us often make us feel good. Our real friends tend to ask hard questions and expect mature responses. They hold us to our best. Sometimes we're less than grateful. In this encounter, the demoniac must have sensed it would produce a radical change in his life. Like the demoniac, individuals are ambivalent about dealing with radical changes.

In the Preachers' Commentary series, Larson, B., & Ogilvie said that after Jesus commanded the demons out He inquired of the man his name which was a profound question about his identity similar to what modern psychiatry deals with. The man responded to Jesus with great insight, "My name is Legion". In those days a legion was comprised of 6,000 soldiers. In biblical times, the number of demons living in the sufferer measured the degree of mental illness. (Mary Magdalene was possessed by seven demons.) The demoniac claimed to be possessed of 6,000, which meant that he was telling Jesus how sick he really was. It was the schizophrenic gentleman—whose identity was lost and who existed with many different personalities, lonely and living on the outer edge of normal society in the cemetery—that ran to Jesus and opened conversation with Him that resulted in his cure. What is your identity? Who are you? Who would you tell Jesus that you are?

Sometimes even the most stable of us struggle with the question of identity. The genius inventor and architect of the United States government Benjamin Franklin, was reputed to be very mean within his own family. Which was the real Ben Franklin? Thomas Jefferson wrote that "all men are created equal" yet it is said that he kept slaves until the day he died. Which was the real Thomas Jefferson? Tolstoy is revered as one of the great Christian writers and statesmen of his time, yet his wife said he never gave her a kind word or a cup of water. Again, will the real Leo Tolstoy please stand up? Even the apostle Paul, in Romans 7:19, 24, speaks of a divided self: "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice... O, wretched man that I am." It seems all of us are potentially schizophrenic.

But here is the good news: by coming to Jesus, our true identity can be revealed and we cannot be too confused, mixed up or deranged for Him to straighten us, heal us and restore us. Ellen White said, "The demoniac, in place of prayer, could utter only the words of Satan; yet the heart's unspoken appeal was heard. No cry from a soul in need, though it fails of utterance in words, will be unheeded. Those who will consent to enter into covenant relation with the God of heaven are not left to the power of Satan or to the infirmity of their own nature" (DA, p. 258). He was the answer to the problems of the demoniac. **This same Jesus who stilled the storm is also the One who can heal our minds, resolve identity crisis, rearrange our thought processes and set us on our way rejoicing.** He can save us from all of the situations that, however unwittingly, we get ourselves into. This Ultimate Being, God Himself, is our friend. C. Raymond Beran gives us this description of a friend:

A friend... is a person with whom you dare to be yourself; your soul can be naked with him. He seems to ask you to put on nothing, only to be what you are. He doesn't want you to be better or worse. When you are with him you feel as a prisoner feels when he is declared innocent. You do not have to be on your guard. You can say what you think, so long as it's genuinely you. He understands those contradictions in your nature that lead others to misjudge you. With him you breathe freely. You can avow your little vanities and indecent hates, your meanness and absurdities and in opening them up to him they

are lost, dissolved in the white ocean of his loyalty. He understands. You do not have to be careful. You can abuse him, neglect him, tolerate him, it makes no matter. He likes you. He is like fire that purges to the bone. He understands!

When we evaluate ourselves we may realize that we never had a friend like that, neither have we been such a friend, and that is the reason we are here this moment. We need that friend who can help us to be that friend! Jesus is such a friend! When He says, "Tell me about it!" you can open up and reveal your confusion, you can reveal to Him who you are. You can tell Him, "I failed in my marriage." "I've alienated my children." "I betrayed my best friend." "I have split personality." "I am addicted to pornography." "I am a sex addict." "I am struggling with homosexual tendencies." "I am growing more and more indifferent to spiritual things." "I am an avid liar." "I am hooked on drugs." "I am obsessed with social media, movies and all kinds of pleasurable entertainment that I cannot find time for study of the Bible, prayer, and personal worship." **By opening up to Him, we can find integration and become one joyful person with someone to love, something to do and something to hope for.**

THE RESULT OF COMING TO JESUS

"When those who fed them saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. Then they went out to see what had happened, and came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. They also who had seen it told them by what means he who had been demon-possessed was healed" (Luke 8:34–36).

The news went around the town like wild fire and the Gadarenes with great curiosity went out to experience firsthand the story told of this man who lived among them all these years as a lunatic. There are three basic ingredients of health and wholeness that are applicable for any age that Luke's description of this new man provides. They found the man from whom the demons

had departed sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. That's exactly what the new psychiatry, the post-Freudian psychiatry, is all about—these three signs of wholeness are 1) submission to authority, 2) clothed and 3) in a right mind.

First, he was sitting at the feet of Jesus. He was acting responsibly under authority. No longer was he free to do his own thing. That had made him ill. He did his own thing when he was running about in frenzy, tearing off his clothes and living like an animal. Now he submitted his life to the authority of Jesus. Christian freedom is a paradox. **When you submit to the lordship of Christ and the Holy Spirit takes possession of your life, you are most free.** When the Spirit of God resides within, and Christ is enthroned, demons cannot abide. Martin Luther said, "A Christian man is the most free lord of all and subject to no one. A Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all and subject to everyone." We lose our freedom to find a new freedom.

Second, he was clothed, which is another mark of wellness. He was no longer shameless. His nakedness symbolized shamelessness, a flaunting of all morals and absolutes. This is a common disease today. There are those who tell us everything is relative and, if it feels good, do it. But under Jesus' lordship, the man put on clothes with a new sense of what is decent and proper.

Third, he was in his right mind. He saw the world as it is. No longer was he paranoid and convinced that everybody was out to get him. Those who suffer from those feelings should always convince themselves by the help of the Holy Spirit to remember that most of the world doesn't even know that they exist. On the other hand, being in your right mind means coming to accept the fact that everybody does not and will not love you. They don't. You may have enemies. In his right mind, the man who was possessed saw life as it actually is.

TELL YOUR STORY

"But the man from whom the demons had gone out was begging Him that he might accompany Him; but He sent him away, saying, 'Return to your house and describe what great things God has done for you.' So he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him" (Luke 8:38, 39).

Now the man was so obsessed with Jesus who restored him that he wanted to join the ranks of the disciples to be going around with Him, but Jesus had another mission for him. Jesus sent him back home to minister and to witness. It was a person-to-person ministry. He said go back home: Let your family know what has been done for you. Go to your neighborhood and let your friends and neighbors know what the Lord has done for you. **Go and tell your story! There are many out there who need to meet the Man who made this change in your life.**

Jesus wants us to be a part of the whole healing process in society so He sends us. This is what the Kingdom of God is about. When you are converted, help to bring the flock together. There are many who will listen to you when they see the change that has taken place in your life. Go and tell your story and in telling your story you are telling the story of Jesus! This is what He has done for me! He restored me and He will do it for you! That is the Gospel.

Seventh-day Adventist young people all around the world must join in sharing this wonderful story. For in a little while He, Jesus, who heals, restores, redeems, and saves will be coming back to take the faithful witnesses home and you should be among those who will share in this eternal experience.

