

Adult
Sabbath School
Bible Study Guide
Jan | Feb | Mar 2025

GOD'S LOVE AND JUSTICE



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Our Fair and Loving God

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Editorial Office: 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600

Come visit us at our website: <http://www.adultbiblestudyguide.org>.

Printing and Circulation Office: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1350 N. Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687-3193

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Introduction



Our Fair and Loving God

God is love. So we read in 1 John 4:8 and 16. The whole Bible tells us that God is love. God's love is the beginning of the Christian faith. Love is who God is. Love is part of everything we believe and do. If we believe that God's love must be earned, we may think that God doesn't love us because we are filled with sin and are not worthy. This thinking is a mistake.

What we believe and how we live our faith depend on our understanding of God's love. So, we must ask the question: What is love? If you ask ten people to tell you what love is, you may get ten different answers. Sad to say, many Christians have false ideas and beliefs about love, too.

Christians offer different answers to these questions:

- "Does God's love only give but never get?"
- "Is God's love only about dying on the cross?"
- "Is God also delighted and happy with humans?"
- "Does God really care about people?"
- "Can people reject God's love or lose it?"
- "Can God feel angry if He is loving?"
- "How are love and being fair connected?"
- "If God is love, why is there evil in this life and so much of it?"
- "Can humans love the way God loves?" "If so, what would that love look the same as?"

The answers to some of these questions may seem easy. But some of the answers don't agree with what the Bible teaches about God's love.

We won't answer all these questions at one time. We will look at them and other questions during our study this quarter. We will see that God's love is more important than we think. God's love in the Bible is far better and more powerful than the popular ideas about love today. In the coming weeks, we will look more closely at some of the most beautiful and important parts of God's love in the Bible.

As we continue our study, we will see how God is both loving and fair. The Bible shows that these two things about God can't be separated. The God of the Bible is fair. He loves fair decisions (Isaiah 61:8). Because God is love, He cares about the suffering on this earth. He feels pity for people who are hurt and in pain. God feels their pain in His heart. Evil causes people and God this pain. God suffers more than anyone else from the evil that sin causes.

Again and again, the Bible shows us that God feels pain because of the evil and suffering on this earth. God loves each person so much. We can see that God deeply loves us when Jesus said, " 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the prophets [God's special messengers] and kill with stones those men God sent to you. Many times I wanted to help your people! I wanted to gather [collect] them together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. But you did not let me' " (Matthew 23:37, ICB).

The God of the Bible is love. The Bible shows us that God often gets His heart broken. He feels sad. He feels rejected. The whole story of the Bible is about everything God did, and is doing now, to fill every part and corner of heaven and earth with love. This story, and so much more, is the topic for this quarter's Bible study guide.

The whole story of the Bible is about everything God did, and is doing now, to fill every part and corner of heaven and earth with love.

John C. Peckham is an editor for the Adventist Review. John also is a professor of the Bible and Christian thinking at Andrews University.

God Loves Freely



SABBATH—DECEMBER 28

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Exodus 33:15–22; Hosea 14:1–4; Revelation 4:11; Psalm 33:6; Matthew 22:1–14; John 10:17, 18.

MEMORY VERSE: “The Lord says, ‘I will forgive them for leaving me. I will love them freely [with no limits]. I am not angry with them anymore’ ” (Hosea 14:4, ICB).



After Jesus woke up from the dead, He “said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these other men love me?’ ”

THREE TIMES PETER said that he didn’t know Jesus. Before Jesus died, He warned Peter that he would say he didn’t know Him (Matthew 26:34). After Jesus woke up from the dead, He “said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these other men love me?’ Peter answered, ‘Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Take care of my lambs.’ Again Jesus said to him, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ Peter answered, ‘Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.’ Then Jesus said, ‘Take care of my sheep.’ A third time Jesus said, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was sad because Jesus asked him three times, ‘Do you love me?’ He said, ‘Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Take care of my sheep’ ” (John 21:15–17, ERV). Jesus asked Peter to serve Him three times. Three was the number of times that Peter said he didn’t know Jesus. So, Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him three times because Jesus wanted to show His other followers that He accepted Peter again.

The question that Jesus asked Peter is the same question that God asks each of us: “Do you love Me?”

Everything depends on our answer to that question.

**GOD LOVES US MORE THAN WE CAN HOPE FOR
(Exodus 33:15–22)**

God asks us, “Do you love Me?” He also freely loves each person. God freely loves you, me, and every other person more than we could imagine in our minds. We can read Bible history to understand that God loves us very much.

Read Exodus 33:15–22 and think about the story that these verses talk about. What do these verses show us about God’s plan for our lives and His love for us? How does verse 19 help us answer these questions in a special way?

Not long after God saved His people from slavery in Egypt, the Israelites worshiped a gold cow. When Moses came down the mountain after talking with God, Moses saw the people worshiping the gold cow. So, Moses threw down the pieces of stone that God wrote the Ten Commandments on. The stone broke in pieces. The people lost the special blessings that God gave them. But God chose to continue to be in a special relationship with Israel anyway.

Many people don’t understand what Exodus 33:19 means: “Then the Lord answered, ‘I will show my love and mercy to anyone I want to. So I will cause my perfect goodness [love and mercy] to pass by in front of you, and I will speak my name, YAHWEH, so that you can hear it’ ” (Exodus 33:19, ERV). Often people think this verse means that God chooses to show mercy to some people, but not other people. Many popular preachers teach this false idea. They say that God chooses some people to be saved and some to be lost. But God doesn’t work that way.

So, then, what is God really saying in Exodus 33:19? God announces that He can give mercy and love freely to people who didn’t do anything to earn those gifts. God will give His love and mercy to Israel even after they worship the gold cow.

This story is one of many stories that shows us that God does more for us than we could hope for or expect. God’s mercy is good news for us all, right?

In what ways has God continued to show His love to you far more than you expected or hoped for?



Moses threw down the pieces of stone that God wrote the Ten Commandments on.

LOVING SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T LOVE YOU BACK (Hosea 14:1–4)



The Bible tells us many times that God is the same as a husband who is married to a cheating wife.

The story about Hosea shows us God's love for sinners. Hosea was God's special messenger. God commanded Hosea to " 'marry a woman who has sex with anyone she wants. Have children with her. Do this [have children] because the people of the land are like [the same as] that kind [type] of wife. They have not been faithful [loyal] to me' " (Hosea 1:2, NIV). Hosea and his cheating wife were living object lessons. They showed God's love for His people when God's people cheated on Him with other gods. The story about Hosea and his wife shows how God gives His love to people who are not worthy of that love.

The Israelites sin against God again and again. The Bible tells us many times that God is the same as a husband who is married to a cheating wife. God loved His people with perfect love. God was loyal to His people. But Israel did not love God back. Israel served and worshiped other gods. God's people broke their relationship with Him and hurt God very much. At times, their relationship with God looked as if it couldn't be repaired.

Read Hosea 14:1–4. What do these verses show us about God's love for His people?

After God's people sin against Him again, God announces: " 'I will forgive them for leaving me. I will love them freely [with no limits]' " (Hosea 14:4, ICB). The word "freely" comes from the word "nedabah" in the Hebrew language. "Nedabah" means something that a person offers or gives because he wants to. Bible writers use this same word to talk about the offerings that people chose to give freely to God in worship.

In the book of Hosea, God shows His love and loyalty to His people. Israel "cheated" on God with other "lovers." Again and again, Israel broke their relationship with God. But God freely chose to love His people. The people weren't worthy of God's love. The people rejected God's love again and again. But God continued to give His love to His people. No one forced God to love them.

How does the word picture of God as a husband who is cheated on help you see God in a different way? How does this word picture change the way you understand your relationship with God?

LOVE FREELY GIVEN (Revelation 4:11)

God continued to love Israel after Israel sinned against Him again and again. In the same way, God continues to love us after we sin. We aren't worthy of God's love. We also can't earn God's love. God doesn't **need** us. The God of the Bible doesn't need anything (Acts 17:25). God loves you, me, and everyone else because He wants to love us.

Compare Revelation 4:11 and Psalm 33:6. What do these verses tell us about God's freedom?

God made the skies and this earth. So, God is worthy of getting all glory, honor, and praise. God didn't **need** to make this earth or any other planet. Before God made this earth, He already enjoyed a love relationship with His Son, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

Read John 17:24. What does this verse tell us about God's love before He made the earth?

God didn't need to make people so that He could have something to love. God chose to make our planet because He wanted to be close to us and share His love with us.

God also continues to love us after we sin against Him. After Adam and Eve sinned, they were not good enough for God's love anymore. Adam and Eve earned death, not life. But God didn't punish them with death right away. God made a special plan to help save sinners and bring them back to Himself with love. God's saving plan includes us, too.

God continues to love sinners. What does this choice tell us about God's mercy and love? How should this important Bible truth cause us to love God more?



God chose to make our planet because He wanted to be close to us and share His love with us.

GOD INVITES MANY PEOPLE, BUT FEW PEOPLE ACCEPT HIS INVITATION (Matthew 22:1–14)

As we saw, God loves people because He wants to love them. God invites people to love Him back, too. God gives us freedom to choose to accept or reject His love. We see this idea in Jesus' picture story about the wedding feast.

Read the picture story in Matthew 22:1–14. What is the meaning of this picture story?



God invites everyone
to the wedding feast.

Jesus tells a picture story about a wedding feast. In the story, a king's son is about to get married. The king sends out his servants to go get the guests who were invited to the wedding. But the guests do not want to come to the wedding (Matthew 22:2, 3). The king sends more servants to the guests to invite them to the feast. But the guests pay no attention to the invitation. Worse, the guests grab the king's servants and kill them (Matthew 22:4–6).

Later, the king punishes the guests who kill some of his servants. Then the king tells the rest of his servants, “ ‘The wedding feast is ready. I invited those people, but they were not good enough [worthy] to come to my feast. So go to the street corners and invite everyone you see. Tell them to come to my feast’ ” (Matthew 22:8, 9, ERV). Jesus then talks about a man who comes to the feast without wearing the proper wedding clothes. The king orders some of his servants to throw the man out into the dark. This part of the picture story shows us that the guests must get wedding clothes from the king before they may come to the wedding feast. Jesus ends the picture story with these strange but powerful words, “ ‘Yes, many people are invited. But only a few [people] are chosen’ ” (Matthew 22:14, ERV).

What do these words mean? The “chosen” are the people who accept God's invitation.

God invites **everyone** to the wedding feast. Any one of us can refuse God's love. We must be free to love. God will never force His love on anyone. Sad to say, we can reject having a loving relationship with God.

God is getting wonderful things ready for the ones who love Him. These things are more wonderful than anything we can imagine in our minds.

Have you accepted God's wedding invitation? How does your life show you are wearing the wedding clothes?

JESUS WAS NAILED TO THE CROSS FOR US (John 10:17, 18)

God invites everyone to enter into a love relationship with Him. First, we must freely accept His invitation if we want to enjoy everything He plans for us in heaven. As we saw yesterday, the king invited many guests to the wedding feast. But not everyone was willing to come (Matthew 22:3).

Shortly before Jesus went to the cross, He said with a sad heart: “ ‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the men who speak for God and throw stones at those [messengers from God] who were sent to you. How many times I wanted to gather [bring together] your children around Me, as a chicken gathers her young ones under her wings. But you would not let Me’ ” (Matthew 23:37, NLT). Jesus wanted to save His people. But the people didn’t want to be saved.

Jesus went to the cross for His people anyway. Jesus died for them and for us. We should die because of our sin. But God Himself (in Jesus) died for our sin so that we may live. God made a way to repair the broken relationship between Himself and sinners. In the meantime, God continues to give us His love. But God doesn’t need to love us. He loves us because He wants to.

Read John 10:17, 18. Compare these verses with Galatians 2:20. What’s the message to us in these verses?

God showed His love for us on the cross. Jesus chose to die for us because He wanted to. No one forced Jesus to give up His life for us. Jesus gave His life to help us without asking us to do something first. His choice was part of God’s saving plan. God the Father and Jesus the Son agreed to this plan before they made the skies and the earth.

“God didn’t make the plan to save us after Adam sinned. God’s saving plan was ‘the mystery hidden for a very long time.’ Romans 16:25 [NLT]. God’s saving plan showed the important rules that were part of God’s government forever. From the beginning, God and Jesus knew that Satan would sin and cause humans to sin, too. Sin was not part of God’s plan for us. But God saw that sin would happen. So, God decided to solve the sin problem. God loved us so much that He made an agreement with His only Son to save us. God made this plan ‘so that everyone who believes in him would not be lost but have eternal [everlasting] life.’ John 3:16 [ERV].”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 22, adapted.



“ ‘How many times I wanted to gather [bring together] your children around Me, as a chicken gathers her young ones under her wings.’ ”

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “ ‘To Meet the Bridegroom,’ ” pages 405–421, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*.

“People misunderstand God. This misunderstanding is the same as a dark cloud covering the earth. Men are losing their knowledge about God’s love. People misunderstand God’s love. At this time, we must announce a message from God. This powerful message will save lives. We must help people understand God’s love, mercy, glory, and truth.

“Isaiah talked about this work when he announced, ‘Jerusalem, you have good news to tell. Go up on a high mountain. Jerusalem, you have good news to tell. Shout out loud the good news. Shout it out and don’t be afraid. Say to the towns of Judah, “Here is your God.” Look, the Lord God is coming with power. He will use his power to rule [govern] all the people. Look, he will bring reward for his people. He will have their payment [reward] with him.’ Isaiah 40:9, 10 [ICB].

“The people who wait for Jesus to come must tell people, ‘Look at your God.’ We must announce God’s final message to all the people on the earth. This message will show everyone God’s love and mercy. At the same time, God’s followers must show His glory in their lives. They must show everyone else that God’s mercy changed their lives.

“The Bible truth about Jesus must cause us to do good things for other people. We must share Bible truth, and we must do holy works.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pages 415, 416, adapted.



“The people who wait for Jesus to come must tell people, ‘Look at your God.’ ”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ Worse than the thought that there is no God is the thought that God hates us. What if God hated us? How would we behave?
- ❷ Why do you think so many people don’t know who God is or understand about His love? How can you help people to better understand God’s love and mercy?
- ❸ What message do we need to share today about God’s love? How can you explain this message to someone who doesn’t know God or His love? What proof can you show them to convince them about His wonderful love?
- ❹ What things can we do to show God’s love to the people around us?

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS WITH NORTH KOREANS

Seventh-day Adventists from South Korea care about their brothers and sisters in the North. They want them to accept Jesus and be saved. Jesus said, “ ‘This good news about the kingdom will be told in all the world [everywhere on earth]. The people in all countries must know about it. And then the end will come’ ” (Matthew 24:14, WE). Today, many Adventists in South Korea are praying that God will help them to share the Good News about Jesus in North Korea.

The Adventist Church's work started in the North, in 1904, and then moved to the South. Today, the church has 235,000 members living among 52 million people in South Korea. But no one knows for sure if any Adventists live in the North. 26 million people live in North Korea. Beom Seok Oh is a leader for the Adventist Church. His job includes sharing the Good News about Jesus with people in North Korea. Beom says that God has a people in North Korea. He knows about a North Korean woman who drank a tea made from a special Chinese sauce. The tea made her very sick with a fever. The woman drank the tea every Sabbath morning, so that her boss would let her stay home instead of going to work on the Sabbath. The woman was thrown into jail. She sneaked a Bible into the prison and hid it in a hole in the ground. Then the woman dug up the Bible later so she could read it when no one watched her. Later, the woman escaped to South Korea so that she could worship God freely. Church leaders in South Korea are getting ready for the time when God will let them work in North Korea. Then the church leaders in South Korea will send Bible workers to the North.

Until then, South Korean Adventists take care of people who escape from North Korea. One church leader and his wife from South Korea often visited a man who escaped from North Korea. The man and his wife helped the North Korean man. They cleaned his apartment, cooked his meals, and helped him to become a citizen. After six months, the North Korean man accepted Jesus. Chang-Seop Lee is the pastor of the Adventist church where the church leader and his wife worship.

Another man who escaped from North Korea was worried about his wife and children in the North. The man was so upset, he couldn't sleep at night. Pastor Lee prayed with him. The man accepted Jesus. This story caused Pastor Lee to help as many people from the North as he can.

Pastor Lee says, “Maybe we can't go to North Korea to share the Good News now. But we can share the Good News with everyone from North Korea whom we meet today.”

Pray for North Korea. Your 13th Sabbath Offering on March 29. Your gift will help us share the Good News in Korea.

INSIDE
Story
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



The woman sneaked a Bible into the prison and hid it in a hole in the ground.



Chang-Seop Lee

God's Promise to Love Us



SABBATH—JANUARY 4

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Psalm 33:5; Deuteronomy 7:6–9; Hosea 9:15; 1 John 4:7–20.

MEMORY VERSE: “Jesus answered, ‘All who love me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them. My Father and I will come to them and live with them’ ” (John 14:23, ERV).



“‘The Father loves you. He loves you because you love Me and believe that I came from the Father’ ” (John 16:27, NLV).

NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS use different words from the Greek language to talk about “love.” Two of these words are “**agape**” and “**phileo**.” Many people believe that the Greek word “**agape**” talks about a love that comes only from God. People also believe that “**phileo**” means to love in a way that isn’t as powerful as “**agape**.” They also think that “**agape**” is something that God can give but never get from humans.

All of these ideas are false. When we study the Bible carefully, we see that “**agape**” can mean both God’s love and human love. Bible writers also use the word “**agapao**.” “**Agapao**” means “to love.” “**Agapao**” can sometimes be used to talk about loving the wrong things (2 Timothy 4:10, John 12:43). Many times New Testament writers use words other than “**agape**” or “**agapao**” to mean God’s love. Jesus said, “ ‘The Father loves you. He loves you because you love Me and believe that I came from the Father’ ” (John 16:27, NLV). In this verse, the word for “love” in the Greek language is “**phileo**.” As we see, John uses this word to talk about both God’s love and human love.

The Bible also teaches that God’s love is not one-way. God wants to be in a love relationship with us. God cares about how we think and feel about Him. God loves us and wants us to love Him back.

GOD'S EVERLASTING LOVE (Psalm 33:5)

The Bible tells us that God loves everyone. The most famous verse in the Bible announces this truth: “ ‘For [yes] God loved the world [the people who live and die on this planet] so much that he gave his only Son. God gave his Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal [everlasting] life’ ” (John 3:16, ICB).

Read Psalm 33:5 and Psalm 145:9. What do these verses teach us about God's love and mercy?

Some people may think that no one can love them. Or they may think that God loves everyone else, but not them. But the Bible announces that God loves everyone. Because God loves everyone, He also wants everyone to be saved.

Read 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4; and Ezekiel 33:11. What do these verses teach us about how much God wants to save everyone?

The verse after John 3:16 adds: “ ‘God did not send his Son into the world [to this earth] to judge the world [people]. He sent him to save the world’ ” (John 3:17, WE). God wants every person to accept His love and be saved. But the Lord won't force His love on anyone. People are free to accept or reject His love.

What happens when someone rejects God's love? Does God stop loving this person? Of course not. God continues to love the ones who reject His love. In Jeremiah 31:3, God announces to His people: “ ‘I love you people with a love that continues forever’ ” (ERV). Elsewhere, the Bible teaches this same idea (to read an example, look at Psalm 136). God's love never runs out. His love is everlasting. We have trouble understanding this idea because we often have a hard time loving other people, don't we?

What if we knew God's love for ourselves? How would this love change how we behave each day? How would this love change how we love other people?

God loves everyone. God loves bad people, too. What should God's love for these awful people teach us about how we should love them?



“God gave his Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal [everlasting] life” (John 3:16, ICB).

GOD'S PROMISE TO LOVE US (Deuteronomy 7:6–9)

God showed us the strongest example of His love when Jesus died for us on the cross.

The Bible often uses word pictures about families to show God's special love relationship with us. These word pictures include the love between a husband and wife or the love of a mother for her child. These word pictures are used to show the special relationship between God and His chosen people. God promises to love His people. He also expects His people to accept His love and to love Him (and each other) back.

Read Deuteronomy 7:6–9. What do these verses teach us about the relationship between God's love and His promises?

Deuteronomy 7:9 talks about a special love relationship that God has with His chosen people. The relationship depends on their loyalty. If they obey God, God will bless them. God won't stop loving them if they sin. But the people can break their relationship with God if they reject His love and His law.