Appeal and Prayer: _____

Suggested Closing Song: I've Wandered Far Away From God

Benediction: _____

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Identify and discuss ways by which Satan seeks to invade the minds of young people today.
2. How can young people guard their minds against the invading forces of the devil?
3. How is it that people who are active in the faith eventually fall prey to the devil?
4. In what ways do peers and others influence young people to become receptive to demonic possession?
5. Identify specific situations of demon possession and state how can you help one who is possessed to overcome.

MAKE A CHANGE!

**Try the
15-MINUTE
Rule.**



For every 15 minutes

of preaching/teaching, include an energy-burning activity or game. Maybe the activity illustrates a point, or it could be completely random.

A strategically placed activity might break your flow, **but** it greatly enhances a youth's ability to stay mentality engaged.

for activity ideas

www.gcyouthministries.org

FOCUS : YOUTH AND COURAGE

DAY 6 : THURSDAY
WILL YOU STAND?

BIBLE TEXT: LUKE 23: 32-43

SUGGESTED OPENING HYMN:
OLD RUGGED CROSS

THURSDAY - NEIGHBOUR NIGHT

**THE YOUTH WHO BRINGS THE MOST
PERSONS FROM THEIR
NEIGHBOURHOOD GETS A SPECIAL GIFT.**

Some years ago, we went to an urban market one Friday and while walking down the street purchasing food products that we needed, we heard behind us, someone shouting the words “move out of the crowd! Move out of the crowd! Move out of the crowd!” We turned to see what was happening, only to discover it was an insane young man frantically addressing a mirage. Obviously, his deranged nervous system showed him someone in grave danger. As a means of assisting the person whom he recognized was facing an impending danger, it was necessary for him to shout at the top of his voice as he did, with the hope that the person facing the danger would recognize the emergency and respond with urgency. As he continued exerting his energy in a bid to avoid being a victim, a gentleman who was not insane asked him, “Why are you shouting move out of the crowd? That is wrong! You must move with the crowd.” The insane young man responded to the gentleman who was not insane by saying, “No, if you move with the crowd you are involved! You must move out of the crowd!”

Luke tells the story of the occurrences in the final moments of Jesus’ life before His death, resurrection and ascension. He gives us a glimpse of the crowd gathered to cheer and celebrate the death of the One who had come to bring Salvation in a world where people were lost and dying. He tells of Pilate the high court judge and the role he played in authorizing such rejection. He highlights how Roman soldiers proudly executed their task, and the affirmative reaction of the rulers of the people. He graphically emphasizes Jesus’ deportment as He faced that grueling experience and could not help but highlight the demeanor of the two criminals who flanked Him on the Cross. He makes sure to inform his readers of the promise that Jesus extended to those dying on the cross beside Him, which is applicable and relevant for young people in this post-modern era of the 21st Century. As we contemplate the efficacy of this discourse recorded in Luke 23:32–43 we will discover its significance and implication for empowering the courage of Seventh-day Adventist young people and young people in general, as well as adults and children, to stand for what the scripture declares and not to become swayed by the jeering crowd.

In the text, Luke says; "Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' And they cast lots to divide his garments. And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!' The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.' One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, and 'Are you not the Christ Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' And he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' And He said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

PILATE

Before the crucifixion of Christ could be legally executed, either Herod the 1st century ruler of Galilee and Perea, or Pilate the Governor of the Roman Judea, had to issue the decree. Luke tells how Pilate had Jesus brought before Herod Antipas, because He was a Galilean of the jurisdiction of Herod and he Pilate had not found Christ guilty of anything. In a similar manner, Herod, who was confused because he saw innocence, sent Jesus back to Pilate. Luke emphasizes how Pilate attested three times to Jesus' innocence and in that way defended both Jesus and Christians before the Roman state (Luke 23:4, 14, 22). Pilate's grief was compounded as he decided and declared that he found no fault in Christ, his wife sent him a letter saying have nothing to do with this just man. In other words, take no decision to do Him harm. Pilate knew what to do. He knew he should set Him free, but the mob, the crowd was vigilant and determined that He should be crucified.

What do you do when you know what is right and want to do the right, but you are pressured by the crowd or the majority to do otherwise? Are you this moment faced with such dilemma? Is the crowd your challenge? There is a song done by the Heritage Singers that we love very dearly. It says:

*The joy I can't explain, fills my soul
The day I made Jesus my king
His Blessed Holy Spirit is leading my way
He's teaching and I'm learning to lean*

Chorus:

*Learning to lean
Learning to lean,
I'm learning to lean on Jesus
Finding more power than I've ever dreamed
I'm learning to lean on Jesus.*

*Sad broken hearted, at an alter I knelt
I found peace that was so serene
And all that He asks is a childlike trust
And a heart that is learning to lean*

*There's a glorious victory, each day now for me
I've found peace so serene
He helps me with each task, If I'll only ask
Every day now I'm learning to lean*

So weak was this strong Governor, this man of influence and authority, Pilate, that he gave in to the popular demands of the crowd saying, "Take Him and crucify Him, He is your King" (John 19:13–16). In handing Jesus over to be crucified, Pilate declared Jesus as King but the crowd rejected saying, Caesar is our King and not Jesus. By composing the inscription "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" and placing it on the cross, Pilate defended the position of Jesus, which was and is victory for both Jesus and all Christians. Not only did he write it, he defended it against Jewish objections (John 19:19–21). In Luke 23:38 we read, "And a superscription also was written over Him in letters

of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, "This is the King of the Jews". For political reasons and in an act of cowardice, Pilate exchanged the incarnate son of God, who knew no evil, for the release of one of the then known world's notorious criminal. This experience is repeated every moment of every day as young people; children and adults exchange Jesus, the Savior of the world for their own parochial self-interest. **Young people, who will you stand with at this moment, with Pilate, with the crowd, or with Jesus?**

THE ROMAN SOLDIERS

"And when the procession reached the place called Calvary, just outside Jerusalem, they tied Jesus to the Cross and nailed His hands and feet in place. So He was crucified with two criminals, one on His right, and the other on His left... When the soldiers had finished their job and the crosses were in place, they took Jesus' seamless robe and gambled for it because of its value... The Roman soldiers also joined in making fun of Jesus. First they teased Him, and then to ease His pain they offered Him a sip of drugged wine from a sponge on the end of a stick. They shouted up at Him, saying, "If you are a king, where is your army? Aren't they going to come and rescue you?" (Clear Word Devotional Bible, Luke 23:33-37).

The Spirit of Prophecy reads, "The Roman soldiers joined in this abuse. All that these wicked, corrupt soldiers, helped on by Herod and the Jewish dignitaries, could instigate was heaped upon the Savior. Yet His divine patience failed not" (DA 731). It was the Roman soldiers who took hammer and drove the nails into Jesus' hands, and feet. It was the Roman soldiers who took spear and stabbed it into Jesus' side. It was the Roman soldiers who guarded His body on the cross and did not allow anyone to even make an attempt to save him. It was the Roman soldiers who went to check if He was dead on the cross. They were happy to carry out the will of the people. They nailed Him to the cross. They mocked Him. They parted His garments and gambled for it. They teased Him in a way reminiscent of how even those who helped Noah to build the Ark ridiculed him. They gave him vinegar to drink.

When you travel along I-10, which is a highway in Louisiana, United States of America, there is a large billboard at which your eyes are forced to look. It is situated overlooking the city, just as you approach the bridge at the Mississippi River. On that billboard is a picture of Jesus Christ hanging on the cross of Calvary with His head bowed. The description below in bold letters says, “**It's Your Move!**” **How much more powerful could this thought be? God, through Jesus Christ, has already taken the initiative in our salvation. Jesus died for you. Now it's your move!**

THE RULERS AND THE CROWD

The Spirit of Prophecy says, “When the condemnation of Jesus was pronounced by the judges, a satanic fury took possession of the people. The roar of voices was like that of wild beasts. The crowd made a rush toward Jesus, crying, He is guilty, put Him to death! Had it not been for the Roman soldiers, Jesus would not have lived to be nailed to the cross of Calvary. He would have been torn in pieces before His judges, had not Roman authority interfered, and by force of arms restrained the violence of the mob” (DA 715).

The custom of the governor back in the time of Christ was to release a prisoner of the people’s choice at the Passover Feast. It was whoever the people wanted that would be released. The Jewish leaders persuaded the crowd gathered around Pilate judgment hall to call for the release of Barabbas who was a notorious criminal and to demand that Jesus be crucified. When Pilate asked the crowd which they wanted to be released, Barabbas or Jesus, they yelled for Barabbas. Pilate asked what he should do with Jesus, and the crowd yelled, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” At Pilate’s order Jesus was crucified and the crowd and rulers cheered and made merry.

How ironic, for while the rulers and a vast throng of the citizens joined in the merry making and mockery, in bold letters above the head of Jesus on the cross were the words, “King of the Jews”. He was their King, but they understood it not. He was their provider, but they understood it not, He was their Savior, but they understood it not. He was the one that had the key to their

lives, prosperity, success, and future yet they understood it not and they mocked. Like a recurring decimal, the fun continues today. People celebrate the birth of Christ at Christmas time with everything but that which pleases Him. **Every seat in the celebration halls is taken, yet there is none provided for Him, because He is not invited even though He is the one being celebrated.** The crowd and rulers rejected Him. What is your response? It takes courage to stand for Him in this cultural malaise, where everything is relative and morality is nothing but one's individual choice.

JESUS THE CRUCIFIED

The command of the High priest was for Jesus to be placed in the midst of two criminals. Ellen White said, "Christ's position between the thieves was to indicate that He was the greatest criminal of the three. Thus was fulfilled the scripture, 'He was numbered with the transgressors' (Isaiah 53:12). But the full meaning of their act the priests did not see. As Jesus, crucified with the thieves, was placed 'in the midst,' so His cross was placed in the midst of a world lying in sin" (D.A. 751). What would you do if you were nailed to a cross innocently as Jesus was—especially knowing your mission was in their interest? How would you react to those who committed the offence? So many would be waiting for the moment, if possible, to get even with them. The guilty would be made to pay the full price for their heartless acts of oppression, rejection, and inflicted suffering.

How did Jesus handle it? To His executioners and those who mocked He said, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do..." (Luke 23:34). **It was appropriate that He should offer forgiveness because for that purpose He had come.** However, they still could not conceive the significance of His pronouncement. It was characteristic of Him since on numerous bases, during His healing ministry, He proved his ability to forgive sins. He taught that forgiveness would only be accessed by those who forgive others (Luke 6:37; 11:4). He also taught that forgiveness had no limits (17:4). It was His way of life in calling individuals to love their enemies (6:27,28). Here on the cross he was

putting into practice His own teaching. He watched them as they mocked him, as they played games with him, as they scourged him, and crucified Him. Then He asked His Father who is their Father as well to forgive them.

His call for forgiveness was based on two accounts. Firstly, He loved his enemies, and secondly, they were ignorant. Neither the Jews nor the Romans who accused and executed Him, fully realized the gravity of their actions. The Jews were protecting their religious establishment against whom they considered an obnoxious newcomer that was pulling the crowds away from them. The Romans on the other hand, in the person of Pilate, was protecting their political territory against one who proclaimed the kingdom of God was at hand. Both groups acted defensively by placing personal self-interest and political and religious institutions above the call for justice. That blinded their eyes and their mind so they could not realize that they were executing the innocent Savior, the Son of God who had come to save them from their sins.

Just as He pronounced forgiveness upon those by who executed Him, likewise He is freely offering forgiveness this moment to every young person, child and adult living in the 21st Century. Jesus demonstrated that God would forgive the most heinous crimes as long as individuals are willing to accept His forgiveness. Nothing that we may have done can preclude us from accessing this Divine forgiveness if we would humbly and penitently come to Him this moment.

THE CROSS

We travel around the world, to local neighborhoods, small and medium-sized towns and large cosmopolitan centers—one of the common features we find is a monument. These cenotaphs are commemorative of freedom and deliverance and liberty and emancipation and victory and sovereignty and conquest and triumph and success and acts of heroism and symbols of unity, togetherness, and strength. Maliciously, the Jews and Romans ignited friendship and cohesion to give Jesus one of the most menial, shameful and degrading deaths, the death of being nailed to a cross. But He conquered and

transformed the imagery from one of shame, defeat, and death to a symbol of victory and redemption.

It is not imaginary to see many young people, children, and adults wear a cross of gold, silver, brass, wood and of various alloy suspended from their neck and other parts of their bodies. Some even tattooed the cross on their bodies. For many, this is not a commemoration of the victory they have in Christ but for some good luck charm or memento of some earthly personalities, memories, desires or experiences.

In the same vein, all around the world, crosses are erected to the memory, honor, and glory of this Christ who suffered such indignity to have taken the death that we should die so they we might live. He was mocked on the cross, laughed at on the cross, and suffered the excruciating physical pain and emotional separation from the father when He exclaimed, "My God, my God, why hath thou forsaken me?" **Today, the cross is a symbol of all of that, but more than all, of the liberation from sin and victory over death, suffering and defeat that He has won for the youth of the world and all others.**

THE CRIMINALS ON THE CROSS

Both criminals on their individual cross sinned and were rightfully judged. One joined the mocking crowd because he was about being a part of the crowd and wanted to let it known that he had no association with Jesus. Like so many of us he did not respond to the love of God, repent and accept change. However, **the other one was reflective. He did not allow himself to be swayed by popularity and the pressure of the crowd.** For him, death was imminent and just in case there is something right about Jesus, he was willing to take the risk rather than to lose the possibility of life eternal. It was an act of courage on his part.

Dante says the hottest places in hell are reserved for those who maintain their neutrality in a period of moral crisis. Robert Kennedy said, "Few men are will-

ing to brave the disapproval of their fellows, the censure of their colleagues, the wrath of their society. Moral courage is a rarer commodity than bravery in battle or great intelligence, yet it is the one essential, vital quality for those who seek to change the world, which yields most painfully to change." The thief on the right hand of Jesus demonstrated courage, rebuked his companion, and parted company. He made confession, he admitted to his evils. "'Don't you have any fear of God in your soul? In a few hours you and I will be dead,' he said. 'We are getting what we deserve, but this man is being executed even though He's innocent! Didn't you hear what the soldiers said about the whole trial, and Pilate found no fault in Him?' Then He turned to Jesus and said, 'Lord, I believe in you! Please remember me when you set up your Kingdom'" (The Clear Word Youth Devotional, Luke 23:40–42).