In Deuteronomy 7:9, the word written as "love" (ERV) or "mercy" (KJV) comes from the word "**hesed**" in the Hebrew language. "**Hesed**" shows us the promise of God's love and so much more. Bible writers often use "**hesed**" to tell us that God's mercy and love are very powerful and wonderful. "**Hesed**" also means the loyal love that someone shows another person in a relationship. When a person has "**hesed**" love in his heart, he can start a love relationship with someone and expect that this person will love him back.

God's "**hesed**" shows that His mercy continues forever. We can depend on God's promise of mercy and love. At the same time, we must obey God and do our part in the love relationship with Him (read 2 Samuel 22:26; 1 Kings 8:23; Psalm 25:10; Psalm 32:10; 2 Chronicles 6:14).

God's love for us is the beginning of all love relationships we have with others. We can never match God's love. God gave us life. God in Jesus gave Himself to us. Jesus said, " 'The strongest love anyone can have is this. He will die to save his friends' " (John 15:13, WE). For sure, God showed us the strongest example of His love when Jesus died for us on the cross (Philippians 2:8).

What are ways you can keep God's love always in your thoughts? Why is it important to do so?

**A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD DEPENDS
ON OUR CHOICE (Hosea 9:15)**

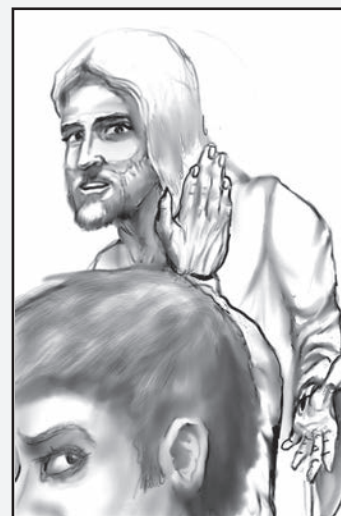
God invites every person to have a personal love relationship with Him (read Matthew 22:1–14). If we want to have a relationship with God, we must love and obey Him (read Matthew 22:37–39). Everything depends on our choice to accept or reject God’s love. God wants to bless us in our relationship with Him. So, we must accept His love to get the blessings He promises us.

Read Hosea 9:15; Jeremiah 16:5; Romans 11:22; and Jude 1:21. What do these verses teach us about God’s promised blessings? Can we reject His blessings or lose them? Explain.

If we want to enjoy the blessings that God promises, we must choose to love and obey Him. But we must not think that God stops loving anyone. As we saw already, God’s love is everlasting. This Bible truth helps us to understand Hosea 9:15 better. In this verse, God says about His people, “ ‘I will not love them anymore’ ” (ERV). But we must remember that later in the same book God announces about His people, “ ‘I will love them freely [without limits]. I am not angry with them anymore’ ” (Hosea 14:4, ICB). So, Hosea 9:15 can’t mean that God completely stops loving His people. The verse must be talking about some blessing of God’s love that the people lost because they didn’t obey Him. How we answer God’s love is important for our relationship with Him to continue.

“ ‘He who knows my commands and obeys them is the one who loves me. And my Father will love him who loves me. I will love him and will show myself to him’ ” (John 14:21, ICB). In the same way, Jesus announces to His followers, “ ‘The Father loves you. He loves you because you love Me and believe that I came from the Father’ ” (John 16:27, NLV).

These verses teach us that getting the blessings from a saving relationship with God depends on our accepting His love. (We also must share that love with other people, too.) Again, God’s love for us does not end if we reject Him. We can’t stop the sun from shining or from giving us its light. In the same way, we can’t do anything to stop God’s everlasting love. But we can reject a relationship with God. When we do, we cut ourselves off from the blessings this relationship offers, including the promise of everlasting life.



When we reject a relationship with God, we cut ourselves off from the blessings this relationship offers, including the promise of everlasting life.

MERCY LOST OR REJECTED (1 John 4:7–20)

God's love is everlasting. We can't earn God's love. But we can reject it. God gives us a choice: we may accept or reject His love. God gives us this freedom to choose because He loves us with His perfect, everlasting love **before we do anything** (Jeremiah 31:3). Our love for God is our answer to everything He gives us before we ask for it.

Read the picture story in 1 John 4:7–20. Look carefully at verses 7 and 19. What does the picture story tell us about God's love?



The forgiven servant had his fellow servant thrown into prison.

God's love always comes first. If God didn't first love us, we couldn't love Him back. God made us to love and to be loved. God is the beginning of all love. But we have the choice to accept God's love and then show that love in our lives. We see this Bible truth in Jesus' picture story about the servant who won't forgive (read Matthew 18:23–35).

In the picture story, we see that the servant can't repay the money he owed the master. In Matthew 18, the servant owed his master 10,000 talents. One talent was the same as about 6,000 denarii or Roman coins. One denarius was the pay that a man got for one day of work (compare with Matthew 20:2). A worker would need to work 6,000 days to earn one talent. Let's say that a worker worked for 300 days a year. Then he would earn 300 denarii in one year. So, he would need to work about 20 years to repay one talent, because one talent was worth 6,000 denarii ($6,000/300 = 20$). To earn 10,000 talents, then, the worker would need to work for 200,000 years! In short, the picture story shows that the servant **never** can repay the money he owed the master. But the master felt love and mercy for his servant. So, the master forgave him.

But the forgiven servant refused to forgive the small amount of money (100 denarii) that one of his fellow servants owed him. The forgiven servant had his fellow servant thrown into prison. Then the master got angry and removed His gift of mercy and forgiveness. God's mercy and love don't run out or end. But we can finally reject and lose the blessings of God's love and mercy.

What has God forgiven you for? How much did this forgiveness cost Jesus? What should this price tell you about forgiving other people?

**GIVING TO OTHER PEOPLE
BECAUSE GOD GIVES TO US (John 15:12)**

As we saw yesterday, the servant couldn't pay his master the money he owed. In the same way, we can't pay God for everything He did and does for us. "God shows his love for us in this way: Christ died to save us while we were bad people [sinners]" (Romans 5:8, WE). God's love is so amazing! As 1 John 3:1 says, "The Father has loved us so much! He loved us so much that we are called [named] children of God" (ICB).

What we can and should do is show God's love to other people as much as we can. God shows us so much love and forgiveness. So, how much more should we love and forgive other people? Remember, the servant lost his master's mercy and forgiveness because he didn't show mercy and forgiveness to his fellow servant. If we love God, we will show His love to other people.

Read John 15:12; 1 John 3:16; and 1 John 4:7–12. What do these verses teach us about the relationship between God's love, our love for God, and our love for people?

Jesus told His followers, " 'You are my friends if you do what I command you' " (John 15:14, ICB). What did Jesus command them to do? Jesus commanded them (and us) to love other people as He loved them. In this verse and in other verses, the Lord commands us to love God and to love each other.

In short, we should understand that God forgave us for something we can't pay Him back for. So, we should love and praise God and live with love and mercy in our hearts for other people. As Luke 7:47 teaches, the one who gets a lot of forgiveness also loves a lot. But " 'people who are forgiven only a little will love only a little' " (ERV). Who among us doesn't know how much God forgives us?

If we love God, we must love other people, too. We should want to share the message about God's love with people in words and in actions. We should help people in their daily lives here and now. We also should seek to lead people to the One who offers them everlasting life in a new heaven and on a new earth.

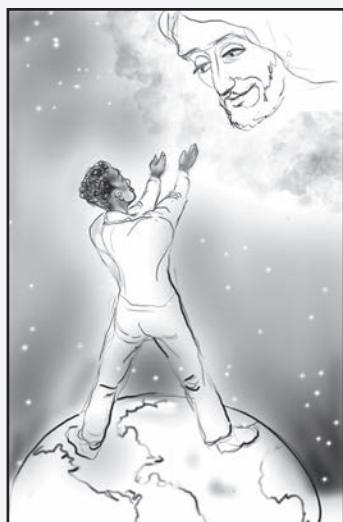
What are some things that you can do today and in the coming days to show God's love to people? What can you do to invite them to enjoy the promise of everlasting life?



**As Luke 7:47 teaches,
the one who gets a lot
of forgiveness
also loves a lot.**

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “The Privilege of Prayer,” pages 93–104, in *Steps to Christ*.

“Tell God about all your needs, your joys, your sorrows, your troubles, and your fears. God will not grow tired of listening to you. God knows the number of hairs on your head. So, He knows everything you need. ‘The Lord is full of [filled with] loving-kindness [mercy] and pity.’ James 5:11 [NLV]. Our sorrows touch God’s heart of love. When we tell our sorrows to God, His heart is touched, too. Tell everything to God that troubles your mind. Nothing is too big for God to solve. God keeps life going on all the planets. He is the King over all heaven and earth. Nothing that makes us happy or at peace is too small for Him to care about. He knows everything that happens to us. He can fix any problem. Our Father in heaven is interested in everything that happens to us. He is interested in the things that upset us and the things that give us joy. He is interested in every prayer of faith that we say. ‘He heals those who have broken hearts. He takes care of their wounds.’ Psalm 147:3 [NirV]. The relationship between God and every one of us is personal and deep. God loves you and watches over you as if you were the only person on the earth who needed His love and care. He loves you as if He gave His Beloved Son to die only for you and no one else.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 100, adapted.



God loves you and watches over you as if you were the only person on the earth who needed His love and care.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Think about this thought from the quote above: “God loves you and watches over you as if you were the only person on the earth who needed His love and care. He loves you as if He gave His Beloved Son to die only for you and no one else.” How does this thought give you hope? How should you live your life, knowing how much God cares for you?
- ② How does this week’s lesson help you to understand Psalm 103:17, 18 better? What does this lesson show you about God’s everlasting love? In what ways is His love everlasting? At the same time, how do the blessings of a relationship with God depend on our choice to accept His love?
- ③ How does your understanding of God’s everlasting love strengthen your relationship with God and people?

DIRT, NOT CORN

Melvin wasn't sure what to believe: Did God make man from dirt or from corn? The Bible taught that "the Lord God took dust from the ground and formed [made] man from it. The Lord breathed the breath of life into the man's nose. And the man became a living person" (Genesis 2:7, ICB). Melvin was from a group of people named the Cabécar. There are about 17,000 Cabécar in Costa Rica. The Cabécar taught Melvin that Sibú made humans from corn. Sibú is the word for "God" in the Cabécar language.

Growing up, Melvin always thought that the Sibú of the Cabécar people was the same as the Sibú of the Bible. Then Melvin studied the Bible with a Seventh-day Adventist. Melvin understood that the Bible taught very different ideas about God than he learned from his people. Melvin decided to accept what the Bible taught about Sibú. Melvin was baptized with his parents and two other family members.

A year later, Melvin's mother died at the age of 40.

Melvin was 22 at the time. He believed the Bible teaching about what happens when you die: a person sleeps until Jesus comes back. But the Cabécar people believed that Melvin's mother was alive. Worse, she would be lost in the dark forever if her family didn't help lead her into the next life in a special funeral ceremony that continued for four days. Melvin's family also needed to kill two pigs and three chickens and feed them to the guests who came to the funeral. If Melvin's family refused to kill the animals, everyone would think they were selfish. Melvin's grandparents and other family members wanted Melvin and his family to follow the Cabécar teachings. But Melvin and his family decided to follow the Bible. An Adventist pastor helped them to find a place to bury his mother outside of Cabécar land.

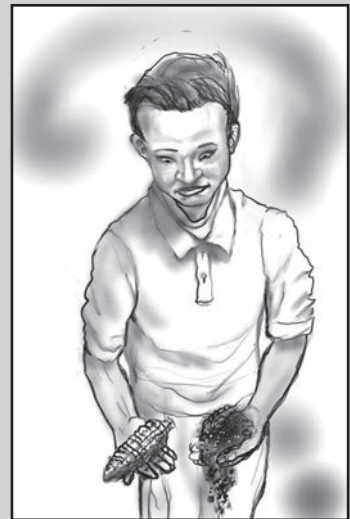
At this time, Melvin chose to become a pastor. After his mother died, Melvin decided to spend the rest of his life telling the Cabécar about the real Sibú in the Bible. Melvin wanted to help his people know Bible truth about the Sibú who made humans from dirt, not corn. Melvin also wanted his people to know that they didn't need to kill animals to get everlasting life.

Today, Melvin Madriz is a 24-year-old student at an Adventist university in Costa Rica. There, Melvin studies to be a pastor. Melvin will be the Adventist Church's first Cabécar pastor. Only about 30 Cabécar people are Adventist.

Melvin says, "I believe only in Sibú from the Bible."

Pray for the Cabécar people to learn about the God of the Bible and for all people worldwide who don't know about Jesus. Thank you for your offerings that help Bible workers share the Good News with these people groups.

INSIDE
Story
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



Melvin wasn't sure what to believe: Did God make man from dirt or from corn?



Melvin Madriz

Making God Happy



SABBATH—JANUARY 11

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Luke 15:11–32; Zephaniah 3:17; Ephesians 5:25–28; Isaiah 43:4; Romans 8:1; Mark 9:17–29.

MEMORY VERSE: “The Lord your God is with you, a Powerful One Who wins the battle. He will have much joy over you. With His love He will give you new life. He will have joy over you with loud singing” (Zephaniah 3:17, NLV).

IMAGINE in your mind this scene: On Father's Day, a five-year-old child comes to his dad with a gift wrapped in a messy way. The boy is very excited as he gives the gift to his dad.

Imagine the father says, “Son, I don't like your gift. You can't give me anything that will please me. Anything you can give me, I can get for myself. Anything you give to me was bought with my money or made from materials that I paid for. So, keep your gift. I don't need it or want it. But I love you anyway.”

Ouch!

What do you think about this father's words? Maybe the words “mean,” “nasty,” or “cold” come to your mind. Is this the way God feels about us and our gifts? Can we really make God happy? Yes, the good news is that we can make God happy! We may be sinners who want to do evil. But God doesn't look on us, or the gifts we bring Him, in the way that the father in the story looked on his five-year-old son. So, if we can make God happy, then how do we do that? We need Jesus' help. We can't please God on our own. But with Jesus' help we can be pleasing to God, for sure.



The boy is very excited as he gives the gift to his dad.

**MORE VALUABLE THAN YOU CAN IMAGINE
(Luke 15:11–32)**

As we saw in last week's lesson, God loves everyone, including the worst sinner. God values people more than we can possibly imagine in our minds. But God hates sin. God loves us and knows what sin does to us.

Read the picture story in Luke 15:11–32. What does this story about the lost son teach us about God's mercy and love? What warning does this story give to church members who stay "at home" (in the church), as the older son does?

Jesus tells a picture story about a younger son who asks his father to give him the gift of money that he will get when his father dies. When the young man asks for this gift before his father dies, he rejects his father and his family. The lost son then goes on to spend all his money until he is poor and hungry. The lost son feels jealous of the pigs because they have more to eat than he does. The son knows that the servants in his father's house have more than enough food. So, the son decides to go back home in hopes of becoming a servant.

What happens next in the picture story is powerful. Some fathers would not accept this son when he came home. They may say, "You took the money I gave you and cut yourself off from my family. You no longer have a home here." We would understand completely if a father said these words to a lost son who came back home after doing the awful things he did. In the eyes of some parents, the son went too far to be accepted back home as a son anymore.

But in the picture story, the father (who is a word picture for God) doesn't say these words. Jesus says, " 'The son got up and went to his father. While he was yet a long way off, his father saw him. The father was full of [filled with] loving-pity for him. He ran and threw his arms around him and kissed him' " (Luke 15:20, NLV). In those days, the master of the house didn't run out of his house to meet anyone. But the father's heart was filled with so much love and mercy. So, he ran out to meet his son. More important, the father welcomed his son back into the family again. The father held a big party to celebrate His son's coming home. This celebration shows the love and mercy God feels for each person who leaves Him and then comes back to Him. This story shows us an amazing and wonderful picture of God!



" 'He ran and threw his arms around him and kissed him' " (Luke 15:20, NLV).

REJOICING WITH A HAPPY HEART (Zephaniah 3:17)

Every person who ever lived is very valuable to God. That's why God rejoices when one person is saved.

Read Zephaniah 3:17. How does this verse help us better understand the picture story of the lost son (Luke 15:11–32)?

Zephaniah 3:17 shows us that God rejoices when His people are saved. In this single verse, Zephaniah uses almost every word for “joy” and “delight” in the Hebrew language. It's as if no one word by itself can show us God's full delight on the day when one person is saved.

Look at where God is, as this verse tells us. God is “with” His people. In the same way, when the father in the picture story saw his son far off, he ran to him. When God is among His people, His people can come back to Him.

Isaiah 62:4 uses the word picture of marriage to teach the same idea about God. In Isaiah 62:4, God's people will be named “The People God Loves” (ERV). This name means that God delights in His people. God will name the land “God's Bride” (ERV), which means “married.” Why does God name the land “God's Bride”? Because, the verse says, “the Lord loves you. And your land will belong to him as a bride belongs to her husband” (ICB). God will feel the most joy for the time when He gets to be with His people forever. Then He will rejoice over us as the father rejoiced over his lost son in Jesus' picture story in Luke 15:11–32.



Why does God name the land “God's Bride”? Because, the verse says, “the Lord loves you. And your land will belong to him as a bride belongs to her husband” (ICB).

Read Ephesians 5:25–28. What do these verses say about the love God asks us to show in marriage?

These verses tell husbands to love their wives. “Husbands, love your wives. You must love them as Christ [Jesus] loved the church” (Ephesians 5:25, NLV). And how did Jesus show His love for His church? “He gave His life for it” (verse 25, NLV). So, “husbands should love their wives in the same way. They should love their wives as they love their own bodies” (verse 28, ICB). These verses help us to understand the love that a husband should have for his wife. A husband's love should not be selfish. He must be willing to give up whatever is necessary to love and protect her. In the same way, these verses show us that Jesus loves His people, the church, as part of Himself.

PLEASING GOD? (Isaiah 43:4)

Why does a mighty God feel so much delight for the people who live on our small planet? Why do we matter so much to an all-powerful God who doesn't need anything? To help us answer these questions, we can break them down into two new questions. First, what delights God? Second, how can people, who are sinners, delight Him? We shall answer the first of these two new questions today. Tomorrow, we shall look at the other question: Why do we matter to God?

Read Isaiah 43:4; Psalm 149:4; and Proverbs 15:8, 9. What do these verses tell us about God and the delight He feels for His people?

As we saw yesterday, God can be happy with people because He loves them. He cares about them and wants the best for them.

At the same time, God is not happy when His people do evil. Proverbs 15:8, 9 teaches that God is happy with the prayers of the ones who obey Him. But God is not happy with the offerings and the lives of people who break His law. These verses show us that God isn't happy with evil. The verses also show us that God delights in good and loving people. In these verses, we also see the connection between God's delight and His love. We see this same idea all through the Bible, too.

Psalm 146:8 says, "The Lord loves those who are right [forgiven and accepted with God] and good [holy]" (NLV). 2 Corinthians 9:7 adds, "God loves those [people] who are happy to give" (ERV). Notice what these verses **don't** say. The verses don't say that God loves **only** people who are good or holy, and no one else. The verses don't say that God loves **only** the people who are happy to give. God loves everyone. At the same time, these verses must mean that God loves holy people and people who are happy to give in some special way. What we saw in Proverbs 15:8, 9 gives us a hint: God loves these people and others who love Him because He is happy with them.

God cares for us so very much. This Bible truth tells us that heaven and earth must be closely connected. What hope does this amazing thought give you? How can this thought fill you with hope when you are going through a very hard time?



Proverbs 15:8, 9 teaches that God is happy with the prayers of the ones who obey Him.

LIVING STONES (Romans 8:1)

We are sinners. So, how can a holy God accept us?

Read Romans 8:1 and Romans 5:8. What do these verses teach us about God?

God offers us His mercy before we accept it. Before we say or do anything, God gives us the choice to accept or reject His love. As Romans 5:8 puts it, “God shows his love for us in this way: Christ died to save us while we were bad people [sinners]” (WE; compare with Jeremiah 31:3). When we have faith in Jesus’ saving power, God will accept us and be happy with us.

Read 1 Peter 2:4–6 and compare it with Hebrews 11:6. What do these verses tell us about how we may make God happy?



“I pray that God will work through [with] Jesus Christ to do the things in us that please him.”