THE PROMISE

"And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, today shall thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). There is no time for neutrality in responding to this promise of the Savior. Not only to the thief is it given, but to you as well as us. Jesus' promise from the cross to the repentant was triumph and victory. He achieved! The promise was a title deed for his liberation from the grasp of the devil. **To all who will stand for Him, the promise is a title deed of their liberation an entry code that opens the gate of glory through which they will access the victorious eternity.** This promise is joyous news for young people, middle aged, children, and adults that they, too are overcomers in Jesus, if only they will stand with Him and move out of the crowd. Victory over every evil, temptation, threat, and trial as well as all human weaknesses are guaranteed in Christ and His promise is your title deed. Will you Stand?

Appeal and Prayer: _____

Suggested Closing Song: They Are Nailed To The Cross

Benediction: _____

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<http://oneyearinmission.org>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Share your ideas on how young people can stand courageously against the influences of the crowd and witness of their faith in Christ.
2. How can the church help the youth to be bolder in identifying with the mission of Christ?
3. Discuss how young people today are similar to Pilate in their response to power, politics, and coercion.
4. Discuss how seriously young people consider eternal life in the kingdom as a phenomenon that impact their daily lives and conduct.

FOCUS : YOUTH AND FORGIVENESS

DAY 7 : FRIDAY
FULFILLING THE DREAM

BIBLE TEXT: GENESIS 45: 1-12; 50: 15-22

SUGGESTED OPENING HYMN:
STAND UP STAND UP FOR JESUS

FRIDAY - FAMILY NIGHT
SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON FRIENDS AND PARENTS.
ENCOURAGE THE YOUTH TO BRING THEIR FRIENDS AND
PARENTS. THE PERSON BRINGING THE MOST PERSON
FROM THEIR HOUSEHOLD/FAMILY GETS A GIFT

INTRODUCTION

Orville was an ambitious member of the Church who loved music. He played the guitar and keyboard very well and had great interest in drums. However, his was a conservative church that believed drums should not be used in church services, so he was not able to utilize that skill at his home church. However, because he knew how to be moderate in playing drums for church services, occasionally, a neighboring church would invite him to play for their service. His church had many young people with active youth ministries—the Adventurer, Pathfinder, Master Guide, Ambassador and Senior Youth programs were very strong. Orville was at the forefront of leadership in many of the activities.

He excelled in academia also as he was very intelligent, committed to task and success oriented. Because of his strengths, many of his peers felt he was proud and would oppose as much as they could, the things he tried to do. They found faults, complained about him playing drums, and tried to get others to turn against him. The parents of many such detractors of his were also anti-Orville. There was always a negative complaint about him. At the same time, everything he did in church was well done. Because of the negative complaints, his service in church became less and less pronounced because individuals in leading positions were discouraged from utilizing him to participate in activities. Eventually, he became inactive and those with fewer competencies than him, especially those who opposed him, assumed roles that they performed with less effectiveness than he did. Knowing the obvious rejection, he continued going to that church but eventually became more and more active in the church that he would usually be invited to play the drums. As time progressed, he was made the head elder of that church. He ultimately nurtured and developed interest in pastoral ministry. Today, Orville is an effective pastor, who is serving as the Youth Ministries Director in his conference.

Experiences like Orville's are replicated across the globe both in religious and secular organizations. The results are not always the same as some become dropouts and fugitives while others swim against the tide and become suc-

cessful. It is purported that teachers of Thomas Edison told him he was "too stupid to learn anything". However, Edison went on to hold more than 1,000 patents and invented some world-changing devices, like the phonograph, practical electrical lamp, and a movie camera. There are thousands of young people who are out of the faith today because of rejection, jealousy, and negative prophecies, while there are those who still remain in spite of the negative reactions received. There are those in the faith who are struggling with choices that they have made and which are to be made. At the same time, some are in the process of anticipating the most opportune time to leave the Church.

Some youth are in places today where they would not have been, if their reception in the Church was more accommodating. Some who are now struggling with their addiction to sex, pornography, alcoholic drinking, smoking, use of drug, lying, and even stealing, blame someone for influencing them in these directions. The effects of sibling rivalry and parental discontent are also contributing factors that can lead to undesirable choices and resulting negative outcomes that many youth are now dealing with.

A survey was done last year concerning the greatest challenges facing young people today. 24% of the youth respondents considered the breakdown of the family to be the most pressing issue facing their generation. The pressure of peers and siblings have caused many to toy with the temptation of suicide and countless numerous are depressed. Lack of self-confidence and low self-esteem influenced by the negative effects of the behavior of others lead scores of young people to see themselves as worthless, to develop a sense of hopelessness, become confused and ambiguous concerning moral issues, and question what is right and wrong?

Some individuals question the reason we so often focus on the negatives. The fact is these are life's realities that cannot be overlooked. However, while we contemplate the numerous negatives, there is an abundance of positives that we celebrate and thank the Lord for. **Like Orville, there are many young people in the faith who stood their tests and have stories to share that encourage other in knowing that failure is not an option for them to embrace.** Young

people, as you face life's challenges both within the family, the church and the wider society, never forget to love the Lord, to love the Church, and to embrace the mission of the Church. Whatever may be your obstacles and temptations, as much as it is possible, love your family, love the members of the church, and love people. Always remember, that faith, courage, prayer, study of the Word and a strong relationship with the Lord, are powerful survival tools in a world, a church, a family, and a society that is riddled with compromise, grudge, hate and jealousy.

What would you do if you found yourself in a situation as Joseph?

JOSEPH THE DREAMER

The Bible gives us some information relating to factors in the life of Joseph as a teenager that influenced his development and success. His brothers hated him because of their father's exceptional affection to him. Of course, the coat of many colors topped it off (Genesis 37:3). "And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him. And Joseph dreamed a dream, and told it his brethren: and they hated him yet the more" (Genesis 37:4,5. **In telling them the dream, they perceived that he would have dominion over them and they could not conceive themselves submitting to the supremacy of their smaller brother.** They could not recognize that he was an instrument under construction by the Lord to serve a great purpose, and that what he would become, would to a large extent, depend on the treatment they handed out to him.

Joseph was already committed to and deeply entrenched in principles of right, truth, good work, and faith by the time he had reached seventeen years of age. The day when he announced his dream about the sheaves of corn bowing down to each other was a signature point that angered and piqued their interest. They bluntly asked, "Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?" (v. 8). His second dream did nothing to calm their anger and added his father's offence as well, who said to

him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?" (v. 10). At 17 years of age, Joseph could have been short on tact but he was no foreigner to truth. He did not compromise principle and neither would he remain silent in declaring his conviction and revelations to which he was privy.