Without God’s help, sinners can’t make God happy. But God in His mercy and love made a way to save us. That way is through Jesus. When you “give sacrifices [offerings] to God from your heart” then “God will accept them because of Jesus Christ” and everything He did and does for us (1 Peter 2:5, WE). For sure, we can’t make God happy without faith (Hebrews 11:6). Paul tells us that the “God of peace will give you every good thing you need so that you can do what he wants. . . . I pray that God will work through [with] Jesus Christ to do the things in us that please him. To him be glory forever. Amen” (Hebrews 13:20, 21, ERV). When we answer God in faith, God accepts us because of Jesus. Jesus’ holy life is the only holy life that God accepts. Jesus’ work for us makes us worthy in God’s eyes. Jesus changes us to become holy and loving (1 Corinthians 15:51–57; 1 John 3:2). God’s holy work is not only **for** us, but He works **in** us, too.

Jesus is working right now in heaven to save you. Why does this idea give you so much hope?

IMPORTANT ADVICE (Mark 9:17–29)

God is happy with us when we accept His love. God is the only Person who is worthy of love. God is perfect and holy. He will accept us as holy and worthy of love when we believe in Jesus. Then we become God's children who will live with Him in perfect love forever. This promise is ours when we have faith in Jesus' work for us in heaven.

"But," you may wonder, "can this promise include me? What if I feel I'm not good enough or don't have enough faith?"

Read the story in Mark 9:17–29. How does God answer the man in the story? How much faith is enough faith?

Jesus' followers couldn't cause the demon to come out of the boy. Everyone in the story started to lose hope. But then Jesus came. He told the father, " 'Everything is possible for the one who believes' " (Mark 9:23, NIV). Then "the father cried out, 'I do believe. Help me to believe more!' " (Mark 9:24, ERV).

Do you see that Jesus doesn't say to the man, "Come back to Me when you have more faith"? The man's cry, " 'Help me to believe more!' " was enough for Jesus.

Without faith, we can't make God happy (Hebrews 11:6). At the same time, Jesus accepts the smallest faith. When we have faith in Jesus' saving work for us, we can make God happy. Faith in Jesus helps us to answer God in ways that God accepts. Then God will be happy with us in the same way a human father is happy when his beloved child brings him a sweet gift that isn't valuable.

We should follow Paul's advice to "always please the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:9, ERV; also read verse 10. Compare with Colossians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:1; and Hebrews 11:5). We should ask God to help us care more about the needs of other people: "Love each other in a way that makes you feel close [in your hearts] like [the same as] brothers and sisters. And give each other more honor than you give yourself. As you serve the Lord, work hard and don't be lazy. Be excited about serving him! Be happy because of the hope you have. Be patient when you have troubles. Pray all the time. Share with God's people who need help. Look for people who need help and welcome them into your homes" (Romans 12:10–13, ERV).



The man's cry, " 'Help me to believe more!' " was enough for Jesus.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “ ‘Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled,’ ” pages 662–680, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“The Lord is sad when His people don’t think they are worth much. The Lord wants His chosen people to know that they are valuable because of the price He paid to save them. God wanted them. That’s why He sent His Son on an expensive journey to save them. God has a use for His people. God is happy when people ask Him to do big things so that His name will be honored. God’s people may expect God to do big things if they believe His promises.

“To pray in Jesus’ name means much. To pray in His name means that we accept His holy life and love. We also must show His spirit and do the things He did. The Savior’s promise contains the word ‘if.’ The word ‘if’ tells us that Jesus expects us to obey Him: ‘If you love me, you will do the things I command.’ [John 14:15, ICB]. Jesus saves people, but not in their sins. Jesus saves people from sin. When we love Jesus, we will obey Him. Our obedience shows Jesus that we love Him.

“All real obedience comes from the heart. Jesus obeyed God from the heart. If we give Jesus permission, He will help us to live the way He lived, thought, and worked. His thoughts will become our thoughts. His wishes will become our wishes. Then we will naturally do the things that please Him. Our biggest joy will come from serving Jesus. When we know God as we should know Him, we will obey God always. When we talk with God, we will know and understand Jesus better and who He is. Then we will hate sin.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 668, adapted.



“If we give Jesus permission, He will help us to live the way He lived, thought, and worked.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ What is the connection between giving and getting? How will giving and getting be different for us in heaven and on the new earth?
- ❷ Daniel was God’s special messenger. Angels said that Daniel was “chamudot.” In the Hebrew language, “chamudot” means “beloved” or “precious.” The angels said Daniel was “chamudot” three times (read Daniel 9:23; Daniel 10:11; Daniel 10:19). What do God’s words about Daniel tell us about God and how much He loves us? What hope does this amazing Bible truth give you?

THE THANKFUL CHURCH LEADER

Jong-Moon Yoon is famous for being thankful. He is a leader at a local Seventh-day Adventist church in South Korea. The first words Jong-Moon says are always “thank you!” When someone asks Jong-Moon for help, he says, “Thank you!” When Jong-Moon suffers hard times, he says, “Thank you!”

Jong-Moon carefully follows the teachings of Paul, who wrote, “Whatever happens, always be thankful. This is how God wants you to live in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:18, ERV). People notice Jong-Moon’s thankful spirit.

Jong-Moon owns a café on a beach in Jeongdongjin. Jeongdongjin is one of the most popular places to watch sunrises in South Korea. Many people come to Jeongdongjin to watch the sunrise on New Year’s Day. One of Jong-Moon’s customers was Nanum. When she was a teenager, Nanum sometimes came to the café to enjoy the sunrise while she ate breakfast. Later, Nanum got married and had a daughter named Azsa. Nanum and her daughter often came to Jong-Moon’s café for breakfast. Nanum was always amazed at Jong-Moon’s thankful spirit. When Nanum ordered her food, Jong-Moon said, “Thank you!” When Nanum paid for breakfast, Jong-Moon said, “Thank you!” When Nanum thanked Jong-Moon for a meal, he said, “Thank you!”

During a visit, Nanum had a conversation with Jong-Moon. She learned that he went to church on Saturdays. Nanum never heard about people worshiping on Saturdays. Nanum asked Jong-Moon, “May I go to church with you next Saturday?”

The next Sabbath, Nanum and her five-year-old daughter went with Jong-Moon to his church. The church was a 30-minute drive from Jong-Moon’s café. Church members warmly welcomed Nanum and her daughter. They wanted to know how Nanum learned about the church. Nanum said she came because of the “thankful church leader.”

After church, Nanum told Jong-Moon that she wanted to come again. She said, “If you go to this church, I will follow you.”

Nanum never heard Jong-Moon say the name of Jesus at the café. But she saw that Jesus lived in Jong-Moon’s heart. We preach the Good News about Jesus with more than our words. We preach the Good News in the way we live our lives. Jong-Moon’s example helped a young mother and her daughter to start to go to church every Sabbath. Now, Nanum is praying that her husband will join them on Sabbath mornings.

Part of this quarter’s 13th Sabbath Offering will help Bible workers share the Good News about Jesus in South Korea. Thank you for planning to give a big offering on March 29.

INSIDE
Story
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



When Nanum paid for breakfast, Jong-Moon said, “Thank you!”



Jong-Moon Yoon

Our Loving God



SABBATH—JANUARY 18

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Psalm 103:13; Hosea 1:2; Matthew 9:36; 1 Corinthians 13:4; 1 Corinthians 13:4–8.

MEMORY VERSE: “But the Lord says, ‘Can a woman forget her baby? Can she forget the child who came from her body? Even [anyway] if she can forget her children, I cannot forget you’ ” (Isaiah 49:15, ERV).



The Bible shows God as Someone who has strong feelings.

SOME PEOPLE believe that strong feelings are bad. So, they try to avoid having strong feelings whenever they can. Because some people believe that strong feelings are bad, they think that good people do not have strong feelings. Some Greek thinkers believed that the best person was someone who didn't feel any strong feelings or was someone who controlled his feelings.

Yes, some strong feelings that get out of control can be a problem. But God made us with hearts to feel. The Bible shows God as Someone who has strong feelings. If God has strong feelings, then strong feelings can't be bad. That's because God is good, perfect, and wise.

God loves us deeply. When we understand this idea about God's love, we can learn some beautiful Bible truths. But we always must remember that God's love is not the same as our love. Our love is human. But God's love is perfect.

MORE THAN A MOTHER'S LOVE (Psalm 103:13)

Maybe the most important love in our human experience is a parent's love for a child. The Bible often uses the parent-child relationship as a word picture to show God's amazing mercy and love for people. This word picture shows that God's mercy is much more powerful than the deepest and most beautiful human love we can feel.

Psalm 103:13; Isaiah 49:15; and Jeremiah 31:20 show us some pictures of God. What do these pictures teach us about how much God loves us?

These verses show us that God loves the same as a parent loves a child. We are God's beloved children. God loves us the same as a good father and mother love their children. But as Isaiah 49:15 explains, a mother may "forget her baby" or "forget the child who came from her body" (ERV). But God always remembers His children. "The Lord's love never ends" (Lamentations 3:22, ICB).

The word for "love" in Lamentations 3:22 comes from the word "**raham**" in the Hebrew language. Bible writers use the word "**raham**" in many other verses to talk about God's love and mercy. Bible thinkers believe that the word "**raham**" comes from the Hebrew word "**rehem**," which means the part of a woman's body where her baby grows inside her. So, Bible thinkers use this idea to show that God's love is the same as a mother's love that she feels for her child when it is born. This love is very strong and powerful. But God's love for us is far more powerful.

Jeremiah 31:20 tells us what God thinks and feels about His chosen people, Israel. Israel is the same as God's dear son and beloved child. Often Israel rejected God and refused to obey Him. Their sins hurt God very deeply. But God continued to love Israel anyway and to show them His mercy. The word for "mercy" (Jeremiah 31:20, KJV) or "loving-pity" (NLV) in this verse comes from the same word that is used for God's love ("**raham**"). The words "my heart longs [feels a strong feeling of love] for them" (Jeremiah 31:20, NIV) also can be written as "my guts and all the lower parts inside me roar" for them. This verse uses strong language to show us that God loves us so very much, more than we can imagine in our minds. God's love for His people didn't stop when they refused to obey Him or broke His law. God continues to love His people anyway.



The Bible often uses the parent-child relationship as a word picture to show God's amazing mercy and love for people.

GOD'S DEEP LOVE FOR US (Hosea 1:2)

The book of Hosea shows us God's love for humans. Hosea was God's special messenger. God commanded Hosea, " 'Go. Marry a woman who has sex with anyone she wants. Have [make] children with her. Do this [marry this woman] because the people of the land are like [the same as] that kind [type] of wife. They have not been faithful [loyal] to me' " (Hosea 1:2, NIV). Later, Hosea 11 uses a different word picture to show God's relationship with His people. Hosea uses the word picture of a loving father.

Read Hosea 11:1–9. How does the word picture in these verses help us better understand how much God cares for His people?



The Bible shows God as a parent teaching a young child to walk.

The book of Hosea uses the word picture of a parent's love for a child to show us God's love. The Bible also uses other word pictures to help us understand God's love. The Bible shows God as a parent teaching a young child to walk. God also is compared to a parent holding his child in his arms. The Bible shows God as someone who heals His people, feeds them, and takes care of their needs. The Bible says that God "carried" His people the same as "a man carries his son" (Deuteronomy 1:31, NIV). The Bible says that God "loved them [His people] and felt sorry for them, so he saved them. . . . He picked them up and carried them, just as he did long ago" (Isaiah 63:9, ERV).

Compare God's love for His people with His people's love for Him. God's love is loyal. But His people "cheat" on Him the same as a cheating wife. How do they cheat? They don't obey God. Their sins hurt God very deeply and cause God to punish them. God is loving. But His love is always fair. He will punish sin and evil when necessary. (As we will see in a future lesson, God's love is both fair and filled with mercy. Being fair and showing mercy are behaviors that work well with each other.)

Did you get so upset about something that your tummy started to hurt? The Bible uses this word picture to show us that God's feelings for His people are strong. The Bible also uses this word picture for strong human feelings, too.

JESUS' MERCY (Matthew 9:36)

The New Testament uses the same word picture that the Old Testament uses to show us God's mercy. Paul says that God "is our Father Who shows us loving-kindness [mercy and love] and our God Who gives us comfort [makes us feel better]" (2 Corinthians 1:3, NLV). Also, Paul explains in Ephesians 2:4 that "God loves us deeply. He is full of [filled with] mercy" (NIV).

In many picture stories, Jesus uses words that show us that God's love and mercy for us are very strong (Matthew 18:27; Luke 10:33; Luke 15:20). The New Testament writers use the same word pictures from the Old Testament to show Jesus' mercy to suffering people.

Read Matthew 9:36; Matthew 14:14; Mark 1:41; Mark 6:34; and Luke 7:13. Also read Matthew 23:37. How do these verses help us understand Jesus' mercy for suffering people?

Again and again, the Bible tells us that Jesus was filled with love and mercy for people who suffered or were in need. Jesus' mercy caused Him to help suffering people and take care of their needs, too.

Yes, the people made Jesus cry and feel sad. Imagine in your mind the tears in Jesus' eyes when He looks at Jerusalem and says, "'Jerusalem, Jerusalem! . . . Many times I wanted to help your people! I wanted to gather [collect] them together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. But you did not let me'" (Matthew 23:37, ICB). In this verse, the sorrow that Jesus feels matches the sorrow in God's heart in the Old Testament. Bible thinkers tell us that only writers from the lands where Jesus grew up used this mother-hen word picture to talk about God. This word picture helps us remember Deuteronomy 32:11. Deuteronomy 32:11 compares God to a bird protecting and taking care of its young chicks.

Jesus is the best example of God's mercy for us. That's because Jesus gave Himself for us. He died for our sins. Jesus is also a perfect example of what each of us can become. How can we live the way that Jesus lived? What can we do to put other people first and take care of their needs? What else can we do to show God's love to people in ways that they can see and understand?



Imagine in your mind the tears in Jesus' eyes when He looks at Jerusalem and says, "'Jerusalem, Jerusalem!'"

A JEALOUS GOD (1 Corinthians 13:4)

The Bible says that God is a God of mercy. In the Hebrew language, God is named “**el rahum**” (Deuteronomy 4:31). The word “**el**” means “God.” “**Rahum**” comes from the word for “mercy” in the Hebrew language. The Bible also tells us that God is “**el qana**’ ” or the jealous God. Deuteronomy 4:24 says, “The Lord your God is a jealous [wants you to worship Him and no one else] God. He is like [the same as] a fire that burns things up” (Read Deuteronomy 4:24, ICB; Deuteronomy 6:15; Joshua 24:19; and Nahum 1:2.)

1 Corinthians 13:4 says that “love is not jealous” (ERV). God is love, right? So, how can He be a “jealous God”? Read 2 Corinthians 11:2 and think about how often God’s people didn’t obey Him (read an example in Psalm 78:58). How do these verses help us understand what the Bible means when it says that God is jealous?



God’s jealous feelings are the same as a loving husband who wants to be the only man who has a love relationship with his wife.

People don’t understand how God can be a jealous God. If you say that someone is a jealous husband or wife, you aren’t praising him or her. The word “jealous” often is not a very nice word in many languages. But in the Bible, when God is jealous, His being jealous is not bad. God’s jealous feelings are the same as a loving husband who wants to be the only man who has a love relationship with his wife.

The Bible tells us that love isn’t jealous (1 Corinthians 13:4). At the same time, the Bible says that love can also be holy. Paul says that this jealous feeling “comes from God” (2 Corinthians 11:2, ERV). God’s jealous feelings are the only holy jealous feelings. These feelings really talk about God’s deep love for His people.

God’s jealous feelings (“**qana**’ ”) for His people come from His deep love for them. God wants His people to worship Him and nothing else. God wants to be their only God. The Bible often shows us a picture of God as a lover who was rejected and as someone who loves people who don’t love Him back (read Hosea 1–3; Jeremiah 2:2; Jeremiah 3:1–12). So, God’s jealous feelings for His people don’t happen without a cause. His people do evil and cause God to feel hurt and jealous. Jealous humans want things that don’t belong to them. But God’s jealous love is never evil. He wants to be the only God His people worship.

MERCY AND LOVE (1 Corinthians 13:4–8)

The God of the Bible is filled with mercy. His love is strong and deep. Jesus shows us these strong feelings. Jesus shows us that God loves us very much. God feels pity for people when they are in trouble (compare with Isaiah 63:9; Hebrews 4:15). God is sad when His people suffer (Judges 10:16; Luke 19:41). God is always willing to hear, answer, and comfort His people (Isaiah 49:10, 15; Matthew 9:36; Matthew 14:14).

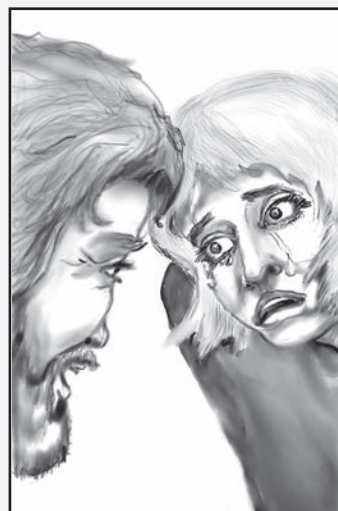
Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–8. How do these verses ask us to show God’s amazing mercy and love in our relationships with other people?

We want relationships with people who show the love that we read about in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8. But how often do we show this same love to other people? We can’t make ourselves patient and nice. We can’t stop being jealous, filled with pride, nasty, or selfish. God’s love “never gives up on people. It never stops trusting, never loses hope, and never quits. Love will never end” (1 Corinthians 13:7, 8, ERV). We can’t show this love without God’s help. Praise God that His Holy Spirit pours His love into our hearts when we live with faith in Jesus (Romans 5:5).

God’s mercy and His Holy Spirit help us to show God’s deep and holy love to other people. In what ways can we show this love? First, we must worship the God who is love. Second, we show God’s love when we show mercy and love to other people. We should share our Christian faith with people and help them feel better because Jesus makes us feel better. Third, we should understand that we can’t change hearts, but God can.

So, let us ask God to give us a new heart for loving Him and for other people. God can give us a love that makes us holy and removes the sin from our hearts.

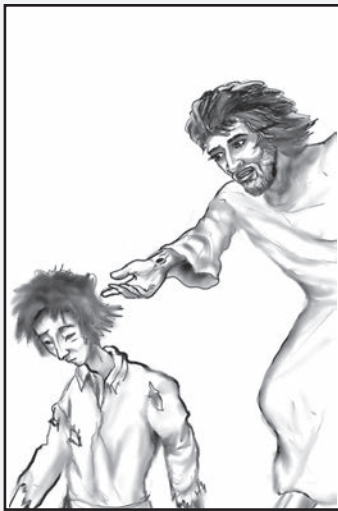
Let Paul’s words to the church members in Thessalonica be our prayer: “May the Lord make your love grow. . . . May your love for one another increase [grow]. May it also increase for everyone else. May it be just like [the same as] our love for you. May the Lord give you strength in your hearts. Then you will be holy and without blame in the sight of our God and Father. May that be true [real] when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones” (1 Thessalonians 3:12, 13, NIV).



God is always willing to hear, answer, and comfort His people.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “The Beatitudes,” pages 6–44, in *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*.

“Everyone who knows they can’t be holy on their own may find the strength they need when they come to Jesus for help. Jesus says, ‘Come to me, all you who are tired and are carrying heavy loads. I will give you rest.’ Matthew 11:28 [NirV]. You are poor. Jesus invites you to accept the gifts of His mercy and forgiveness. These gifts will make you rich. We aren’t worthy of God’s love, but Jesus is worthy. Jesus can save everyone who comes to Him to be saved. Your past experience doesn’t matter. Maybe you feel you have no hope in life right now. Come to Jesus as you are: weak, helpless, and sad. Our loving Savior will come to meet you when you are far away from Him. He will throw His loving arms around you. He will put His holy life and love on you the same as clothes and bring us to His Father. Jesus goes to God for us and says, ‘I died for this sinner. Don’t look at this child, but look at Me.’ Satan complains about us to God and accuses us of sinning. But with more power, Jesus asks God to forgive us because of His blood.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pages 8, 9, adapted.



**Our loving Savior
will come to meet you
when you are far away
from Him.**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ Thanks to Jesus, the Father accepts us. Ellen G. White wrote in the quote above: “He will put His holy life and love on you the same as clothes and bring us to His Father.” Yes, we may feel hopeless when we make mistakes or don’t show other people the love that God shows to us. So, why must we always remember the wonderful news about what Jesus will do for us?
- ❷ Again and again, the Bible tells us that the needs of the people touched Jesus’ heart. What did Jesus do about their needs? How did He act? Jesus took care of their needs. What are some ways that you or your class can meet the needs of people who are suffering and without hope?

DRUNKEN MEN ATTACK A BIBLE WORKER

A drunken man approached a 21-year-old Bible worker on a public bus. Then the man tried to hug and kiss her. The young Bible worker tried to stop him. The other passengers on the bus looked the other way until an old woman yelled something to the bus driver. The bus stopped. Then the old woman told some of the passengers to help the young woman. The passengers threw the man off the bus. The old woman came over to the Bible worker, who was crying, and patted her arm.

The young woman was Joanne Park Kim. Joanne had this same experience nearly every week in Mongolia. The time was the 1990s. Joanne was a single American woman. She served as one of the first Seventh-day Adventist Bible workers in Mongolia. Mongolia was a very poor country.

Another time, a drunk neighbor thought Joanne's apartment was his own. The man kicked down her wooden door with his steel-tip boots. Then the man started to beat Joanne. Joanne grabbed a broom and screamed. She fought back. Joanne was losing the fight until she used the broom to bang on the ceiling. A married American couple lived in the apartment above Joanne. They heard the banging and came down to help her.

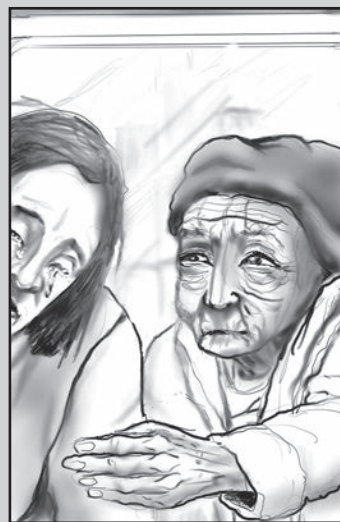
The worst experience for Joanne happened when she and another Bible worker waited for a friend at a bus stop in Ulaanbaatar. Ulaanbaatar is Mongolia's capital. Earlier, a mother invited Joanne and her friend to her child's first haircut, which was a time for celebration in Mongolia. The mother told Joanne and her friend to wait for her at the bus stop.

Then four drunken men sat next to Joanne and her friend and tried to hug and kiss them. Joanne and the other girl tried to move away, but the men followed. Everyone at the crowded bus stop looked away. They pretended not to notice the men. The men dragged the women to an empty street behind some buildings. Joanne screamed, kicked, and fought back. But she was no match for the four men. The men threw the women on the ground. Joanne thought that the men were going to force them to have sex.

Then the men's faces filled with fear. The men turned and ran away. Joanne looked around to see who saved them. No one was there. Joanne knew the men saw an angel.

This story offers a look inside the life of American Bible worker Joanne Park Kim. Joanne helped start the Seventh-day Adventist work in modern Mongolia. Today, Joanne continues to serve as a missionary there. You can also help Bible workers in Mongolia when you give your 13th Sabbath Offering. Part of this offering will help open a center for children in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Read more about Joanne next week.

INSIDE
Story
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



The old woman came over to the Bible worker, who was crying, and patted her arm.



Joanne Park Kim

God's Anger Shows His Love



SABBATH—JANUARY 25

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Psalm 78; Jonah 4:1–4; Matthew 21:12, 13; Ezra 5:12; Deuteronomy 32:35.

MEMORY VERSE: “But God was merciful [filled with mercy]. He forgave their sins and did not destroy them. Many times he held back his anger. He never let it get out of control” (Psalm 78:38, ERV).



Evil makes God angry and causes God to help the ones who suffer because of evil.

MANY PEOPLE like the idea that God is a God of love. But they get upset at the idea that God can get angry. If God is love, they think God should not get angry at all. But that idea is false. God's anger comes from His love.

Some people believe that the Old Testament God is a God of anger and that the New Testament God is a God of love. But there is only one God. He is shown as the same God in both the Old and the New Testaments. Our loving God does get angry at evil. Evil makes God angry **because** God is love. Jesus showed His anger against evil. The New Testament teaches many times about God's holy anger.

God's anger is His loving answer to evil and to human actions and behavior that aren't fair. God's anger comes from His perfect love because He wants the best for all living things. Evil makes God angry and causes God to help the ones who suffer because of evil. That is why God's anger is really another way that He shows His love.

EVIL MAKES GOD SAD (Psalm 78)

The God of the Bible loves decisions that are fair. He hates evil. Sin and evil make God angry. God shows His anger against evil when evil people hurt innocent people. God also feels upset when someone does something evil to hurt himself. God hates evil because evil always hurts the living things that He made. In the Bible stories, God gets angry again and again because of the evil that His people do against Him. Below is an outline of what happens in those Bible stories:

1. First, the people stop obeying God and do evil. Sometimes the people do terrible things to make God angry. What was one of the terrible things that the people did? They killed their children and offered their children's blood and dead bodies as gifts to false gods.
 2. God respects the people's decision to stop obeying Him. He leaves them alone.
 3. Foreign countries attack God's people and hurt them.
 4. The people cry to God to save them from their enemies.
 5. God in His mercy saves His people.
 6. After the people are no longer in danger, they stop obeying God and do worse sins than they did in the past.
- God continues to show His people His mercy and love when they fight against Him.

Read Psalm 78. What does this psalm tell us about how God feels when His people fight against Him again and again? What does God do when they reject Him?

The Bible tells us that being fair and showing love go together. God's anger is the answer of His love against evil because evil always hurts someone that God loves. Every example of God's anger in the Bible shows that God's anger is always fair.

Again and again, God's people rejected Him and turned against Him. But God was patient with His people, even when they made mistakes. God gave them His mercy when they did not expect Him to help them (Nehemiah 9:7–33). God showed them His wonderful love. As Psalm 78:38 says, "God was merciful [filled with mercy]. He forgave their sins and did not destroy them. Many times he held back his anger. He never let it get out of control" (ERV).



God's anger is the answer of His love against evil because evil always hurts someone that God loves.

GOD GETS ANGRY SLOWLY (Jonah 4:1–4)

Evil makes God angry because God is love. God is so filled with mercy that one special messenger in the Bible scolded God for being filled with too much mercy!

Let's think about the story of that special messenger, Jonah. How did Jonah feel, and what did he say, when God forgave the Ninevites? Read Jonah 4:1–4 for the answer. (Read also Matthew 10:8.)

Jonah's words and feelings tell us a lot. First, we see that Jonah's heart is very hard and cold. Jonah hated the Assyrians so much. The Assyrians destroyed Israel. So, Jonah didn't want God to show them any mercy.

Jonah's story is a powerful lesson for us! We must be careful not to feel the same way about people who hurt us. Remember, God gave us His mercy when we weren't good enough. So, we must be willing to show mercy to the people who hurt us.

Also, Jonah's thoughts and feelings show us how important God's love, mercy, and forgiveness are to our understanding of who He is. Jonah knew very well that God was loving and filled with mercy. Jonah also knew that God didn't get angry fast (Jonah 4:2). Jonah knew that the Lord would not punish Nineveh if the people who lived there stopped doing evil. God is fair with all people everywhere.

Let's look in the book of Jonah at the Hebrew words written as "slow to get angry" (Jonah 4:2, NIV) or "don't become angry quickly" (Jonah 4:2, ICB). In the Hebrew language, these words really mean someone with a "long nose." In Bible times, a person who had a long nose was a word picture for someone who was very patient. A long nose was a sign that it took the person a long time to get angry.

The Bible says that God has a long nose because He doesn't get angry fast. Also, He is very patient. Humans get angry really fast, right? Not God. Because God is patient, He gives us His mercy before we know Him. But God's mercy doesn't excuse sin. God accepted the punishment for our sins on the cross so that He can be fair and save the ones who believe in Him (Romans 3:25, 26).

How can remembering what God did for you help you to show mercy to other people? Is showing mercy to the ones who hurt you the same as excusing their sin? Explain.



Jonah knew that the Lord would not punish Nineveh if the people who lived there stopped doing evil.

GOD'S ANGER IS HOLY (Matthew 21:12, 13)

Many angry feelings are evil and filled with sin. But the Bible also teaches us that there is holy anger.

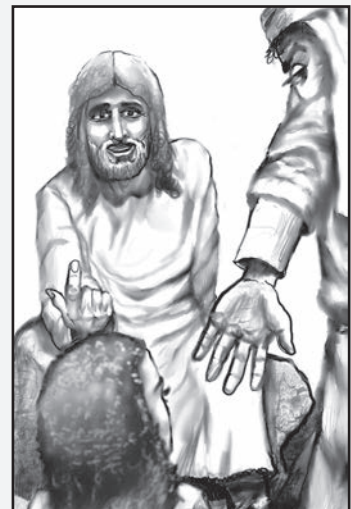
Imagine in your mind a mother watching her three-year-old daughter at the playground. All of a sudden, a man attacks her daughter. The mother should feel angry, right? When evil things happen, we get angry because of the love we feel for the people that get hurt. This example helps us understand God's holy anger.

Read Matthew 21:12, 13 and John 2:14–16. What does Jesus say and do when He sees the evil things happening in God's temple? How does Jesus' anger in this story help us understand God's anger at evil?

In these verses, we see that Jesus was upset with the people who did evil in God's temple. Jesus' feelings were holy. These people stole money that was meant to help widows, orphans, and the poor (Matthew 21:13; compare with John 2:16). The temple offerings showed God's forgiveness and how He made people clean from sin. But the Jewish leaders used the offerings to cheat and hurt the poor and the needy. No wonder Jesus was mad!

Mark 10:13, 14 and Mark 3:4, 5 give us more examples of Jesus' holy anger. When people brought little children to Jesus, His followers scolded the ones who brought them. That upset Jesus. Jesus said to His followers, " 'Let the little children come to me. Don't stop them' " (Mark 10:14, ERV).

In another Bible story, the Jewish leaders waited to accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath because He healed someone on it. Jesus asked the leaders, " 'What does the Law say we should do on the Sabbath day? Should we do good? Or should we do evil? Should we save life? Or should we kill?' But no one answered (Mark 3:4, NIV). "Jesus looked at the people. He was angry, but he felt very sad because they were so stubborn. He said to the man, 'Hold out your hand.' The man held out his hand, and it was healed" (Mark 3:5, ERV). Do you see that Jesus is both angry and sad at the same time? Jesus is upset because the Jewish leaders had hard hearts. Jesus' anger is holy because it comes from His love. In the same way, the anger of God in the Old Testament is holy because it also came from His love. How can God not get upset with evil when evil hurts the ones whom God loves?



Jesus said to His followers, " 'Let the little children come to me. Don't stop them' " (Mark 10:14, ERV).

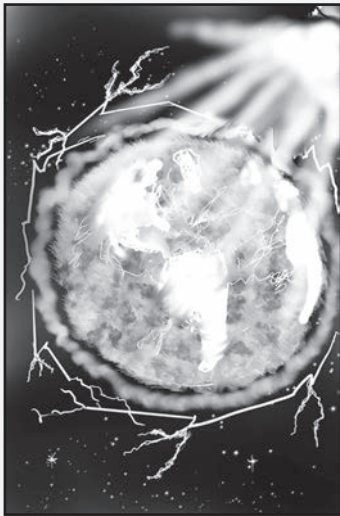
GOD AND PUNISHMENT (Ezra 5:12)

The Bible shows us that God helps people who are hurt and suffering. God also shows His anger against evil people. Evil makes God angry. His anger is always against the things that hurt the living things that He made.

When we read Lamentations 3:32, 33, we see that God doesn't want to punish sinners. He doesn't want to judge evil people. But God is a God of love. Because God is a God of love, He must be fair and punish evil.

We see this Bible truth in the Bible stories about how long God continued to forgive His people. Again and again, God gave His people time to stop sinning and come back to Him. God sent His special messengers, the prophets, to His people. But His people refused to listen (read Jeremiah 35:14–17; Psalm 81:11–14).

Read Ezra 5:12 and compare it with Jeremiah 51:24, 25, 44. What explanation do these verses give us about why God judged Jerusalem? (Also read 2 Chronicles 36:16.)



God's anger against evil will finally cause Him to destroy all sin and evil forever.

Ezra 5 tells us that God's people continued to make Him angry. After a long while, God finally allowed Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, to remove His people from their land and take them away to Babylon (Ezra 5:12). God waited a long time before He let go of His people. He waited until there was no other way to save them (2 Chronicles 36:16). Later, God judged Babylon for the terrible things that it did to His people and their land (Jeremiah 51:24, 25, 44; compare with Zechariah 1:15).

When God judges His people, the Bible explains God's actions as **giving** the people to their enemies (Judges 2:13, 14, NLV; Psalm 106:41, 42, ERV, NKJV). That's because God is accepting their decision to serve other gods and not Him (Judges 10:6–16; Deuteronomy 29:24–26). As we saw already, God's anger against evil comes from His love and because He wants the best for everyone. God's anger against evil will finally cause Him to destroy all sin and evil forever.

God doesn't want to punish anyone. How does this idea help you to understand God's anger? If God gets angry very slowly, we should be more patient with other people, right? At the same time, how can we protect and take care of the ones who suffer because of evil people?

SHOWING MERCY (Deuteronomy 32:35)

For sure, God's anger is terrible. But His anger comes from His love. In the Old and New Testaments, God shows His anger against evil **because** of His love. God's anger needs to be terrible because evil is so terrible.

Love is important to God; anger isn't. God gets angry because sin and evil cause bad things to happen to the ones He loves. In the end, God's love will end His anger when He ends all evil. God will no longer be angry because there won't be any more evil. God's anger will stop because there won't be any need for it again. This thought is wonderful!

Some people use God's anger as an excuse to be avengers and get back at other people for hurting them. Read Deuteronomy 32:35; Proverbs 20:22; Proverbs 24:29; Romans 12:17–21; and Hebrews 10:30. How do these verses help us to understand that we must not try to hurt the people who hurt us?

The Bible tells us that God may punish us. When He does, He is always fair. Both the Old and New Testaments say that only God may judge and punish the people who hurt us. As Paul writes in Romans 12:19, "My dear friends, don't try to get even. Leave room for [allow] God to show [punish them with] his anger. It is written, 'I am the God who judges people. I will pay them back,' (Deuteronomy 32:35) says the Lord" (Romans 12:19, NIV).

While God judges people who are not fair and do evil, there is good news. Jesus made a way for everyone to be saved who believes in Him. Jesus "saves us from God's anger, and his anger is sure to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:10, NIV). God's coming anger is part of His plan: "God planned to save us from the punishment of sin through [because of] our Lord Jesus Christ. He did not plan for us to suffer from His anger" (1 Thessalonians 5:9, NIV). The ones who believe in Jesus will be saved from God's anger.

How does Jesus' death on the cross allow God to be both fair and filled with mercy when He does His work as Judge? What did God do to save us from His coming anger? Why should this Bible truth help you to be more patient with other people?



Both the Old and New Testaments say that only God may judge and punish the people who hurt us.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “Idolatry at Sinai,” pages 315–330, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

When Ellen G. White wrote about the gold cow, she said: “The Israelites were guilty of turning against God. God was their King. As their King, God poured many blessings on them. The people promised to obey God. So, now God needed to punish the people who broke His law. At the same time, God showed the people mercy. God honored His law, but He gave people the freedom to choose to confess their sins and stop sinning. . . .

“God needed to punish this sin. Then the people from the countries around Israel would know that God hated when anyone worshiped the statues of gods. Moses wrote about Israel’s crime and left a record to show that God was not happy with His people for their sin. Later, the Israelites must teach people around them that worshiping statues was a sin. Their enemies would accuse Israel of worshiping the gold calf in Horeb after they promised to worship only God. God’s people would need to answer that, yes, they sinned. But then they must help other people remember that God punished the ones who sinned against Him. This punishment is proof that God didn’t excuse their sin.

“God’s love caused Him to judge His people for worshiping the gold cow. . . . Because of His mercy, God allowed many people to suffer when He judged them. God permitted them to suffer so that He didn’t need to judge millions of people and punish them. So, to save many people, God must punish the few guilty ones.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pages 324, 325, adapted.



**“To save many people,
God must punish
the few guilty ones.”**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Why do you think people have a hard time accepting God’s anger? What helps you to understand it?
- ② What happens when people try to get back at those who hurt them? Why can God punish evil and judge people? Why can’t we judge them?
- ③ How did God’s punishment of Israel for worshiping the gold cow show His mercy? What other examples in the Bible show that God’s work as Judge is loving?
- ④ Why must we not judge other people?

"DO YOU WANT SATAN TO WIN?"

American Bible worker Joanne Park Kim locked herself in her apartment after four drunk strangers attacked her in Mongolia. Joanne wanted to go home to the United States.

After two days, another Bible worker came to see her. She thought he came to give her pity. But instead of giving her pity, the Bible worker scolded her. He said, "Joanne, did you come all the way to Mongolia to share Jesus with your closet?! Do you want Satan to win?"

Joanne didn't expect the Bible worker to say these words to her. But Joanne needed to hear them. If the Bible worker had shown her pity, Joanne would feel sorry for herself. Then she would give up and go home. But now Joanne thought about why she came to Mongolia. At first, Joanne planned to go to Uzbekistan. So she started learning the Russian language. When the plan to go to Uzbekistan didn't work out, Joanne ended up in Mongolia. The Mongolians used the Russian alphabet, but Joanne couldn't understand a word of the Mongolian language. For the first two months, Joanne tried to learn Mongolian. She couldn't share Jesus without knowing the language. Joanne also had trouble asking for help when drunken strangers attacked her almost every week. Worse, people kept thinking that Joanne was Mongolian and spoke the Mongolian language because she was Korean.

Joanne wanted to share her love for Jesus with the Mongolian people. But she felt she didn't have much love for Mongolians left in her heart after all those drunk men attacked her.

Joanne decided to pray for help. She said, "Lord, if you want me to stay in Mongolia, please help me out of this mess. Please protect me, or show me how to take care of myself when I am in danger. Or please get rid of these drunken men."

Joanne decided to stay in Mongolia and wait on God.

The drunken attacks didn't stop. But God gave Joanne a tool to help her protect herself: a perfect knowledge of the Mongolian language. In just three months, Joanne learned to speak Mongolian perfectly. This was a miracle! Joanne started to give Bible studies in Mongolian. She also could ask for help when she was attacked. But after the men hurt her, she had trouble loving the Mongolian people as Jesus loved them.

This mission story offers a look inside the life of American Bible worker Joanne Park Kim. Joanne helped start the Seventh-day Adventist work in modern Mongolia. Today, Joanne continues to serve as a missionary there. You can also help Bible work in Mongolia when you give your 13th Sabbath Offering. Part of this offering will help open a center for children in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Read more about Joanne next week.

INSIDE *Story*

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



"Joanne, did you come all the way to Mongolia to share Jesus with your closet?!"



Joanne Park Kim

God Is Fair



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 1

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Psalm 33:5; Deuteronomy 32:4; Malachi 3:6; Numbers 23:19; Matthew 5:43–48.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘But if someone wants to brag, let him brag about this: Let him brag that he understands and knows me. Let him brag that I am the Lord. Let him brag that I am kind [loving] and fair. Let him brag that I do things that are right [fair] on earth. This kind [type] of bragging pleases me,’ says the Lord” (Jeremiah 9:24, ICB).



Spiritual leaders commanded the followers of these gods to kill their own children and offer them as gifts to the gods.

IN BIBLE TIMES, the “gods” that the non-Jews worshiped did evil things. People couldn’t trust these gods or depend on them. Spiritual leaders commanded the followers of these gods to kill their own children and offer them as gifts to the gods. But even someone who killed his child and offered its dead body to the gods couldn’t depend on the god’s favor or blessing. So, the people were afraid to do anything to make the gods angry.

Deuteronomy 32:17 tells us that these gods were really demons (also read 1 Corinthians 10:20, 21). The people who worshiped these demons were confused about good and evil and right and wrong.

The God of the Bible is very different from those demons. Yahweh is perfect, holy, and never changes. Because God doesn’t change, we can trust God. He gives us hope, now and forever. Yahweh cares about people who suffer. Yahweh wants things to be fair. He judges against evil, suffering, and decisions and actions that aren’t fair. Most important, in the future, God will end these things forever.