Five specific reasons why his brothers hated him: 1) he reported to their father about the misdemeanor they displayed on the job, 2) his father loved him more than they, 3) he received a special coat from their father, 4) he told them two unusual dreams that he got, and 5) their interpretation of those dreams which apparently signified that he would reign over them. Your experience may not be as dramatic as Joseph's, but do you find members of your family, people at school, at work, in the community or at your church hating or disliking you? Are you able to identify with Joseph? Have you got a dream? The rejection of peers and other members of the family and the church can influence you away from attaining your dreams. Many young people prefer to fry their brains on drugs, even though they know the dangers, instead risking the disapproval of others. **Joseph was at that age when he, too, needed acceptance; however, popularity or friendship or even the pressure of his brothers did not sway him.**

THE EFFECTS OF PEERS REJECTION

When Joseph journeyed to Dothan at his father's request to meet his brothers, the extent of the rejection by his peers became clearly evident. "Now when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him" (v. 18). The hatred and envy that they had for him had now matured, turning cold and obsessive. They cranked into gear their deliberate scheme to execute premeditated murder. The Spirit of Prophecy reads, "His brothers saw him approaching; but no thought of the long journey he had made to meet them, of his weariness and hunger, of his claims upon their hospitality and brotherly love softened the bitterness of their hatred. The sight of the coat, the token of their father's love, filled them with frenzy" (EP. 138).

Dressed in his splendid “tunic” which announced favoritism and provoked hostility, Joseph walked into the unbelievably stressful experiences at Dothan. Negative peer pressure and sibling rivalry as well as unwise parental pressure all were at play in that most undesirable event. He escaped alive only because one of his brothers, Reuben, intervened with a deliberate plan to save his younger brother. His life was spared, and the plans of the brothers were altered. Nevertheless, “they stripped him of his tunic and cast him into an empty pit. **How incredible that after such an act, they sat down to eat a meal.** The torture of abandonment and unrelenting cruelty were added to the suffering of rejection and hatred. He then became a merchandize that brought fame to Median traders who purchased him and re-sold him as one of their products in Egypt.

Not only did Joseph suffer, his father also suffered, as they brought him the heartbreak news. “They took Joseph’s tunic, killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the tunic in the blood... they brought it to their father and said, ‘We have found this. Do you know whether it is your son’s tunic or not?’” (vv. 31–32). The old man, as expected, recognized the tunic, assumed the worst, and “mourned for his son many days... and he said, ‘For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning’” (vv. 34–35). Meanwhile Joseph was on his way to Egypt where he was subsequently traded to “Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard” (v. 36).

This moment, as many of you suffer and face rejection, cruelty, hatred, and grudges, your heavenly father bears your pain and knows your agony. Just as Joseph held on to his dreams through the most trying and disabling stage of his life, hold on to your dreams! The hands of providence that spared his life and brought him from the pit and slave market in Egypt, as well as the dungeon of prison, will carry you safely through.



THE HANDS OF THE DIVINE BEHIND THE SCENES

Young people, as you face life's struggles today, be assured that nothing is happening to you that the Lord is not aware of. It was Brisco and Ogilvie who said, "**God has not excused His people from living in a sinful world. But neither has He deserted them in their struggle.**" Through all the struggles of your life, He has a purpose for you and if you remain faithful to him, He will eventually take you where He wants you. We are strangers and pilgrims here in this world. It is not our home. Home is on its way, let it be your dream to meet Christ in the clouds of glory and be taken home to your mansion that He is preparing for you. Hold on to your dreams! As Abraham was promised the land of Canaan, God said to him, "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years" (Gen. 15:13). Egypt was that land that was not theirs and the story is told over and over again how they were enslaved and suffered there in that land. The providence of God turned adversity into the fulfillment of promise. Joseph's Egyptian experience was meant to be God's method in fulfilling a great promise.

God knew that going to Egypt would not end the suffering of Joseph. However, He had a great deliverance planned not only for him, but also for all the descendants of Abraham. God knows that when we became Seventh-day Adventists it would not bring an end to suffering and feelings of rejection and abandonment. We would not immediately become perfect and have all our doubts, temptations, troubles, fears and cares forever eliminated.

Young people, you must never lose sight of the fact that where you are is not where you are going. You must hold on to your dreams. The story of Joseph demonstrates how the mysterious workings of God are threaded through all the machinations and schemes of mankind and He will ultimately triumph, and His purposes for our lives will eventually prevail. Joseph understood this, even as a teenager, and accordingly, he had the necessary fortitude to endure to the end.

JOSEPH IN EGYPT

Joseph's story is one of the great classics that must motivate young people all around the world to stand up for the Lord and hold on to their dreams. Heartlessly betrayed, ditched, and peddled like livestock by his own brothers, he arrived in Egypt at the age of seventeen. He had no relatives, no friends, no church member and no known means of support. "Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there" (Gen. 39:1). So many would despair and become depressed or even suicidal in such circumstances, but not Joseph! He did not forget his dreams. This fundamental awareness of his objectives, combined with a consciousness of his intimate relationship with the Lord, were significant factors in the development of his ability to advance regardless of the situations in which he found himself. Ellen White said, "For ten years he was here exposed to temptations in the midst of idolatry, surrounded by all the pomp of royalty, the wealth and culture of the most highly civilized nation then in existence. Yet Joseph preserved his fidelity to God" (EP. P.142). "The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man... And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand" (vv. 2-3).

Potiphar was not slow to note that as soon as he put the young man in charge everything in his house and business took off. He was so impressed with Joseph's abilities that he handed over to him the complete running of his household. As time progressed the providence of God led Joseph to become counselor to the highest official of government in Egypt, Pharaoh. He said to him, "Now therefore, let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt" (v. 33). Pharaoh's question was, "Where can we find such a man who can lead with integrity and courage?" He did not hesitate. He knew the man he needed and he said, "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?" (v. 38). Joseph was that man and he was made governor of Egypt. It was 13 years since he had left home. He experienced heartaches, betrayal, attainments, and frustrations. However, nothing compared to his meteoric elevation from prison to "governor over the land" (Gen. 42:6). What an immense weight of responsibility that rested on this thirty-year-old leader. The key to his success was found in Chapter 41:18; he said, "I fear God."

FULFILLING THE DREAM

The emergence of famine that was experienced in Egypt and beyond led individuals from various nations to Egypt to buy food at the authority of Governor Joseph. His brothers were among those who had to face him. For two years he was able to disguise himself and relate to them as a stranger. However the moment came when Joseph held all the cards and could play them exactly as he wished. His brothers were completely at his mercy and fortunately for them mercy was what he extended. He "...said to his brothers, 'Please come near to me.' So they came near. Then he said: '...But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life'" (vv. 4,5). His attitude was most remarkable in that he refused to impose any blame on them, but wanted only to impress upon them that the hand of the Lord had been clearly evident in his life.

He wanted them to see that God had sent him to Egypt and that He had done so in order that a great blessing might result. If the brothers had difficulty comprehending these dramatic disclosures it would be understandable. Not only had their long lost brother suddenly reappeared and their long hidden secret been exposed, his dreams were fulfilled, "And the brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, 'Behold, we be thy servants'" (Genesis 50:18).