GOD IS LOVING AND FAIR (Psalm 33:5)

All through the Bible, God is both fair and loving. God's love must always be fair. Also, God can be fair only if He shows love and mercy when He judges. We often think about being fair as separate from love. But that's because, as sinners, we don't understand how to be both fair and loving without God's help.

Read Psalm 33:5; Isaiah 61:8; Jeremiah 9:24; Psalm 85:10; and Psalm 89:14. How do these verses help us understand how much God cares about being fair?

These verses announce that God loves being fair (Psalm 33:5; Isaiah 61:8). In the Bible, the ideas of love and being fair are connected and can't be separated from each other. God's love and His holy life are connected, too. God cares very much about what happens to His people on this earth. He wants us to be holy and fair in everything we do.

God's prophets or special messengers warn us against not being fair. We must make fair laws and fair decisions. We must not hurt or cheat the poor, the widows, or the weak. People do much evil on this earth. But God is "always kind, fair and right" (Jeremiah 9:24, NIV). The Bible shows us that God's followers trust in Him to judge and punish evil people. God's work as judge is always fair. He saves people from the ones who steal from them and hurt them.

God's law and His work as judge are an important part of His government. God's decisions are holy and fair and come from His love. God's government is different from the governments that control this earth. Many of the leaders of this earth care more about getting riches and power. But God is not selfish the way they are. "God's [Bible] truth and faithful [dependable] love join together. His peace and holiness kiss [join together with] each other" (Psalm 85:10, NIV).

God tells us what He expects from us: "The Lord has told you what is good [holy]. He has told you what he wants from you: Do what is right [be fair] to other people. Love being kind [nice] to others. And live humbly [with no pride in your heart], trusting your God" (Micah 6:8, ICB). We need to show God's love and mercy. We need to be fair to other people. When we do these things, we show people who God is.



Many of the leaders of this earth care more about getting riches and power.

GOD IS PERFECT AND HOLY (Deuteronomy 32:4)

As we saw already, God loves being fair. He also commands us to be fair. God **always** is fair. The Bible teaches us that God is fully holy, dependable, and loving. God always does what is loving, holy, and fair. God never does any wrong or evil.

Read Deuteronomy 32:4 and Psalm 92:15. What do these verses teach us about God?

These verses (and many other verses in the Bible) announce that God is fair and loving. “There is no evil in him” (Psalm 92:15, NIV; compare with Psalm 25:8; Psalm 129:4). “He never does anything that is wrong [evil]. Every morning he does what is fair. Each new day he does the right [correct] thing. But those [people] who do what is wrong aren’t even ashamed of it” (Zephaniah 3:5, NIV). Do you see that God is very different from those who are not fair?

God knows what is best for everyone. God also wants the best life for everyone. God always works to make the best things happen for people.

Read Psalm 9:7, 8 and Psalm 145:9–17. What do these verses teach us about God?



Many men and women worship power and powerful people.

The God of the Bible is a fair Judge (Psalm 7:11). There is no evil in God’s heart (Psalm 5:4). As 1 John 1:5 teaches, “God is like [much the same as] light and he is not dark [filled with sin or evil] at all” (1 John 1:5, WE). Yes, God is perfect and holy. James 1:13 tells us that “God cannot be tempted [led into sin]. He will never tempt anyone” (NIV; compare with Habakkuk 1:13).

Many men and women worship power and powerful people. God is all-powerful, but He uses His power in ways that are fair and loving. When Moses asked God, “Now show me your glory,” God said, “I will make all my goodness [love and mercy] pass in front of you” (Exodus 33:18, 19, NIV).

Why does a loving God allow so much of the evil that is on our earth? Talk about your answer in class.

GOD DOESN'T CHANGE (Malachi 3:6)

Read Malachi 3:6 and James 1:17. What do these verses teach us about God and who He is?

In Malachi 3:6, God announces, “ ‘I am the Lord. I do not change’ ” (ICB). Some people think this verse means that God doesn’t change in any way. But when we read the whole verse, we understand that Malachi is saying that God is always holy and does what is correct. The rest of Malachi 3:6 teaches us that God’s feelings may change in His relationship with us: “ ‘That is why I have not destroyed you members of Jacob’s family’ ” (NIRV). In the next verse, God announces to His people, “ ‘Come back to me, and I will come back to you’ ” (Malachi 3:7, ERV).

So, God can, and does, enter into relationships with people who aren’t perfect. These relationships aren’t perfect. So, things in the relationships may change between God and His people. But God’s love doesn’t change. James 1:17 tells us this same Bible truth. This verse announces that every wonderful and perfect gift comes from God, who doesn’t change. God isn’t the cause of evil.

In this verse and elsewhere in the Bible, we learn that God doesn’t change. In other words, God’s love and His holy life stay the same. At the same time, God can enter into real relationships with people who aren’t perfect. God always answers us with His love. He is always fair.

Read 2 Timothy 2:13; Titus 1:2; and Hebrews 6:17, 18. What do these verses teach us about God?

God can’t lie. God keeps all His promises. He can’t break them. We can trust that the God of the Bible is the same God who (in Jesus) gave Himself for us on the cross because He wanted to. So, we can depend on Him and trust Him without any doubt or fear. We can trust and hope for the future because, as Hebrews 13:8 puts it, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (ERV).

How can you learn to trust in God’s promises when you are in trouble and your life is a mess? Make a picture in your mind of God on the cross. How does this picture help you to learn to trust in God’s love and mercy?



We can trust that the God of the Bible is the same God who (in Jesus) gave Himself for us on the cross because He wanted to.

GOD DOES NOT LIE (Numbers 23:19)

Can God feel sorry about something He said? Can He change His plans and decide not to do something He promised? If so, what does that change really mean? We have seen that God is always the same and dependable. But some Bible verses talk about God choosing not to do something He said He would do. As humans, we often feel sorry about things that we did wrong. God can't sin or do wrong. So, what does the Bible mean when it says that God feels sorry about something He did or said He would do?

Read Exodus 32:14 and compare it with Jeremiah 18:4–10. What do these verses teach us about God's feeling sorry about something He said or did?

In these verses and in other verses in the Bible, we read that God decides not to punish His people anymore when they show Him that they are sorry for their sins. God promises that He will not punish His people for their sins if they stop doing evil. So, God will not judge them or punish them as He planned to do.

Read Numbers 23:19 and 1 Samuel 15:29. What do these verses teach us about God and His decisions or plans?

These verses announce that God “is not a man. So he does not change his mind as men do” (1 Samuel 15:29, ICB). And “God is not a man, that He should lie. He is not a son of man, that He should be sorry for what He has said. Has He said, and will He not do it? Has He spoken, and will He not keep His Word?” (Numbers 23:19, NLV). When we read these verses and other ones, we understand that they are not saying that God can't change His plans or decisions. But God doesn't change His mind about sin in the ways that people do. God always keeps His promises. He may change His decision to judge His people if they stop doing evil. Then He may decide not to punish them. God is loving, holy, and filled with mercy. God's decisions always agree with His love and the Bible. That's why God may choose not to punish His people when they confess their sins and stop doing evil.



God promises that He will not punish His people for their sins if they stop doing evil.

ALWAYS DOING WHAT IS LOVING AND FAIR (Matthew 5:43–48)

The Bible teaches, “So I want you to realize [understand] that the LORD your God is God. He is the faithful [dependable] God. He keeps his covenant [Promise] for all time to come. He keeps it [His Promise] with those [people] who love him and obey his commandments. He shows them his love” (Deuteronomy 7:9, NIV). God showed His love for us at the cross when He gave Jesus to die for our sins (read Romans 3:25, 26; Romans 5:8). As Psalm 100:5 says, “The Lord is good. His love continues forever. His loyalty continues from now on” (ICB; compare with Psalm 89:2). So, we can trust God. God gives only good gifts to His children (James 1:17; compare with Luke 11:11–13). God also gives good things to His enemies.

Read Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:43–48. What do these verses teach us about God’s amazing love? What does Jesus teach us about how we should love other people?

Matthew 5 says that God’s love is perfect love. When we don’t have God’s perfect love in our hearts, we love only the people who love us. But God loves the ones who hate Him. God’s love is complete, and that’s why it is perfect.

God loves us more than we could hope for. But God’s love is always fair. God’s love is both fair and filled with mercy (Psalm 85:10). That’s why the Bible encourages us, “ ‘So come back to your God. Be loyal to him. Do the right [fair] thing, and always trust in your God!’ ” (Hosea 12:6, ERV). Or as another translation of this same verse says, “ ‘You must hold on to love and do what is fair’ ” (Hosea 12:6, NIV; compare with Luke 11:42).

In the end, God will make everything fair. Romans 2:5 teaches us, “The day of God’s anger is coming. Then his way of judging fairly will be shown” (Romans 2:5, NIV). Finally, the saved ones will sing: “ ‘You do great and wonderful things, *Psalm 111:2* / Lord God, the God of heaven’s armies. *Amos 3:13* / Everything the Lord does is right and true, *Psalm 145:17* / King of the nations. Everyone will respect you, Lord. *Jeremiah 10:7* / They will honor you. Only you are holy. All people will come and worship you. *Psalm 86:9, 10* / This is because he is a faithful [dependable] God who does no wrong. He is right [holy] and fair.’ Deuteronomy 32:4” (Revelation 15:3, 4, ICB).



**God loves the ones
who hate Him.**

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “God’s Love for Man,” pages 9–15, in *Steps to Christ*.

“The Bible tells us about God. God announces that His heart is filled with pity and love. When Moses prayed, ‘Now, please show me your Glory.’ Exodus 33:18 [ERV]. ‘The Lord answered, “I will cause all my goodness [love and mercy] to pass in front of you.” ’ Exodus 33:19 [ICB]. Then the Lord passed in front of Moses and announced His glory: ‘As he passed in front of Moses, he called out. He said, “I am the LORD, the LORD. I am the God who is tender [filled with mercy] and kind [loving]. I am gracious [forgiving]. I am slow to get angry. I am faithful [can be trusted] and full of [filled with] love. I continue to show my love to thousands of people. I forgive those [people] who do evil. I forgive those [people] who refuse to obey me. And I forgive those who sin.” ’ Exodus 34:6, 7 [NirV]. . . .

“God gives us many blessings from heaven and on earth to cause us to love Him. God uses nature and our loving relationships with other people to show Himself to us. At the same time, both nature and our loving relationships can’t show us fully who God is. God gives us much proof of His love, but Satan causes people to be afraid of God. Satan tricks people into believing that God is mean and nasty and won’t forgive them. Satan leads people to think that God is a mean judge. Satan made people think that God watches over them and waits for them to make a mistake, so He can punish them. But Jesus came to this earth to live among people to show us that God is love.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pages 10, 11, adapted.



“God uses nature and our loving relationships with other people to show Himself to us.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ Why is it important to understand that God’s glory and honor are connected to His love?
- ❷ Do you sometimes wonder why God allows so much evil to happen in life? Why does a God who is loving and filled with mercy let bad things happen? How do you answer these questions? How can you help someone who is asking the same questions, too?
- ❸ How does the worldwide war between God and Satan help us understand all of the evil that we see on this earth now?

"YOU MUST HELP THIS MAN"

American Bible worker Joanne Park Kim walked to her rented apartment in Ulaanbataar, Mongolia. It was winter. The midafternoon temperature was about -40 degrees.

Joanne saw a drunk man lying on the sidewalk. Some drunken men hurt Joanne over the past year. So, Joanne didn't want to stop to help this drunk man. What if the man also attacked her? Joanne started to walk past him, but then she stopped. A voice inside her heart said, "You must help this man."

Joanne didn't want to help the man. She prayed, "Lord, this man weighs almost two times as much as I do. How can I help him?"

Joanne looked around. The street was empty. Joanne didn't see anyone else. She looked at the stranger again. She thought, "If I don't help him, he will die. His body will freeze in a couple of hours."

Joanne saw apartment buildings all around. Each building had a small room on the first floor for a guard, so the entrance was warm. The nearest building was about 1,000 feet away. Joanne prayed, "OK, Lord. I'll do my best to get this guy over there. Please help me." Joanne put her arms under the man's. She prayed for strength and pulled. Somehow, she dragged the man to the building. She put him in the warm doorway. Then she stepped back and looked at him. New feelings filled Joanne's heart. She felt love and pity.

This experience helped change Joanne. She no longer felt anger and hate for the men who hurt her in the past. Now, mercy and pity filled her heart. Finally, she loved the Mongolian people the same as Jesus loved them.

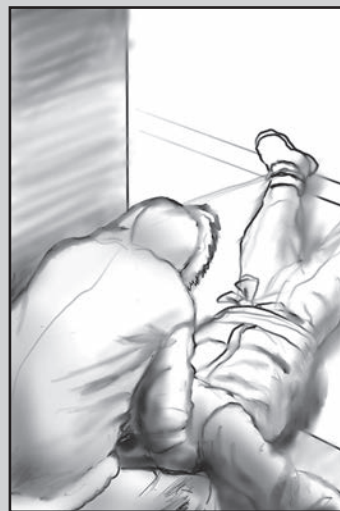
Later, Joanne helped start the first Seventh-day Adventist church in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Joanne worked as a Bible worker there from 1992 to 1998. She was one of the first Bible workers to serve in modern-day Mongolia. In 2017, Joanne went back to Mongolia. She now serves as the education manager for the Adventist Church in Mongolia.

Even now, drunken strangers try to hurt Joanne from time to time. But Joanne's love for God and His people is strong. Joanne says, "Satan doesn't give up. He knew he could make me afraid enough so that I would want to quit. But God gave me the knowledge of how to speak the Mongolian language. God also gave me a new heart. God loves even the drunk men who hurt me all the time. So, I need to love these men, too, and help the Mongolian people as best as I can."

You can help, too. When you give your 13th Sabbath Offering this quarter, your money will be used to help open a center for children in Ulaanbaataar, Mongolia.

INSIDE *Story*

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY

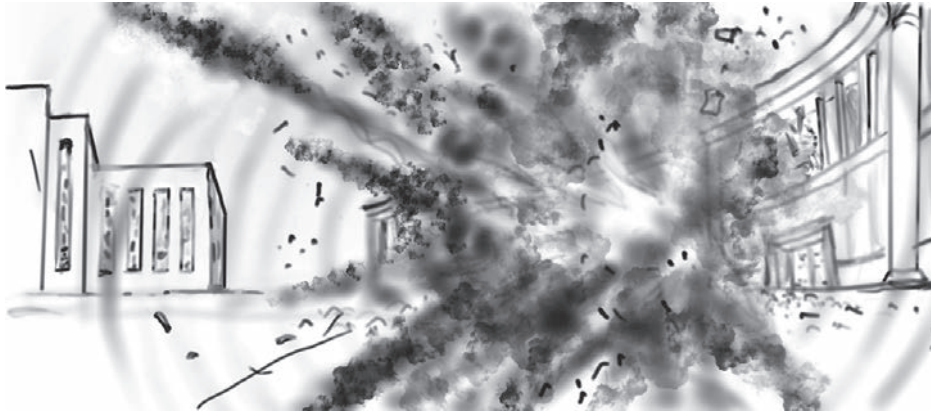


Somehow, Joanne dragged the man to the building.



Joanne Park Kim

The Problem With Evil



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 8

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Psalm 94:3; Job 38:1–12; Psalm 73; Genesis 2:16, 17; Romans 8:18; Revelation 21:3, 4.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. No one will die. No one will ever cry or be sad for any reason. No one will ever have trouble. The old things are gone’ ” (Revelation 21:4, WE).



“Some people question how a loving, powerful, and wise God can allow there to be evil.”

MAYBE THE BIGGEST PROBLEM for Christians is the problem with evil. If God is all-good and all-powerful, why is there so much evil?

This question troubles many people and keeps some of them from coming to know and love God.

“Many people are troubled with the problem of sin. How did sin start? Why is sin on this earth? People see the evil in life and that it is very terrible. So, some people question how a loving, powerful, and wise God can allow there to be evil. People can find no explanation for this mystery.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 492, adapted.

Many people say the reason they don't believe in God is because of the problem with evil. But as we will see this week and in coming weeks, the God of the Bible is holy and fair. We can trust Him, even when evil is everywhere around us.

“LORD, HOW LONG?” (Psalm 94:3)

The problem with evil is more than a problem we have today. Bible writers talked about the problem in their day, too.

Read Job 30:26; Jeremiah 12:1; Jeremiah 13:22; Malachi 2:17; and Psalm 10:1. What do these verses say about the problem with evil? How much is this problem a part of the human experience?

These verses ask many questions that we continue to ask and seek answers for today. Why do people who do evil seem as if they enjoy a lot of success, if not always but often enough? Why do God’s loyal followers suffer so much? Why does God sometimes seem to be so far away from us, or hidden?

Whatever we say about these questions, we must not think that the problem with evil is small or not important. Evil is very bad. God hates evil more than we do. So, we may join the Bible writers who cry out to God against the many evils in life: “LORD, how long will the wicked have their fun? How much longer?” (Psalm 94:3, ERV).

Read Matthew 27:46. How do you understand Jesus’ words in this verse? How do His words help us understand that evil hurts God, too, in the most painful way?

On the cross, Jesus asked the question, “ ‘My God, my God, why have you left me alone?’ ” (Matthew 27:46, ERV). In this verse, we see that evil hurt God. This amazing Bible truth is shown in the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross. All the evil on this earth fell on Jesus at that time.

This verse also gives us hope. On the cross, Jesus won the fight against evil and its cause, Satan. In the future, Jesus will end evil forever. The words Jesus said on the cross are a quote from Psalm 22:1. The rest of the psalm ends in success and with praises to God.

On the cross, Jesus looked for a hope that He didn’t see at the time. How does Jesus’ experience on the cross give us hope when we, too, feel hopeless?

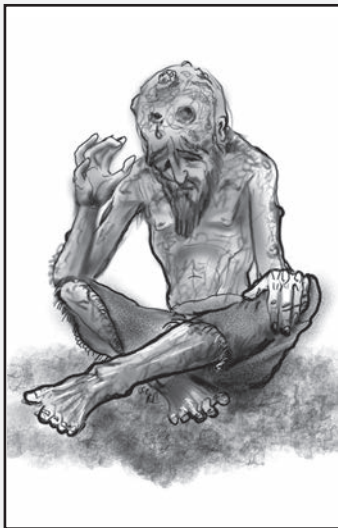


On the cross, Jesus asked the question, “ ‘My God, my God, why have you left me alone?’ ” (Matthew 27:46, ERV).

WE DON'T KNOW SO MANY THINGS (Job 38:1–12)

History will end when God's love wins the fight against evil. But meanwhile, many questions about evil may continue to trouble us. How can we think and talk about the problem with evil in a way that is helpful?

Read Job 38:1–12. How does God's answer to Job help us to understand the bad things that happen? How much do we know about the bad things that are happening now? How much do we not understand?



We also should be the same as Job. We should empty our hearts of all pride and understand that many things are happening in life that we can't see and don't know anything about.

Job suffered much. He asked many questions about why so much evil and suffering happened to him. Job wanted to talk with God to get answers to his questions. Job didn't understand that far more was happening in heaven than he could see (read Job 1; 2). One Bible translation writes: " 'Why do you talk so much when you know so little?' " (Job 38:2, CEV). After God asks Job this question, God says in Job 38:4, " 'Where were you when I made the earth? If you are so smart, answer me' " (ERV).

Read Job 42:3. How does Job's answer help us to know what we should understand about ourselves?

God's answer to Job shows that Job didn't know and understand many things. We also should be the same as Job. We should empty our hearts of all pride and understand that many things are happening in life that we can't see and don't know anything about. We may not know the answers to all our questions. But that doesn't mean that there are no good answers. We must believe that God will answer our questions in the future. Until then, we must trust in God.

Think about how little we know about anything. Why, then, should we accept that there are questions that we can't answer now about evil and suffering?

GOD HAS REASONS WE DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT (Psalm 73)

God announces in Isaiah 55:8, 9, “ ‘The LORD says, “My thoughts are not like [the same as] yours. Your ways are not like mine. Just as the heavens are higher than [above] the earth, so my ways are higher [filled with more wisdom] than your ways, and my thoughts are higher than your thoughts’ ” (ERV).

Our thoughts are not as wise as God's thoughts. We can't imagine in our minds God's whole plan for history. So, why should we expect to know what God's reasons are for what He does or doesn't do?