FORGIVENESS

Joseph offered forgiveness to his brothers and encouraged them not to grieve or be angry with themselves. He did that because he knew that the sovereign Lord had been in control. He said to his brothers, "you sold me", but then he reminded them, "God sent me." In no way was their responsibility diminished, but equally in no way had the Lord ever lost control of the situation. **We must learn from experience that to ignore the divine sovereignty is arrogance but to ignore human accountability is a major irresponsibility.**

Joseph continued by saying to his brothers, "God sent me before you to preserve posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliv-

erance" (v. 7). He invited them to explore the wonderful workings of the Lord and to see how an understanding of the Lord can deal with bitterness and put sweetness in its place.

He summarized by saying, "So now it was not you who sent me here, but God" (v. 8). It is doubtful if guilty men ever heard more pleasant words than those. The victim of their unspeakable wickedness, who held their lives in his hands, was offering them full and free forgiveness. If they had any doubt at all it was dispelled when Joseph "kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and after that his brothers talked with him" (v. 15). We are spared the details of their conversation, but little imagination is needed to guess that at first they stammered their guilt and then as they grasped the forgiving spirit of their brother, they poured out their gratitude for his mercy and grace.

What a beautiful ending; he said to his brothers, "Go bring the old man." With all their possessions and belongings they were to come and live in the land of Goshen. He introduced them to Pharaoh and all his attendants and sent them home with an abundance of food, clothing and money (45:22). When eventually their father died and they were now worried about reprisals Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about, as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones. And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them" (Genesis 50:19–21).

Young people, are you hurting at this moment? Is it the pastor or is it the elder? Is it one of the adult members of the church or one of your peers? Who is it? Is it your parents or one of your siblings? Is it your spouse or someone outside the church or is it a relative?

He was rejected, abandoned, and banished by his brothers. From his father's house to the dungeon of the prison in Egypt, Joseph suffered for his integrity. However, he forgave because the Lord was with him! If you could get a glimpse inside the courts of heaven just now, you would see the arms of Jesus wide open, beckoning to you, along with the angels, saying, "Forgive! Forgive!"

Forgive!" **With your dreams in your mind, forgiveness in your heart, and the Lord as your leader, be encouraged.** Do what you must do, always remembering that weeping will endure for a night, but joy will come in the morning.

Appeal and Prayer: _____

Suggested Closing Song: *Since I Have Been Redeemed*

Benediction: _____

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Repentance, confession, conversion, forgiveness, and acceptance of Christ are vital for salvation. How significant are these in the active vocabulary of young people of the 21st century?
2. What was significant about Joseph, which his brothers did not possess, that created the separation between them?
3. Joseph was a whistle blower on his brothers' conduct that caused them to hate him. Is it ever right for a Christian to be a whistle blower?
4. Joseph became governor of Egypt. Should Christians be involved in secular government today?
5. What should be the attitude of members of the Church toward one of their peers who eventually becomes named to a position within the Church, a social organization or civil society?

FOCUS : YOUTH AND GRACE

**DAY 8 : SECOND SABBATH
LIVING BY GRACE**

BIBLE TEXT: TITUS 2: 11-15

SUGGESTED OPENING HYMN:

STANDING ON THE PROMISES OF CHRIST MY SAVIOR

2ND SABBATH- HOMECOMING NIGHT
VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR IDEAS ON PLANNING YOUR
HOMECOMING PROGRAM

www.gcyouthministries.org

Invite the youth to remain and play games, enjoy fellowship and engage in sports activities. (Plan ahead)

THE STORY OF A COMMUNITY THAT UTILIZED WARM FUZZY

The story is told of a community of happy people where there was no violence but all love, joy, happiness and peace. Everyone had a small, soft Fuzzy Bag that was given at birth. Whenever persons reached into this bag, they were able to pull out a Warm Fuzzy which, when given to anyone going through unpleasant experience, made them feel warm, fuzzy, and happy. People were always giving and receiving them, and since they were always given freely, getting enough of them was never a problem. There were always plenty to go around, and so everyone felt warm and fuzzy most of the time. One day a bad witch who made salves and potions for sick people became angry because everyone was so happy and feeling good and no one was buying her products. The witch was clever and devised a wicked plan. One morning while two young people were passing her, she pretended to have fainted and when the young people gave her a Warm Fuzzy she said, "If you keep giving those away you will soon run out and then there won't be any left for you!" They were astonished and asked her, "Do you mean that there isn't a Warm Fuzzy in our bag every time we reach into it?" She answered, "No, absolutely not, and once you run out, that's it. You don't have any more."

With this the witch flew away, laughing, and cackling. The young people took it to heart and stopped giving and receiving Warm Fuzzies. They began to complain or sulk when others gave Warm Fuzzies. Soon everyone started to hoard and eventually stopped giving Warm Fuzzies. The result, people began to shrivel up and, occasionally, some died from lack of Warm Fuzzies. The community became violent, robberies, and all types of crimes resulted. The peaceful, loving community was no longer. More and more, people went to the witch to buy her products that did not offer love, joy, peace, and kindness. Years passed and this violent community got viler. Tim and Maggie, two youth went to visit their grandparents for a summer vacation and saw many hoarded Warm Fuzzies in the clothes closet and asked what they were. Their grandparents told them the story of the days when everyone would give and receive Warm Fuzzies and how loving, peaceful, and happy the people and

the community were, as opposed to the present. They were told that the violence in the community began after people started hoarding them. The young people decided to collect as many Warm Fuzzies as they could get and started giving them to people, as they saw the need. As they did, others started to do likewise, after a while, everyone was giving and receiving Warm Fuzzies again and gradually, the love, peace, joy, kindness, and happiness returned to the community.

This story is descriptive of the primer society in which God, who created the Universe was satisfied and said: "Very Good", there was: abundance of peace, immeasurable love, unlimited joy, endless happiness, perfect health, wholesome use of time, and face-to-face communion both vertically and horizontally. But Satan and his demonic forces invaded the "Very Good" and the following resulted: nakedness became shameful, sweet dreams turned into nightmares, blame game became the national sport, sumptuous meals became dependent upon the sweat of the brow, child bearing became subjected to sorrow and excruciating pain, thorns and thistles became natural vegetation of the earth, domestic violence became the order of the day, jilting began, love triangles came into existence, substance abuse and alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, cocaine, crack, heroin, club drugs, and other types of dependency drugs became common place. Withdrawal symptoms from such dependencies became major issues. Hate, malice, infightings, and undercover movements emerged and all forms of anti-social behaviors began.

RESPONDING TO THIS PANDEMIC

The Creator chose not to remain aloof and allow hopelessness, despair and destruction to proceed on a scale hitherto unknown. The Apostle Paul gives us a description of the Divine response. He captures the scenario in Titus 2:11–15, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus

Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee."

Titus 2 has two main divisions: (1) Verses 1–10 are a division of Imperatives that is formulated as a series of exhortations to Godly behavior for Christians, while (2) verses 11–15 are a division of Theological Realities. In the Theological Realities division, verse 11 commences that division of doctrines or theological realities with the use of the Greek word, "for" ("γάρ"). This word shows a connection between what is to come and that, which preceded it, which are the imperatives in verses 1–10. In verse 11, Paul refers to the great act of God's grace appearing (*ἐπεφάνη*) and to that act bringing salvation to all people. He uses this phrase: "The grace of God" (*ἡ χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ*) 15 times in his writings (Rom. 5:15; 1 Cor. 1:4; 3:10; 15:10; 2 Cor. 1:12; 6:1; 8:1; 9:14; Gal. 2:21; Eph. 3:2, 7; Col. 1:6; 2 Thes. 1:12).

WHAT IS GRACE?

Divine Grace is always defined as the favor, kindness, and goodwill of God directed toward his creation. George W. Knight in the New International Greek Commentary said: "Grace is the dimension of divine activity that enables God to confront human indifference and rebellion with an inexhaustible capacity to forgive and to bless." The SDA Bible Commentary defines Grace as: "The abundant saving love of God that is manifested to sinners." Ellen White said, "Grace is an attribute of God shown to undeserving human beings. We did not seek after it, but it was sent in search of us" (My Life Today, Chapter 4). **Paul uses the term Grace as "God's gracious intention toward mankind whereby a) He saves, b) He instructs, and c) He enables.** In his discourses on Grace in verse 11, he makes three claims about salvation in relation to Grace: (1) The Grace of God is the source of man's salvation. (2) This salvation brought by Grace is a historical reality (3) Grace has made this Salvation universally available to all human beings. We will now consider these three claims of Grace.

I. **Grace is the Source of Our Salvation**

Paul says, "The grace of God that brings salvation..." This speaks to the source of our salvation. Without Grace, there is no possibility of us being saved. In Ephesians 2:8 the Apostle says: "For by grace ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves: It is the gift of God." When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden – Grace went after them; Gen. 3:8–11 (NIV), "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?' He answered, 'I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.' And He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?'" This text makes it obvious that after Adam and Eve sinned, they went running or hiding from God. It is a natural consequence of sin.

When Church members commit themselves in some ways, or begin to develop attractions that distract from spiritual standards and practices, they usually go missing. Church attendance becomes sparse, active involvement in the Adventurer, Pathfinder, and the general youth and other programs of the Church take on less importance and their presence become occasional and sometimes eventually non-existent. Like Adam and Eve, they go hiding. The text says, "they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden". Things were now different. Adam and Eve usually had face-to-face communion with God and now all of a sudden, "they heard the voice". God did not change. He appeared in the same manner as formerly—uttering the well-known tones of kindness, walking in some visible form not running hastily, as one motivated by anger and disappointment.

They hid themselves amongst the trees of the garden because shame, remorse, fear, and guilt that they had not experienced before and to which they were strangers disordered their minds.

It led them to shun the Lord, whose approach they used to welcome. **How strange that while in the presence of God, the guilty were seeking refuge from God!** But He would not give up on them. As they ran, in His own characteristic manner, He followed behind them, asking, "Where are you?" He did not desist until they responded. That is Grace! Here we see Grace begins by showing the Edenic couple their need of the Savior. The same is replicated daily to young people all across the globe. When we go running, Grace comes in search of us. Grace is persistent! We must either answer in the affirmative or reject, but Grace does not leave us alone. To save us from sin and guilt, Grace demands that we first recognize our weaknesses, helplessness and need of a Savior. Yes, we must recognize our fallen condition. The offer of Grace does not wait for human beings to recognize their needs first. Grace presents its uniqueness, indefatigable love and un-fallen character. It challenges human beings to behold and compare then to make their choice. **When we see what we are in comparison to what we could become, except we are stubborn, we accept this matchless gift called salvation.** Today, Grace says to young people who are running, becoming spiritually indifferent, focusing on the joys and pleasures of this life and are cautious of the sacrifices that following Christ demands, "follow me, for there is a higher joy"!

Many young people are running from the Lord because of music, the pleasure of sexual intimacy, entertainment, economic difficulties, intellectual and academic attainments, secular attractions, as well as pressure from parents, peers and others. Some are even running because of the actions of some members of the church.

The Lord did not say follow the crowd, but "follow me"! For that reason Jesus came running after us. A lifeguard lost his job because he went into a no swim zone to rescue a drowning man. He knew it was not a part of his job description to rescue anyone in difficulties outside of the defined area but he saw a human being in difficulty, in a no swim zone, and went to his rescue. Hans LaRondell said, "Human beings were victims of deception but when it occurred, God

was already prepared for the emergency". Jesus came and made Himself available for our rescue and now He says give me your heart, your hands, your desire, your total being I will save you. That is what Grace does. It is the source of our salvation!

II. *Grace is a Historical Reality*

Paul says in Titus 2:11, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation **hath appeared** to all men...". He refers here to its unique historical appearance in Christ, which is communicated to us in the gospel. Titus 3:3–6: "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving diverse lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior." Jesus is the embodiment of God's Grace!

In John 1:14 the Apostle in corroborating with Paul said, "And the WORD was made 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." We travelled to Israel a few years ago and when we got there our tour guide, who was a Jew, carried us to the nativity scene and told us that's where Jesus was born. He took us to the site at the river Jordon and said, "This is where He was baptized." He showed us the house at Cana and told us there was the place that He turned water into wine. At the river of Galilee he showed us the area where Peter walked on the water to Jesus. In the garden of Gethsemane he identified to us the area where His sweat became blood. He carried us to various other places, including to the tomb and showed us that it is empty and said this is where the resurrection story occurred. When the tour was over, he informed us that he did not believe that same Jesus that he spoke to us about is the Messiah. How pathetic!

As Christians, we believe the scriptures. We believe that the first advent of the Messiah and the Grace that He provides is not a future tense phenomenon. **The first advent of Christ and His sacrificial act that has made our salvation possible is a historical reality.** Our anticipation at this time is for the glorious appearing of Christ who will so come in like manner as He ascended. That will be the final act on this side of the drama of life. Billy Graham and Charles Templeton were both evangelists and friends who came to fame in the 1940s. The two friends eventually parted company; Templeton died in 2001, shortly after writing the book "Farewell to God". Before he died, Templeton told Billy that, "we cannot continue to believe that God created the world in 6 days. It was done over millions of years". He also said, "I believe that Jesus lived. He was a good and upright man. Great example, but he was not the Son of God. He was the son of a man." Templeton was seeking for intellectual conviction. By faith Billy accepted the story of the Bible. Templeton died an atheist; Billy called the world to Christ. **Young people, as Seventh-day Adventists we believe in the historical Jesus – He is not a myth!** He walked in Palestine – He went to the Cross. He died for you and for us! Christ came into a war zone, and confronted the attacks and missiles of the devil. He intercepted and overcame them all. Yes, He came into a world infested with gangs, gunmen, and evaders, engaged them in combat, and declared it is finished: The battle is won! He only chose to lay down His life in an apparent show of defeat, however, through this intentional act, He scored victory and redemption for lost humanity and hope of eternal restoration to all who accept Him as their Savior.

III. Grace Makes Salvation Universally Available to All

Titus 2:11, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men..." Ellen White said, "Satan was exulting that he had succeeded in debasing the image of God in humanity. Then Jesus came to restore in man the image of his Maker. None but Christ can fashion anew the character that has been ruined by sin. He came to expel the demons that had controlled the will. He

came to lift us up from the dust, to reshape the marred character after the pattern of His divine character, and to make it beautiful with His own glory" (DA. P. 37) In John 3:16 Jesus declared the targets of His mission to save: "Whosoever will..." No one is left out of His plan. Those who are not included are those who choose to walk or run away from His saving grace that is already freely given to all.