So, then, how can we, as humans, understand the problem with evil? Some people believe in something named skeptical theism. It means that God has good reasons for doing the things He does, even if we don't always understand them. At the same time, our knowledge about God is limited. So, we shouldn't expect to know just what His reasons are. A skeptical theist is someone who believes this way. The skeptical theist doubts that humans can understand fully God's reasons for doing what He does or His decisions about evil on this earth. We can't see germs moving around in the air. But that doesn't mean germs aren't moving in the air all around us. In the same way, we may not know what God's reasons are, but that doesn't mean God has no good reasons.

Read Psalm 73. What does the poet who wrote Psalm 73 think and feel about the evil around him? What does the poet see that helps him to understand things in a new way?

The poet was very troubled when he saw all the evil in life. The poet looked around him and saw evil people enjoying success. Nothing was fair. The poet had no answers for what he saw. He wondered if his believing and serving God was worth it. But then the poet looked in God's holy temple.

God's temple helped the poet understand the problem with evil better. How? The temple is the place where God does His work as Judge. As a holy Judge, God will do what is fair. He will punish evil in His own time.



God's temple helped the poet understand the problem with evil better.

FREE TO CHOOSE (Genesis 2:16, 17)



The story about the Fall shows how the wrong choice brought sin and evil into the history of our planet.

While we may not fully understand God's ways or thoughts, the Bible does tell us some things that help us with the problem of evil. One view for helping us understand the problem with evil better is named the free will defense.

The free will defense is the view that evil happened because humans made the wrong choice. So, we must not blame God for evil. God gave us free will or free choice for good reasons. Why did God make us free to choose? Christian writer C.S. Lewis wrote, "Free choice makes evil possible. At the same time, free choice is the only thing that makes possible any love or joy worth having. A planet filled with robots is not worth making. God wants us to be happy. The only way we can be happy is to love God and each other. . . . We can love God and each other only if we are free."—*Mere Christianity* (New York: MacMillan, 1960), page 52, adapted.

Read Genesis 2:16, 17. What do these verses teach us about the freedom to choose?

Why would God bother to command Adam and Eve to obey if they weren't free to obey? Adam and Eve chose to eat the forbidden fruit. Since then, our planet became filled with evil. In Genesis 4, the next chapter after the story about the Fall, we read about Cain killing his brother Abel. The story about the Fall shows how the wrong choice brought sin and evil into the history of our planet.

All through the Bible, we read about free choice. (Read Deuteronomy 7:12, 13; Joshua 24:14, 15; Psalm 81:11–14; and Isaiah 66:4.) Every day of our lives, we make choices because God made us free to choose. Without the freedom to choose, we would not really be human. We would be more like a machine or a robot.

Sony Company made a robot dog, named Aibo. But Aibo can't get sick, can't get fleas, won't bite, doesn't need shots or medicine, and doesn't lose its fur. Would you trade your real dog for an Aibo? If no, how does your choice help you better understand why God made us free to choose?

LOVE AND EVIL (Romans 8:18)

God gave people free choice. Free choice is necessary for love. When we make bad choices, evil happens. Why does God allow evil to happen? God hates evil. But He allows evil to happen for a time. We must be free to choose evil or good. Without this choice, we cannot be free to love. If God destroyed evil too soon, people would serve God because of fear, and not because they loved Him.

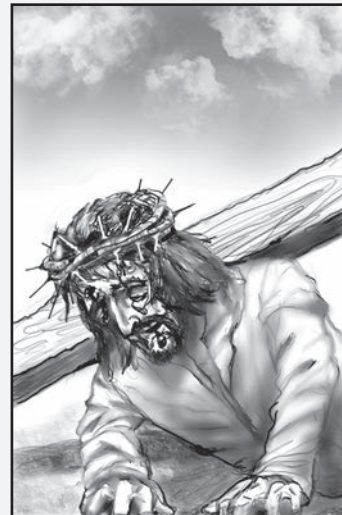
“The people on the earth didn’t understand God. So, the earth was a dark place. God wanted people to understand who He really was. He wanted to end Satan’s lies. God wanted to bring people back to Himself. God couldn’t force people to accept Him. That goes against the important rules of God’s government. God wants people to serve Him because they love Him. Love can’t be commanded. Love can’t be won with control. We love God because God first loved us. When we know God, we will love Him back. God’s love must be shown to everyone on earth. Then people can compare God’s love for them with Satan’s plans to destroy them.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 22, adapted.

If we aren’t free to choose, we can’t be free to love. If God is love, then God must allow us the freedom to choose to love Him.

Read Romans 8:18 and Revelation 21:3, 4. For sure, there is so much evil in this life. Even so, how can these verses help us to trust in God’s love and mercy?

Often, we can’t understand why evil happens. But God sees the end from the beginning. He also promises happiness to everyone who has faith in Jesus. Romans 8:18 tells us, “Now I’m sure of this [amazing promise]: the sufferings we endure [have] now are not even [at all] worth comparing to the glory that is coming and will be revealed [shown] in us” (VOICE). Do we have the faith and trust to believe this amazing promise?

Jesus chose to die because He wanted us to be free to love. He knew what our freedom to choose would cost Him. Our free choice would send Him to the cross and cause Him to suffer much. But Jesus gave us our freedom anyway. Why must we always remember this important Bible truth?



**Jesus knew
what our freedom
to choose
would cost Him.**

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “Why Was Sin Permitted?” pages 33–43, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.



God threw Satan
out of heaven.

“God threw Satan out of heaven. But even then, God was very wise. He didn’t destroy Satan. God only accepts people who serve Him in love. God’s followers must believe He is fair and filled with mercy. The angels in heaven and the people on other planets weren’t ready to understand sin and the evil it would cause. So, they weren’t ready to understand that Satan should be destroyed. If God destroyed Satan right away, some people would serve God from fear and not love. Then Satan’s evil would not be fully destroyed. The spirit of fighting against God would continue. So, God did the best thing for everyone. God allowed Satan to show the rules of his kingdom. Then people would more fully understand the truth about Satan’s lies against God’s government. Then people would see that God was fair and filled with mercy. No one would doubt God or His law again.

“Satan’s war against God is a lesson to everyone in heaven and on earth. Satan’s war teaches us about the terrible things that happen when we break God’s law. We see what happens when people follow Satan. We see what sin does to both angels and people who refuse to obey God. We also see that God’s government wants what is best for everything He made. Sin is a terrible experiment. The history of sin will help the people on other planets to understand that sin is very evil and help them not to sin.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pages 42, 43, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① God gives us the freedom to choose. How does our freedom to choose help protect us from thinking that everything that happens is God’s plan?
- ② Do you sometimes feel the same way as Job? Too many bad things happen at the same time. Do you sometimes think that there can’t really be a good explanation for the pain or hurt that you or your loved ones suffered? Job says, “ ‘I talked about things I did not understand’ ” (Job 42:3, ERV). How does this verse help you understand how limited we are in our understanding of God and His plans?

A VOICE IN THE DARK

An angry voice woke up Grace Babcock in the middle of the night. The voice said, “You don’t know. You don’t understand.”

Grace was upset about being woken up, but she wasn’t scared. Grace worked as a teacher at the Holbrook Indian School.

The voice told Grace, “God is controlling you the same as a puppet. You don’t understand many things. You follow God blindly. God is not fair.”

Grace was trying to trust God after a bus hit and killed a student. Grace had many questions for God. But she was feeling upset about the student’s death. So, she didn’t want to talk with God about her questions.

Now the voice was accusing God, and Grace didn’t like that.

Grace said, “Go away. I don’t want to talk to you.”

The voice stopped talking.

But Grace remembered the bad things the voice said against God. Grace didn’t want to talk to God right now. But she felt she needed to be fair. So, Grace asked God about the things that the voice said. But God said nothing. So, Grace fell asleep.

The next day, Grace went to a spot in nature where she often liked to think. She sat down on a rock. Then she asked God again about the things that the voice said against Him. God stayed silent. Grace went home just before night came.

Grace went to the same place the next day. Again, God was silent when she asked Him her questions. But as she walked home, she heard a voice in her heart say, “You don’t need to know the answers to these questions. You need to trust and believe.”

Grace said, “That’s true. I don’t need to know the answers. But I do need to know that You are loving and holy, Lord. Right now, I don’t know if You are loving and holy.”

Back home in her one-bedroom apartment, Grace opened the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* and started to read. As she read, she heard a voice in her heart say, “Look up.”

When Grace looked up, she saw a picture from a coloring book on her refrigerator. A fifth-grade student gave the picture to Grace. The picture showed Jesus’ cross with the words from John 3:16. Grace said, “You died for us, Jesus. Because You did that, You really are loving. I can trust You, even if I don’t have answers to all my questions.”

Grace Babcock teaches at the Holbrook Seventh-day Adventist Indian School. Your 13th Sabbath Offering helped support this school, in 2021. Thank you for continuing to support the Good News about Jesus with this quarter’s 13th Sabbath Offering.

INSIDE Story

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



When Grace looked up, she saw a picture from a coloring book on her refrigerator.



Grace Babcock

Free Choice, Love, and God's Power



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 15

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Psalm 81:11–14; Revelation 11:17; Matthew 22:37; Ephesians 1:9–11; John 16:33.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘I told you these things so that you can have peace in me. In this world [among people who hate God's cause] you will have trouble. But be brave! I have defeated [won the fight against] the world [the things that get in the way of God's cause and block it]!’ ” (John 16:33, ICB).



The story about the Fall, sin, and evil shows us what happens when we make bad choices.

GOD does many things to take care of His people. God's work and care for His people on this earth has a special name: providence. How we think about God's providence or care for us is important. Our thoughts and feelings about God, other people, and the problem of evil come from our understanding of God's providence.

Not all Christians believe that God wants good things for all of us. Some Christians believe that God uses His power to control everything that happens. These Christians believe God decides who will be saved and who will be lost. This idea teaches us that people aren't free to choose. People who believe this way say that God decides our feelings, not us. Compare this idea with the Bible teaching that God doesn't decide everything for us. God gives us the freedom to choose. He allows us (and angels) to choose to do things that He doesn't like or want. The story about the Fall, sin, and evil shows us what happens when we make bad choices. God made His plan to save us from the bad things that happened when humans chose the wrong things.

GOD IS IN CONTROL (Psalm 81:11–14)

The youth pastor told a group of students in middle school, “God is in control. That means God controls everything that happens.” One confused middle school student said, “So, God was in control when my dog died? Why did God kill my dog?”

The youth pastor tried to answer the question: “That’s a difficult question. Sometimes God lets hard times happen to us to help us be ready for more difficult things in the future. When my dog died, I was very sad. But that experience helped me later on when my grandma died. Does this example help you understand?”

After a while, the student said, “So, God killed my dog to help me get ready for the time when He’s going to kill my grandma?”—Marc Cortez, in John C. Peckham, *Divine Attributes: Knowing the Covenantal God of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), page 141, adapted.

People sometimes think that everything happens in the way God wants. They think that whatever happens in life is just what God wanted. God is all-powerful, right? How, then, can anything happen that God doesn’t want to happen? So, the bad things that happen must be part of God’s plan. That is what this belief teaches.

Read Psalm 81:11–14; Isaiah 30:15, 18; Isaiah 66:4; and Luke 13:34. What do these verses say about the things that happen? Does everything happen because God wants it to? What does the Bible really teach on this topic?

Yes, many people believe God must always get what He wants. But the Bible tells a different story. Again and again, the Bible shows God not getting what He wants. Things happen that God does not want to happen. God often announces that what is happening is not what He wants. God wants something good for His people, but they choose something different. God feels sad when He says, “ ‘But my people wouldn’t listen to me. Israel wouldn’t obey me. . . . I wish my people would listen to me! I wish Israel would live as I want them to live! Then I would quickly [very fast] bring their enemies under control’ ” (Psalm 81:11, 13, 14, NIV).

Think about the teaching that everything that happens is what God wants. How does this idea, then, explain evil?



God wants something good for His people, but they choose something different.

OUR ALL-POWERFUL GOD (Revelation 11:17)

The Bible shows us that God is very powerful. The Bible includes stories about God doing miracles. Even so, many things happen that God doesn't want to happen.

Read Revelation 11:17; Jeremiah 32:17–20; Luke 1:37; and Matthew 19:26. Think also about Hebrews 1:3. What do these verses teach us about how God is very powerful?



Jesus also prayed to God the Father before He was nailed to the cross, “‘My Father, if it can be, let this cup of trouble pass [be removed] by [from] me’ ” (Matthew 26:39, WE).

These verses and other ones teach us that God is all-powerful. He keeps everything going with His power. The book of Revelation again and again names God the “Lord God All-Powerful” (Revelation 11:17, ERV; compare with 2 Corinthians 6:18; Revelation 1:8; Revelation 16:14; Revelation 19:15; Revelation 21:22). The word written as “Lord God All-Powerful” is “**pantokrator**” in the Greek language. “**Pantokrator**” means “all-powerful.” God shows He is all-powerful when God saves His people or does a miracle.

When we say that God is “all-powerful,” we don’t mean that God can do everything. The Bible teaches us that there are some things God can’t do. 2 Timothy 2:13 says that God “cannot go against what He is” (NLV).

Most Christians agree that God is all-powerful. God can’t do anything that is false. Some things aren’t possible for God because if He did these things, He would not be true to Himself. We learn about this idea in Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus said, “ ‘God can do anything’ ” (Matthew 19:26, ERV). Jesus also prayed to God the Father before He was nailed to the cross, “ ‘My Father, if it can be, let this cup of trouble pass [be removed] by [from] me. But do not do what I want. May what you want be done’ ” (Matthew 26:39, WE).

Of course, the Father had the power to save Jesus from suffering on the cross. But God could not do that while also saving sinners. God had to choose to do one or the other, not both.

The Bible also teaches that God wants to save everyone (read 1 Timothy 2:4–6; Titus 2:11; 2 Peter 3:9; Ezekiel 33:11). Not everyone will be saved. What does this Bible truth teach us about our free choice and the limits of God’s power in our lives?

TO LOVE GOD (Matthew 22:37)

As we saw already, God is all-powerful. But that doesn't mean that God can do something that goes against Himself. So, God can't make someone decide to love Him. When we choose to do something without anyone forcing us, we are making a free choice. So, we can't **force** anyone to love us. God can't force anyone to love Him. When love is forced, then love is no longer love.

Read Matthew 22:37 and Deuteronomy 6:4, 5. What do these verses teach us about our free choice?

The most important commandment is proof that God does want everyone to love Him. But not everyone loves God. So, why doesn't God **make** everyone love Him? That answer is that love must be freely given, or love can't be love.

Read Hebrews 6:17, 18 and Titus 1:2. What do these verses teach us about God?

Numbers 23:19 says, “ ‘God is not a man. He will not lie’ ” (ICB). God never lies (Titus 1:2). God always does what He says He will do. God never breaks a promise (Hebrews 6:17, 18). If God promises something, then that promise limits God's future actions.

What does this mean? God gives us the freedom to choose. So, what we choose isn't up to God. People can make choices that go against God's wishes and plan. Sad to say, many people do make choices that go against God. That's why many things happen that God doesn't want.

Think of a time when you did something that you knew God didn't want you to do. What does this experience teach you about our freedom, as humans, to choose?



**Love must be freely given,
or love can't be love.**

GOD'S PERFECT PLAN AND HIS CORRECTIVE PLAN (Ephesians 1:9–11)



God's corrective plan
is God's wish for our lives
when we don't
follow His perfect plan.

Read Ephesians 1:9–11. What are these verses saying about who is saved and who is lost? Does the Bible teach that God chooses to save some people and not other people?

Do you see the words written as “already planned” (ERV) or “already chosen” (ICB) in Ephesians 1:11? These words come from the Greek word “**prohorizo**.” This word does not teach that God decides what will happen in history before it happens. “**Prohorizo**” means “to make a decision before something happens.”

Of course, someone can make a decision without caring about what other people think or want. Or someone can decide to do something in a way that respects the free decisions of other people. When God decides to do something, He respects the decisions that other people made.

The Greek word written as “already chosen” shows us what God plans for the future after He shows respect for the free decisions of people. So, God can guide history in a way that is best for everyone. At the same time, He respects the freedom He gives us. Without this freedom, God can't have a real love relationship with us.

Ephesians 1:11 announces that God “decided to choose us long ago in keeping with his plan” (NIV). Does this verse mean that God decides everything to happen the way He wants? If we read this verse alone, we may think it is teaching this idea. But this belief would go against many of the verses we saw earlier that show that people sometimes reject God's plan (Luke 7:30; compare with Luke 13:34; Psalm 81:11–14). If the Bible doesn't lie, how can these verses say something that goes against what the Bible says about this topic elsewhere?

Ephesians 1:11 is easy to understand if we know that God has two plans for our lives: His perfect plan and His corrective plan. God's perfect plan for our lives is what God wishes to happen for us from the beginning. This plan is the one that would happen if everyone always did what God wanted. God's corrective plan is God's wish for our lives when we don't follow His perfect plan. God puts this plan into action to help save us. Ephesians 1:11 is talking about God's corrective plan.

JESUS WINS THE FIGHT FOR US (John 16:33)

If everything happened the way God wanted, there would be no evil. Perfect love and peace would fill the earth. Jesus will make this happen in the future. But for now, God works out His plan in a way that respects the free choices of people.

Imagine in your mind a baking contest or match. All the bakers must use the same basic ingredients. They can add anything to the mix they want to make any cake they want to make. In the end, whatever cake a baker makes comes from, at least in part, some things in the mixture that he didn't choose.

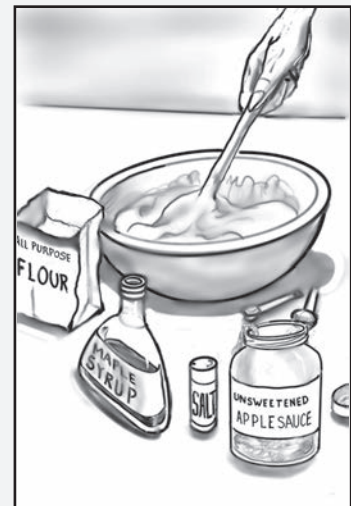
In the same way, God respects our freedom. This freedom is necessary for our love. Many of the things that happened in history weren't God's choices.

In this view, God doesn't control everything that happens. God causes some things in this life to happen. Other things happen because of the free choices that we make. Many things happen that God doesn't want to happen.

Read John 16:33. What hope does this verse offer us during hard times or when we are suffering?

People's faith often grows weak because they believe the false teaching that God will or should keep them from suffering or hard times. But Jesus tells us a very different story. Jesus warns His followers that they will have much trouble in this life. But there is hope. Jesus won the war against evil (John 16:33).

Yes, we may suffer or have troubles. But these things do not mean that suffering and trouble are part of God's perfect plan for us. We always must remember the worldwide war between good and evil. We know that evil is not necessary for good to happen. At the same time, we know that God can bring good out of evil happenings. If we trust God, He can use our sufferings to bring us closer to Him and to help us to be more loving and caring for other people.



In the end, whatever cake a baker makes comes from, at least in part, some things in the mixture that he didn't choose.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “ ‘God With Us,’ ” pages 19–26, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“God’s plan to save us was not something He thought about after Adam sinned. God’s saving plan was ‘the secret truth that was hidden for ages and ages but has been made known.’ Romans 16:25 [ERV]. This plan showed the important rules of God’s government. From the beginning, God and Jesus knew Satan would fall and cause people to sin. God didn’t cause sin to happen. But God saw that sin would come. So, He made a plan to meet the terrible emergency. God loved humans so much that He promised to give His one and only Son, Jesus. ‘Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal [everlasting] life.’ John 3:16 [NIRV].”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 22, adapted.



“From the beginning, God and Jesus knew Satan would fall and cause people to sin.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① God doesn’t always get what He wants. How does this Bible truth change the way you think about what happens in this life? What does it mean for you personally that God doesn’t always get what He wants?
- ② God and Jesus “knew Satan would fall and cause people to sin.” But they went ahead and made humans anyway. God also made us free to love. God knew that giving us this freedom of choice would send Jesus to the cross. Jesus went to the cross for us so that we could be free to love. What does this Bible truth tell us about how important and holy love is to God’s government?
- ③ Often, we can’t understand why we must suffer. Or we can’t see how our suffering can lead to any good. But many things happen in this life that aren’t part of God’s plan. How does this Bible truth help you to understand your own suffering better?

FROM A DANCE PARTY TO CHURCH

Nelson was born in Colombia. As a young boy, Nelson was too young to go to rumba. Rumba was a party with music, dancing, and drinking. Nelson knew something was wrong when his parents took him to church on December 31 and then left him home so they could celebrate New Year's Eve at a rumba party.

In Colombia, Christians went to church on New Year's Eve Day to give their lives to God. Then they went to rumba to celebrate the New Year. Yes, Nelson was a little boy, but he understood that church was a holy place. But rumba was not holy because people celebrated it in bars and nightclubs. Nelson wondered, "Why does my family go to church to become holy and then go to rumba to remove God from their hearts?"

Nelson asked his mother, "Why do you go to church and then to rumba?"

Nelson's mother didn't answer.

When Nelson grew up, he stopped going to church. He started to play music at rumba parties. Nelson was an excellent accordion player. He wanted to become a famous musician.

Then Nelson met his future wife, Laura. Laura used to be a Seventh-day Adventist.

Laura told Nelson, "Did you know that the dead are not in heaven?" Nelson didn't like Laura's ideas. But he liked her. So, they stayed together.

After some time, Laura started to go to church again. She also invited Nelson to meet her parents. At their first meeting, Laura's dad surprised Nelson when they sat down to eat. Laura's dad said, "Let's thank God for the food." Nelson never prayed before he ate a meal. Nelson became friends with Laura's dad. Soon, Nelson started to pray before he ate. Nelson also started to go to church with Laura. Nelson didn't enjoy church at first because he thought it was strange to worship at church on Saturdays. But then Nelson read the fourth commandment, in Exodus 20:8–11. Nelson understood that God commanded people to keep the 7th day holy. Nelson wanted to be holy.

Today, Nelson Silva, 30, is an Adventist musician who no longer plays the accordion at rumba. Now, Nelson plays in restaurants and at birthday parties. Nelson tells people about God's mercy and prays for them. He and a group of church musicians play music on public buses.

Pray for the Good News to be shared with people everywhere. Thank you for your offerings that help us share the Good News with people who don't know about Jesus. Watch a YouTube video of Nelson playing the accordion at: www.bit.ly/Nelson-Silva.

INSIDE
Story
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



Nelson and a group of church musicians play music on public buses.



Nelson Silva

The Worldwide War Between Good and Evil



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 22

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 13:24–27; Genesis 1:31; Ezekiel 28:12–19; Matthew 4:1–11; John 8:44, 45.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘I will make you and the woman enemies to each other. Your children and her children will be enemies. You will bite her child's foot, but he will crush [destroy] your head’ ” (Genesis 3:15, ERV).



The books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are filled with verses about the devil and demons who fight against God.

AN IMPORTANT BIBLE TEACHING is the worldwide war between God and Satan. This war is fought between God and the angels who sinned against Him. We may read about this idea all through the Bible (Matthew 13:24–30, 37–39; Revelation 12:7–10). This idea also is an important part of Christian history. Sad to say, many Christians today reject or pay no attention to this whole idea.

But the Bible teaches that the devil and his angels fight against God's kingdom. We must pay attention to this important topic. If we don't, we will not understand what the Bible stories are really all about. The books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are filled with verses about the devil and demons who fight against God.

This week, we will use the Bible to answer two important questions:

1. Where in the Bible can you find the teaching about the worldwide war between good and evil?
2. What is this war all about?

AN ENEMY DID THIS EVIL THING (Matthew 13:24–27)

Read the picture story in Matthew 13:24–27. How does this story help us understand why there is evil on this planet?

Jesus tells the story about a landowner who plants good wheat seeds in his field. But weeds grow with the wheat. When the servants of the landowner see the weeds, they ask him, “ ‘You planted good seed in your field. Where did the weeds come from?’ ” (Matthew 13:27, ERV). Many people ask the same question today about the problem with evil: “If God made this earth and everything in it holy, why is there evil in it?”

Read Matthew 13:28–30, along with Jesus’ explanation in Matthew 13:37–40. How do these verses help us understand the worldwide war between good and evil?

The landowner answers his servants’ question: “ ‘An enemy planted weeds’ ” (Matthew 13:28, ERV). Jesus later says that the one who plants the good seed is the Son of Man. The Son of Man is Jesus Himself (Matthew 13:37). Jesus also explains that the field is a word picture for this planet (Matthew 13:38). The enemy who planted the weeds is the devil (Matthew 13:39). The word pictures in these verses show the worldwide war between God and Satan. Why is there evil on this planet? Evil came because of the enemy, the devil, who fights against the landowner, or God. That’s what Jesus means when He says that an enemy planted weeds.

The landowner’s answer causes his servants to ask another question: “ ‘Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds?’ ” (Matthew 13:28, ERV). In other words, why not pull up the evil right away? The landowner answered, “ ‘No, because when you pull up the weeds, you might also pull up the wheat. Let the weeds and the wheat grow together until the harvest time [when crops are collected]. At the harvest time I will tell the workers this: First, gather [collect] the weeds and tie them together to be burned. Then gather the wheat and bring it to my barn’ ” (Matthew 13:29, 30, ERV; compare with Mark 4:29). The picture story teaches us that God will finally end evil forever. But destroying evil too soon would cause trouble and hurt the good wheat.



**The landowner answers his servants’ question:
“ ‘An enemy
planted weeds’ ”
(Matthew 13:28, ERV).**

**THE START OF THE WORLDWIDE WAR ON EARTH
(Genesis 1:31)**

Another important question about evil is: If God made the earth and skies good, how did evil start here?

Read Genesis 1:31. What do God's words show us about the earth and skies when God finished making them? Why is this answer important?

Genesis 1:31 says that when God finished making the earth, it was "very good" (ERV). In Genesis 1, no evil is anywhere on this planet. How, then, did evil become part of the human experience?

Read Genesis 3:1–7. What do these verses tell us about how evil got here on earth? How does this answer help us better understand the worldwide war between good and evil? (Also read Revelation 12:7–9.)



Here in Genesis and elsewhere in the Bible, the worldwide war between God and Satan is about what to believe.

In this story, the snake tells lies about God. The snake is a word picture for the devil himself (Revelation 12:7–9). The snake first uses a question to cause Eve to doubt God's command. Then the snake attacks what God said when he says to Eve, " 'You will not die' " (Genesis 3:4, ERV).

Someone, the snake or God, lied to Eve. Eve now has a choice to make. Will she believe what God told her? Or will she believe what the snake said?

Here in Genesis and elsewhere in the Bible, the worldwide war between God and Satan is about what to believe. Will we believe God's truth or Satan's lies? Also, this war is really about love. That's because your beliefs and knowledge about someone help you to know if you can trust, love, and listen to this person.

Read Genesis 3:15. God tells the snake that a future Son of the woman will be the Savior. The Savior will destroy the snake's head. Bible thinkers name this promise the first example of the Good News about Jesus in the Bible. How does this promise help us better understand the worldwide war between God and Satan? Also, how does this promise give us hope?

THE WAR STARTS IN HEAVEN (Ezekiel 28:12–19)

Genesis 1–3 shows us that there was evil **before** Adam and Eve sinned. “Evil” already appeared in the name of the tree of the knowledge about good and evil (Genesis 2:9, 17). At this tree, the snake accuses God of lying when the snake is really the liar. The snake (Revelation 12:9) and his lies show the evil that is in his heart. So, before the Fall happened in Eden, there was evil.

Read about Lucifer’s fall in Ezekiel 28:12–19. Also read Exodus 25:19, 20. Why does Lucifer fall?

Ezekiel 28:12–19 tells us how evil started and how the worldwide war between God and Satan began in heaven.

Before Lucifer fell and became Satan, he was a mighty angel. The Bible also tells us that he was “an example of what was perfect. You were full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You had a wonderful life . . . in Eden, the garden of God” (Ezekiel 28:12, 13, ICB). The king of Tyre did not live in Eden. As a sinner, the king of Tyre wasn’t perfect. So, these verses can’t be talking about the real king of Tyre (or any other human). The king of Tyre is a word picture for Lucifer. So, in these verses, we are really reading about the fall of Lucifer.

Read Isaiah 14:12–15. What extra information do these verses give us about the worldwide war between good and evil?

In Isaiah 14, Lucifer decided to make himself the same as God. Isaiah 14 adds more information to what we read about Lucifer in Ezekiel 28. Lucifer’s heart was filled with pride because of his beauty (Ezekiel 28:17). Lucifer didn’t worship the God who made him beautiful. Lucifer tried to replace God with himself. Lucifer lied about God. The Hebrew word in Ezekiel 28:16 for “trading” (NLV) or “traded” (ICB) means to talk bad about somebody and say false things about that person. This word shows us how Satan will work against God and His people in the end times.



Lucifer’s heart was filled with pride because of his beauty (Ezekiel 28:17).

IF YOU WORSHIP ME (Matthew 4:1–11)

The Spirit led Jesus into the desert so that the devil could try to get Him to sin (Matthew 4:1).

As we saw yesterday, Satan wanted to remove God and replace Him with himself. We see this same evil plan in stories in Matthew 4 and Luke 4. In these chapters, Satan tries to get Jesus to sin. We learn a lot about the worldwide war between God and Satan in these chapters.

Read Matthew 4:1–11. How is the worldwide war between God and Satan shown in these verses?

The Spirit led Jesus into the desert so that the devil could try to get Him to sin (Matthew 4:1). Before Jesus met with Satan, He ate no food for 40 days. Jesus was very hungry. So, when the devil came, he tried to get Jesus to change the stones into bread. Jesus fought the devil with Bible verses, and Satan's plan failed.

Next, Satan tried to get Jesus to throw Himself off the top of the temple. Satan tried to make the Bible say something that it didn't promise. Satan told Jesus that if He was truly God's Son, angels would protect Him if He jumped. But Jesus used Bible verses to fight against Satan and his lies.

The third time Satan tried to get Jesus to sin shows us what he was trying to do. Satan wants Jesus to worship him. Satan tries to steal the worship that belongs to God.

To get Jesus to worship him, Satan "led Jesus to the top of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of [on] the world [earth] and all the wonderful things in them. The devil said, 'If you will bow down and worship me, I will give you all these things' " (Matthew 4:8, 9, ERV). We can read the same story in Luke 4. In Luke 4:6, the devil says to Jesus, " 'I will give you all these kingdoms and all their power and glory. It has all been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I wish' " (ICB).

Again, Jesus fights against the devil with Bible verses. Again, Satan loses the fight.

In all three examples, Jesus uses the Bible to fight against the enemy.

Ephesians 6:12 tells us about our real enemies. We are fighting against evil spirits. But we must not live in fear. Jesus will help us win. At the same time, why must we always remember what is really going on around us?

WHAT THE WORLDWIDE WAR IS ALL ABOUT (John 8:44, 45)

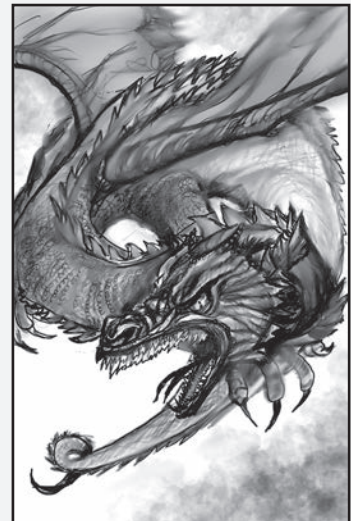
How can God and Satan have a war against each other? If God and Satan war against each other about power, the war would be finished in one minute. That's because Satan can't beat God. So, the war must be about something else. The Bible shows us that the war is about God and His government. Satan says that God is not fully good and loving. God can't destroy these lies with power. So, God must compare His government with Satan's to show how the two governments are different.

"When God fights against sin, He can only use Bible truth and His holy law. Satan can use what God can't use: lies and tricks. Satan tried to make the Bible say things it didn't mean. Satan also lied about God's government to the angels. Satan told the angels that God was not fair in commanding them to obey laws and rules. Satan said that God was trying to make Himself more important and powerful than He really was when He asked the angels to obey Him. So, God must show the angels in heaven and the people on all the other planets that His government was fair and that His law was perfect. Satan tried to make the angels believe that He wanted the best for everyone in heaven. God must show everyone Satan's real plan. So, God gave Satan time to show who he was by all the evil things he did."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 498, adapted.

Read John 8:44, 45, along with Revelation 12:7–9. What do these verses show us about the devil and his plan?

The devil's plan from the start was to try to make people believe that God wasn't really fair and loving. Satan also wanted people to believe that God's law hurt people and made them slaves. No wonder Jesus says the devil is " 'a liar. He is the father of lies' " (John 8:44, ERV). Jesus came to " 'to tell people about the truth' " (John 18:37, ERV). Jesus came to destroy the devil's lies and, in the end, the devil himself (1 John 3:8; Hebrews 2:14).

Revelation 12:9, 10 shows that Satan is (1) the snake, (2) the one who accuses God's people, and (3) the dragon who lies to everyone. In the Greek language, the word "devil" means someone who tells lies. This word shows us that the worldwide war between good and evil is about beliefs, including what we believe about God and who He is.



Revelation 12:9, 10 shows that Satan is (1) the snake, (2) the one who accuses God's people, and (3) the dragon who lies to everyone.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “The Origin of Evil,” pages 492–504, in *The Great Controversy*.



“For the good of heaven for all ages to come, Satan must be allowed to fully show the rules of his government.”

“The Bible teaches very clearly that God did not make sin. Sin did not start in heaven because of something God did. Sin didn’t start because there was something wrong with God’s government. Sin is an enemy. No reason can be given for sin. Sin is a mystery. No one can explain it. If we could give a reason for sin, then that is the same as making an excuse for sin. . . . What if God destroyed Satan right away? Then the angels in heaven and the people on other planets would serve God with fear and not with love. Satan’s power would continue and not be fully destroyed. Other angels would continue to fight against God. For the good of heaven for all ages to come, Satan must be allowed to fully show the rules of his government. Then everyone will see that God’s government was good and fair. They would see that God’s mercy and His law should forever be trusted and obeyed.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pages 492, 493, 499, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Many people wonder how Lucifer, a perfect angel, could sin for the first time. Why is sin a mystery? Why can’t we excuse sin? How can we explain this first sin without making an excuse? Why would trying to give a reason for how this first sin started be the same as making it okay?
- ② Why didn’t God destroy Satan right away? Why must evil be allowed to grow and show itself for what it really is? How is this plan for the good of everyone in heaven and on earth for all ages to come?
- ③ Why is it so important to understand that the worldwide war between God and Satan is not about power and might? What type of war is it? How does a conflict about God’s government, His law, and His love help us understand what this war is all about?
- ④ In what ways does your own life show the worldwide war between God and Satan? How should you behave to show whose side you are on?

THE DOCTOR WHO DIDN'T GIVE UP: PART 1

Matrona couldn't get the Zoom call with Dr. Colette Reahl to work.

Matrona told Colette on the phone, "The Zoom call is not working!" Matrona typed and retyped the Zoom password on her computer.

Matrona was one of many Indian orphan children living in Alaska. Matrona wanted to talk with Colette, but the Zoom call didn't work.

Colette said, "It's OK."

Matrona said, "It's not OK! I want to try again."

When the Zoom call didn't work again, Colette suggested that they talk on the phone instead of on Zoom.

Colette Reahl was a Seventh-day Adventist and a children's doctor. Colette was born in Florida, but she had lived in Anchorage, Alaska, for eight years with her husband. Now Colette wanted to adopt a child. So, Colette was excited about getting to know Matrona.

Matrona agreed to talk on the phone. The first question Matrona asked Colette was, "What rules do you have in your house?"

Colette said, "That is something we can talk about more when you get to the house. But respect is important in my home."

Matrona asked Colette many questions for the next 30 minutes. At the end of the conversation, Matrona said, "Did you know that the lady who takes care of me now plans to adopt me?"

Colette did not know that. She thought, "Matrona is so interesting. She has such a big personality, too!"

Matrona knew that Colette wanted to adopt a child. But Matrona didn't want to get hurt. So, she didn't let Colette get too close to her heart.

Colette asked Matrona how often she could call her. Matrona said only one time each week, on Tuesdays. But when Colette called, Matrona didn't answer or wasn't at home. So, Colette and Matrona changed the time to Thursdays, and then to Saturdays.

Colette understood that Matrona was upset about something, but she didn't understand why. Colette decided to keep calling every week anyway, even if Matrona didn't want to talk to her. As Colette kept calling, Matrona started to trust that Colette really cared about her.

Dr. Colette Reahl is a leader at the Bethel (Alaska) Seventh-day Adventist Church. Last year, Bethel Church got part of a 13th Sabbath Offering. Your 13th Sabbath Offering will help us continue to share the Good News with people everywhere. Read more about Colette and Matrona next week.

INSIDE
Story

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY

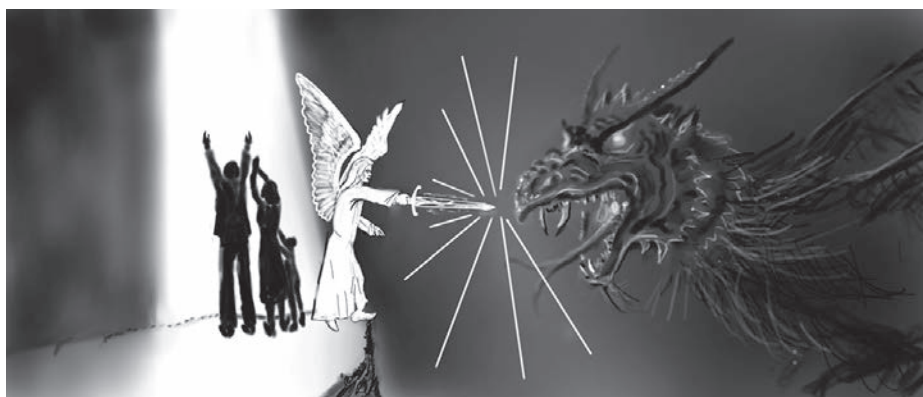


"The Zoom call is not working!" Matrona typed and retyped the Zoom password on her computer.



Dr. Colette Reahl and Matrona

Rules for War



SABBATH—MARCH 1

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Daniel 10:1–14; Revelation 13:1–8; Job 1:1–12; John 12:31; Mark 6:5.

MEMORY VERSE: “The person who keeps on sinning belongs to the devil. The devil has sinned from the beginning. But the Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8, NLV).



**The false “gods”
that non-Jews worshiped
were really demons.**

1 KINGS 18:19–40 is a powerful story. This story shows us what the worldwide war between God and Satan is all about. In this story, Elijah goes to Mount Carmel to help God win a fight against evil. Here, God wins a contest against the foreign gods that King Ahab and Queen Jezebel worship. Who were these gods? Were they make believe? Behind these “gods” that the non-Jews worshiped was something else.

The Bible gives the answer: “The people sacrificed [gave gifts] to those false gods, not to God. They hadn’t known [didn’t know] anything about those false gods. Those gods were new to them. Their people of long ago didn’t worship them” (Deuteronomy 32:17, NIV). Paul explains, “When food is sacrificed [offered] to idols, it is an offering to demons, not to God. And I don’t want you to share anything with demons” (1 Corinthians 10:20, ERV).

So, the false “gods” that non-Jews worshiped were really demons. This information helps us to understand better the worldwide war between God and Satan and the problem with evil.

THE ANGEL WHO WAS DELAYED (Daniel 10:1–14)

Read Daniel 10:1–14. Pay special attention to verses 12, 13. What do these verses teach us about the worldwide war between God and Satan? The angel tells Daniel that “the prince of Persia opposed [fought against] me for 21 days” (Daniel 10:13, NlrV). What does the angel mean when he says “opposed” or fought against?

How can anyone fight against an angel from God for three whole weeks?! God is all-powerful. He chose to answer Daniel right away. God had the power to make an angel appear to Daniel right away, too. But the angel from God met with trouble. The prince of Persia fought against him for three whole weeks. How is that possible?

“For three weeks, the angel Gabriel fought against evil powers. These evil angels tried to stop God’s work with King Cyrus. . . . God did everything He could do to help His people. God won the fight. God stopped the evil angels from doing anything bad to His people during the time of King Cyrus and during the time his son Cambyses was in control.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 572, adapted.

This fight between Gabriel and the evil angels happened because God wasn’t using all His power to stop it. Why not? God must allow Satan to be free to work. At the same time, God limits Satan’s actions. So, this story shows us that in the worldwide war between God and Satan there are rules. God made the rules. We will name these rules the rules for war. These rules say what Satan can and can’t do.