His inclusive commission to the disciples is found in Matthew 28:19,20: "Go ye into all the world and preach to... every nation, kindred, tongue and people... baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost." Last year we attended a festival of the Laity with over 1,500 lay workers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. While the meeting was going on a pastor of another denomination walked in. He told us he had been studying the Word of the Lord and was satisfied that the Seventh-day is the Sabbath of the Lord and he should observe it. He said that since the previous two Sabbath he and all the members of his Church were observing the Sabbath and worshipping on the seventh-day. They were ready to be baptized and be accepted into membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We visited Indonesia some time ago and were told that in response to the distribution of the book Great Controversy, over 100 pastors of other denominations had already accepted the Advent Message and became members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and were working on bringing over their congregations. In the case of some, their congregations had come along with them. There are scores of stories that can be told of how God is leading people into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. **We have a universal message that is leading people of all stations and statuses to accept Christ as their personal Savior.** Amazingly, in this Church, we welcome into membership more young people each year than those who are much older. We thank the Lord for the receptivity of those who are accepting the gospel of Jesus.

In John 10:10 Jesus said: "The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy," but His purpose is to give a rich and satisfying life to all. The grace that ap-

peared brings salvation “to all people” and that is a present reality. It is given to all classes of individuals, enabling them to live truly upright and joyful lives. Everyone has the opportunity to rejoice in the faith and in a satisfying relationship with Christ. Race, language, culture, ethnicity, social status, educational background, color national identity or no other human classification precludes anyone from the salvation made available in Christ. **Children, youth, and adults can all rejoice alike for they are all included in the plan of salvation.**

GRACE TEACHES

“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.” In this verse, Paul personifies grace. We could say it comes with a post-doctorate degree in Divinity from the University of Eternity. He gives grace: intellectual capacity, wisdom, experience, authority, academic profile and professional status. Paul awarded grace a teacher’s credential, with a specific curriculum—to restrain certain behaviors and to promote others, stating that: Grace teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness with the further nuance here of “deny” in the sense of “to renounce” or “to give up”. The construct of the sentence means that we must continually deny (or have already denied) “godlessness and worldly desires” as a condition for the positive goal to which we are called, i.e., so that we may live the Christian life. According to Romans 1:18; 11:26 and Jude 15, 18, we must deny “godlessness or impiety” in both thought and action. 1 Jn. 2:16, 17 speaks of “the desires that characterize the world”. In this context, “the world” is considered as the realm of disobedience to God and of sin (Gal. 6:14). **According to Paul, Grace teaches us to deny the root principle, “godlessness, impiety” and its many concrete manifestations, “worldly desires”.** He sets out what ungodliness is in Titus 1:1–10, which is a demonstration of a lack of love to others, doctrine that is not sound, intemperance, false accusations, ways by which the word of God is blasphemed, corruptness and condemnatory speech among other things.

The intention of Grace is to create holy, godly people who live on the basis of dependence upon God in the midst of satanic forces that opposes Him. Grace teaches positive lessons on how we should live in a self-controlled and thoughtful manner. It means we should live righteously or "in an upright manner" or in a godly manner and be aware that **our actions manifest the Credibility of the Gospel.** We must be intentional about living the claims and instructions of grace. Just because we pray does not mean that God is it. Grace teaches and enables us to become concerned with three important matters as indicated in Titus 1:1: (1) To live uprightly with ourselves in thoughtful self-control (2) To have an upright relationship in dealing with other people. Giving Warm Fuzzies and sharing the gospel with others. Ellen White said, "Every disciple that is born into the Kingdom of God is born a Missionary" (AA. p. 9). "God could have reached His object in saving sinners without our aid; but in order for us to develop a character like Christ's, we must share in His work. In order to enter into His joy,—the joy of seeing souls redeemed by His sacrifice,—we must participate in His labors for their redemption" (Desire of Ages, p. 142) and (3) To walk intimately with God and have a right relationship of genuine piety with Him. We should find time for both personal and corporate worship, study of the Word and prayer.



Be ready for a great time of
deep discussion to pop up
when you least expect it.

Just plant the seed!

THE GRAND OBJECT OF GRACE

"Looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). The participial clause of this verse calls us to live from the vantage point of "expectantly awaiting" and "looking forward to" Christ's appearing. This is what is called the blessed hope. It is living in expectancy of the unseen and sure, but not yet realized spiritual blessings that they will possess in the future. It is That "hope" – which is "laid up in heaven" for Christians (Col. 1:5), the grand inheritance of eternal life (Tit. 1:2; 3:7). This hope embraces Christ's second return, the resurrection and or transformation of believers and glorification of the Saints in the Kingdom of God.

As we bring this week of prayer to a close, let us never lose sight of the fact that we are awaiting the day when the Lord will say these are my people, welcome to the joys of home. **Let us live in readiness awaiting the victory when Jesus will come as King of Kings to liberate us from the prison of this world: Grace will bring us home to glory... Grace, yes, marvelous grace of the loving Lord!**

Appeal and Prayer: _____

Suggested Closing Song: Marvelous Grace

Benediction: _____

try the 15 minutes rule

for activity ideas visit

www.gcyouthministries.org

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Share your testimony. What impact does grace have on your personal life and conduct?
2. How would you seek to persuade your peers, family members, and friends that the grace of God could make a difference in their lives?
3. The Apostle Paul personifies grace. What are some specific things that grace teaches the child of God to do or not to do?
4. What strategy can the youth of your church devise to be united in sharing the gospel of Christ?

KEEPING IT REAL

TIPS AND IDEAS

Making Small Groups Work

by Maria Manderson, Editorial Assistant in the GC Youth Ministries Department

In this book are eight outstanding messages on the parables of Jesus. These messages were written by Dr. Balvin Braham and his wife, Anett Braham. Throughout these readings you will find opportunities to share stories from your own life with others. Use them. They will give you a chance to show that what you are talking about is real and personal, not just something theoretical from Scripture.

To encourage interaction we have included discussion questions to be used at the end of each day's reading. These discussion questions are very important in the process of adapting and applying the lesson to their daily lives and can be found at the end of each day's reading. They can be done together as a large group, or you can break down into smaller groups of 10-15; however, we are suggesting that you break into small, core groups of three to five persons and get together in these same small groups each night. Please remember that no two small groups will be the same. Each will have its own dynamic character, reflecting the varying characteristics of the members. The common thread running through the entire group will be Jesus Christ, and it is in His name that the group will meet each night of this special week.

Avoid the "Christianese" and theological terms. Stick to language young people will understand. Always remember: this week and all the discussion will mean nothing to them if they don't understand what you are saying.

This week will prepare you for next week. **Begin your planning now!**

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 15.** After the Global Youth Day event, on the first night of your meetings, you may want to take some time to discuss or talk about the events that you just participated in.

**It is our
responsibility
to instill in young
people the value
of giving
back to their
community.**

GLOBALYOUTHDAY.ORG

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BE THE SERMON

MARCH 21 / 2015

24 HOUR LIVE COVERAGE
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