As we already saw, God does everything because of love. Love is the foundation of His government. That is why God puts limits on the things Satan can and can’t do. These ideas help us better understand the worldwide war between God and Satan.

Think of a time when you worked with a difficult person, whose heart was filled with anger or hate. Maybe this person was mean and nasty to you. But you showed them love. What did this experience teach you about the limits of power and what you can and can’t do as a Christian?



This fight between Gabriel and the evil angels happened because God wasn’t using all His power to stop it.

THE DRAGON IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION (Revelation 13:1–8)



The wild animal from the sea “was given a mouth which spoke words full of pride and it spoke very bad things against the Lord.”

The book of Revelation tells us more about the powers in the worldwide war between God and Satan. In this war, the devil is the same as the big red dragon who fights against God. The dragon “fooled [tried to trick] the whole world [everyone on earth] (Revelation 12:9, NLV).

Read Revelation 13:1–8. What do these verses teach us about how much control the dragon has?

As we saw, the dragon (Satan) wars against God (Revelation 12:7–9) and His servants (read Revelation 12:1–6 for an example). The dragon is the power behind the kings who hurt God’s people all through history.

The dragon shares his control with the wild animal from the sea. This wild animal is a symbol of a kingdom. The Bible says, “The dragon gave this wild animal his own power and his own throne as king” (Revelation 13:2, NLV; compare with Revelation 13:5; Revelation 17:13, 14). The wild animal from the sea “was given a mouth which spoke words full of pride and it spoke very bad things against the Lord. It was given much power for forty-two months” (Revelation 13:5, NLV).

So, Satan (the dragon) gives power and control to a wild animal (a word picture for a religious kingdom on this earth). The wild animal steals worship that belongs to God. The wild animal lies about God and wars against Him. The wild animal also hurts God’s people for hundreds of years during the Dark Ages. The dragon gives this worldwide power control over the earth. The dragon stole this power from God.

But God puts limits on Satan and the wild animal power. That’s why the Bible says, “ ‘So be happy, you heavens and all who live there! But it will be terrible for the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you! He is filled with anger. He knows that he does not have much time’ ” (Revelation 12:12, ICB).

Satan “knows his time is short” (Revelation 12:12, NIV). The happenings in the book of Revelation show certain limits to Satan’s power (read Revelation 12:14; Revelation 13:5). In the end, God wins. Then “God will wipe every tear from their eyes. No one will die. No one will ever [anymore] cry or be sad for any reason. No one will ever have trouble. The old things are gone” (Revelation 21:4, WE).

JOB (Job 1:1–12)

The book of Job gives us some interesting information about the worldwide war between God and Satan.

Read Job 1:1–12 and Job 2:1–7. What important rules about the worldwide war between God and Satan do we read about in these verses?

We can learn many important things from these verses. First, a meeting is happening in heaven between God and Satan. Angels and people from other planets are also at the meeting.

Second, God asks Satan what he thinks about Job. That question tells us that Satan is arguing with God about something. Why does God ask Satan this question? We understand why God asks the question when we learn more about what Satan is arguing with God about.

Third, God announces that Job is holy and obeys God. Satan says that Job obeys God because God protects him. Satan's words are lies about Job and God (compare with Revelation 12:10; Zechariah 3).

Fourth, Satan says that God's protection of Job isn't fair. Satan says this protection stops him from showing everyone in heaven that he is right that God does not give everyone free choice. Satan's words show us that God puts limits on Satan (the rules for war), and that Satan tried to hurt Job.

God answers Satan at the meeting in heaven. God allows Satan time to show that what he says about Him is correct. Satan is allowed to give Job a test. But there are limits to the things Satan can do to Job. God gives Satan permission to destroy everything Job owns. But Satan must not hurt Job (Job 1:12). Later, after Satan says that Job cares about no one but himself, God allows Satan to hurt Job. But Satan must not kill Job (Job 2:3–6).

Satan causes terrible troubles and disasters to happen to Job and his family. Each time something bad happens, Job continues to bless God's name (Job 1:20–22; Job 2:9, 10). When Job blesses God, he shows that Satan's words against God are lies.

We learn many things from this story. We learn that there are rules for fighting in the worldwide war between God and Satan. There are limits, too, to what Satan can do. God also has limits. His love limits what He may do to show that He is innocent and to show that Satan is guilty.



When Job blesses God, he shows that Satan's words against God are lies.

THE ONE WHO CONTROLS THIS EARTH FOR A SHORT TIME (John 12:31)



The rules for war limit both Satan's actions and God's.

As we saw already, God gives Satan and his followers control over some of the things that happen on this earth. God allows Satan this control for a short time. The rules for war limit Satan's control.

The rules for war limit both Satan's actions and God's. God is limited for a time in the way that He can solve the problem of evil that Satan causes and controls. The Lord agreed to follow the rules for war. The Lord can't break His promises. So, because of the rules, the Lord must permit Satan some limited control of the earth for a short time.

Read John 12:31; John 14:30; John 16:11; 2 Corinthians 4:4; and Luke 4:6. What do these verses teach about Satan's control over this earth?

The New Testament tells us about the fight between two kingdoms: the kingdom of light and the kingdom of the dark. Satan controls the kingdom of the dark. Part of Jesus' job is to destroy Satan's kingdom: "The person who keeps on sinning belongs to the devil. The devil has sinned from the beginning. But the Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8, NLV).

Yes, Jesus came to destroy Satan's works. At the same time, the rules for war limit what God can do. God must honor the rules of His government. The rules that limit God include (1) the freedom God gives to everyone to decide and (2) the rules for war that God and Satan agreed to. For now, these rules are secret. As humans, we don't know fully what these rules are. What we do know is that the rules that limit God's actions have a big part in what God can do to reduce and/or destroy evil on this earth. That is why many people doubt God or His love. So, we need to understand that a worldwide war between God and Satan is being fought. We also must understand that God puts limits on how He solves the problem of evil. Then we can better understand why things are the way they are right now.

Jesus says that Satan is the "king" of this earth, at least for now. How does this information help us understand the evil that is on this earth now? We should be happy knowing that Satan's control will end soon!

LIMITS AND RULES (Mark 6:5)

The worldwide war between Christ and Satan is a fight about God's love and who He is. Satan started the fight when He said God and His government weren't good or fair. The worldwide war between Christ and Satan is the same as there being a court case in heaven.

This court case can't be solved with might or strength. Satan and God must offer proof to show who is correct.

If someone accuses a person in power of crimes, the best (and maybe only) way to show that the person is innocent is to hold a trial. This trial must be fair.

How do all these ideas help us better understand the worldwide war between God and Satan? Let us answer this question with another question. If God makes a promise, will He break it? Of course not! So, whatever rules God agrees to will limit His actions in the future.

Read Mark 6:5 and Mark 9:29. What do these verses show us about how God's actions are connected to our prayers and our faith?

In both verses in Mark, we see some limits or rules for war. Our prayers and faith can give God permission to do certain things that He couldn't do if we didn't ask. Every day we can see proof that prayer changes things on this earth. But we shouldn't think that prayer and faith are the only things that give God permission to act. There may be other things we don't know about.

Read Romans 8:18 and Revelation 21:3, 4. We don't know many things. How do these verses give you hope that we can trust that God knows and wants what is best for us anyway?



Our prayers and faith can give God permission to do certain things that He couldn't do if we didn't ask.



“2 Corinthians 11:14 says we shouldn’t be surprised that ‘the devil makes himself look like [the same as] an angel of light’ [NLV].”

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “The Power of Satan,” pages 341–347, in *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 1.

“Sinners are Satan’s prisoners. They are under his control because they broke God’s law. Jesus came to save sinners from Satan. As sinners, we want to follow Satan’s advice. We can’t stand against Satan’s power without Jesus. Jesus must live in our hearts. Jesus must control our feelings and give us strength. Satan goes everywhere on the earth. He doesn’t sleep for a moment. He doesn’t want to lose a chance to destroy people. God’s people must understand this important Bible truth. If we do, we may escape Satan’s traps. Satan is getting his lies and tricks ready. His final fight against God’s people will be to trick them into not knowing who he really is. 2 Corinthians 11:14 says we shouldn’t be surprised that ‘the devil makes himself look like [the same as] an angel of light.’ [NLV]. Some people are fooled and tricked into believing that Satan isn’t real. While they believe this lie, Satan makes them his prisoners. Then Satan uses them to do his work. Satan knows better than God’s people that they can have much power over him when Jesus gives them strength. When we ask Jesus for help, Jesus will give us the strength to say no to Satan. Then the weakest Christian can win the fight against Satan and all his followers. Satan is too sneaky to appear to us in person and try to get us to sin against God. If Satan did that, the Christian would see the danger he was in. So, Satan comes to us in a way that is very sneaky. He uses Christians who don’t obey God to lead God’s loyal followers away from Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 1, page 341, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① We are Satan’s prisoners. What does that mean? Can Satan do anything he wants to us? How is our being Satan’s prisoners connected with the rules for war in the worldwide war between God and Satan?
- ② Why does God give Satan any control in the worldwide war between good and evil? What does God’s decision tell us about how He chooses to answer Satan’s lies?
- ③ What can you say to help someone who doesn’t believe that Satan is real?

THE DOCTOR WHO DIDN'T GIVE UP: PART 2

Dr. Colette Reahl thought that Matrona looked as tall as a giant! Matrona was a 13-year-old Indian girl from Alaska.

Four months ago, Colette talked with Matrona for the first time on the phone. Now Colette drove seven hours from Anchorage, Alaska, to Fairbanks, Alaska, to meet Matrona in person. Matrona lived at a center with 19 other girls and boys. Matrona was 5 foot 7 inches. Colette was only 5 foot 3 inches.

When Colette saw the girl, she thought, "Matrona looks the same as a giant to me. Our meeting will be interesting!"

Matrona sat on the floor in a meeting room. Matrona was shy and didn't want to talk at first.

Colette sat down on a couch near Matrona. A few minutes passed. Then Colette remembered the gift she brought for Matrona. The gift was an encyclopedia about animals. Colette opened the book and slowly started to turn the pages. Matrona was very interested in the book. She moved closer to Colette. Before long, Matrona sat right beside Colette and looked at the pictures with her.

Colette and Matrona had a pleasant first visit. Their visit was three hours long.

Colette and Matrona met again the next month. Colette gave Matrona a Bible. Colette suggested that they read the Bible together over the phone. But when Colette called, Matrona was too busy to talk on the phone.

Then Matrona moved to a new center in Anchorage. Matrona was lonely and missed her friends in Fairbanks. So, Matrona started to call Colette every day to try to get Colette to adopt her.

Meanwhile, Colette started a new job. Colette's work as a doctor in Anchorage was ending. She got ready to move to Bethel, the biggest community in the west of Alaska, with 6,000 people. Colette would work at a hospital there.

Matrona wasn't excited about the news that Colette was moving to Bethel. To Matrona, Bethel was a small village. Matrona thought that life in Bethel would be very boring.

Dr. Colette Reahl is a leader at the Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church. The church got part of a 13th Sabbath Offering, in 2024. Thank you for giving your 13th Sabbath Offering on March 29. Your offering will be used to preach the Good News worldwide. Read more about Colette and Matrona next week.

INSIDE
Story

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



Before long, Matrona sat right beside Colette and looked at the pictures with her.



Dr. Colette Reahl and Matrona

What More Could I Do?



SABBATH—MARCH 8



When we look to Jesus on the cross, we can see that we can trust God with everything we don't understand for now.

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: John 18:37; Romans 3:23–26; Isaiah 5:1–4; Matthew 21:33–39; Romans 3:1–4.

MEMORY VERSE: “Pilate said to Him, ‘So You are a King?’ Jesus said, ‘You are right [correct] when you say that I am a King. I was born for this reason. I came into the world for this reason. I came to speak about the truth. Everyone who is of [belongs to] the truth hears [obeys] My voice’ ” (John 18:37, NLV).

MANY YEARS AGO, a powerful children's story was printed in *Guide* magazine. The story is about a boy named Denis who lives during the Middle Ages. Denis is an orphan who lives with a family who takes care of him. Denis hates the king of his land. When Denis's parents were sick, the king's soldiers carried him away. Denis never saw his parents again. Later, Denis learned that the king separated Denis from his parents to protect him from a very terrible disease named the Black Death. The truth about the king made Denis free from hate. Then Denis understood that the king loved his people. He always did what was best for them.

Many people today feel about God the way Denis felt about the king. People hate God because of the evil that happens on this earth. Where is God when there is suffering? If God is good, why is there so much evil? The worldwide war between God and Satan helps us understand these important questions better. But we do not have answers for many questions. When we can't answer these questions, we can always look to Jesus on the cross. Then we can see that we can trust God with everything we don't understand for now.

JESUS THE WINNER (John 18:37)

Satan, our enemy, is hard at work. Jesus says Satan is the prince of this earth. But Satan is a prince because he stole his kingdom from Adam when Adam sinned. The real king of heaven and earth is Jesus Christ. Jesus wins the fight against Satan for us. He gives us strength and success. He gives us hope during hard times and suffering.

The Bible tells us many things about the devil. He is:

1. The one who fools and tricks the people on this earth from the beginning (Revelation 12:9; Matthew 4:3; John 8:44; 2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 John 3:8).
2. The one who talks bad about God. Satan accuses God and His people in heaven (Revelation 12:10; Revelation 13:6; Job 1–2; Zechariah 3:1, 2; Jude 9).
3. The one who stole this earth's kingdom from Adam when he sinned and who now controls many things on this planet (John 14:30; John 16:11; Acts 26:18; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2; 1 John 5:19).

Read John 18:37. What does this verse tell us about Jesus' work to stop the lies of Satan? What does it mean that Jesus is King?

In the Bible, we learn that Satan is a liar. Satan talks bad about God. He accuses God and His people. Satan stole the control of this earth away from Adam. The Bible also teaches us that Jesus is the winner over Satan in every way.

1. Jesus “‘came into the world for this reason. I came to speak about the truth’” (John 18:37, NLV).
2. Jesus showed God's perfect love (Romans 3:25, 26; Romans 5:8). When Jesus showed God's perfect love, He gave proof that the devil's words against God were lies (Revelation 12:10, 11).
3. Jesus will finally destroy the devil's kingdom. Then Jesus will be the King over heaven and earth forever and ever (Revelation 11:15). So, the devil “knows he doesn't have much time” (Revelation 12:12, ERV; compare with Romans 16:20).

In the end, Satan has already lost the war. Satan can't do anything to win the war now.



Jesus wins the fight against Satan for us.

THE ONE WHO MAKES US HOLY AND ACCEPTED WITH GOD (Romans 3:23–26)

All the time, Jesus works to stop and reverse the devil's work. 1 John 3:8 tells us that "the Son of God came . . . to destroy the devil's work" (ERV). Jesus also came to "destroy the one who has the power of death. That one is the devil" (Hebrews 2:14, ICB). Jesus will destroy Satan's control in two parts. First, Jesus will die on the cross. His death will show that Satan's words against God are lies. Second, God will destroy Satan and his kingdom later on.

Read Romans 3:23–26 and Romans 5:8. What do these verses teach us about the way Jesus destroys the lies of Satan?

As we already saw, Satan says that God is not full of mercy or love. In Jesus, God gives us proof of His mercy and love. The Cross is the proof.

After Jesus died, "Satan saw that God showed everyone who he really was. God also showed the angels in heaven the truth about Satan's government. Satan was a killer. When Satan killed Jesus, the angels stopped feeling any more pity or sorrow for Satan."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 761, adapted.



"When Satan killed Jesus, the angels stopped feeling any more pity or sorrow for Satan."

Read Revelation 12:10–12 along with Genesis 3:15. How do these verses help us understand why Jesus' win at the cross was so very important?

The history of God's plan to save us gives us more than enough proof that God always works to do what is best for everyone. God always does what is good. He works within the limits He agreed to in the worldwide war between good and evil (Deuteronomy 32:4; 1 Samuel 3:18; Psalm 145:17; Daniel 4:37; Habakkuk 1:13; Revelation 15:3; Genesis 18:25).

Why is God's love in the worldwide war between good and evil so important? Think about the Cross and everything that God did to save us. How do His works give you hope to trust in His love, even when you suffer?

THE SONG OF MY BELOVED (ISAIAH 5:1–4)

In amazing ways, God shows His love for us in the worldwide war between good and evil. But some may ask, “Should God do more than He did to prevent or remove evil?” We saw that the worldwide war between good and evil shows that God always acts in a way that respects our free choice. God respects our free choice so that we will love Him. As we saw, this free choice is necessary for a love relationship between God and humans. We also saw that God follows rules in the worldwide war between good and evil. The rules are named the rules for war. The rules for war show us how God will act and what He can and cannot do because He is a God of love.

Read Isaiah 5:1–4. Who is talking in these verses? What is Isaiah talking about? The grape field and its owner are word pictures. What do these word pictures show us? What does the owner do for his grape field? Why are these things important? What do they mean? What happens because of the things that the owner does?

In these verses, Isaiah sings a song about his beloved, who is the same as a grape field. The grape field is a word picture for God’s people (for more examples, read Isaiah 1:8 and Jeremiah 2:21). But the grape field can also be a word picture for all the people that God is trying to save everywhere on earth. The owner of the grape field is God. God did everything we could expect to make sure His field grew. The field should grow good grapes. But the field grew wild grapes. Some Bible translations say “useless” grapes that aren’t worth anything. The Hebrew word for “wild” or “useless” also can be written as “stink-fruit”! God’s grape field grew rotten grapes.

In Isaiah 5:3, God starts talking. God invites people to judge between Him and His grape field. In Isaiah 5:4, God asks an all-important question, “‘What more could I do for my vineyard [grape field]? I did everything I could. I hoped for good grapes to grow, but there were only rotten ones. Why did that happen?’ ” (ERV). What more could God do? Do you see that God asks other people to judge what He did? That is very interesting!

When you look at the Cross, think about Isaiah 5:4. What more could God do to save us than die for our sins?



**God’s grape field
grew rotten grapes.**

JESUS' PICTURE STORY ABOUT THE GRAPE FIELD (Matthew 21:33–39)

In Matthew 21, Jesus tells a picture story about an owner of a grape field. This picture story helps us remember Isaiah's song about the grape field in Isaiah 5.

Read Matthew 21:33–39 as you think about the question that God asked in Isaiah 5:4. What more could God do to save us than He already did?



**The Cross shows us
that God did everything
He could do to destroy evil
without removing
our free choice.**

The first part of Jesus' picture story is a quote from the song of Isaiah 5 about the grape field and its owner. Then, Jesus adds, the owner rented His field to some farmers and went on a trip to visit a country far away (Matthew 21:33). Two times the owner sent His servants to check on the grape field. (The servants are a word picture for God's prophets or special messengers.) The owner sent the servants to collect the grapes. But the farmers beat and killed his servants (Matthew 21:34–36). Finally, the Owner (God) sent His Son (Jesus), saying, " 'They will respect my son' " (Matthew 21:37, NKJV). "But when the farmers saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the owner's son. This vineyard [grape field] will be his. If we kill him, it will be ours.' So the farmers took the son, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him" (Matthew 21:38, 39, ERV).

What more could God do? The Father loved us so much. He gave His beloved Son to save us (John 3:16). As we already saw, the worldwide war between good and evil can't be solved with God destroying evil too soon. First, God must show that He is a God of love. God showed His love in a public way in the work of Jesus (Romans 3:25, 26; Romans 5:8). What more could we ask God than to give us His Son to die for us? God gave us His Son so that He could honor His law. Then He could accept us. He could be both fair and loving at the same time.

The Cross shows us that God did everything He could do to destroy evil without removing our free choice. Free choice is necessary for love. If God could save us any other way, don't you think He would choose it? Of course He would! People suffer much in the worldwide war between God and Satan. But God suffers the most. When we look at the Cross, we see how much God suffered because of sin. But Jesus was willing to die so that we could be free to love. That's how much Jesus respects our freedom to choose.

GOD IS INNOCENT (Romans 3:1–4)

In the end, everyone in heaven and on earth will see that God is not guilty of the things Satan says about Him. The Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit will show in Their plan to save us that God is a God of love. Then no one will doubt God's love or mercy again (read Romans 3:25, 26; Romans 5:8).

Read Romans 3:1–4, along with Isaiah 5:3, 4. What do these verses teach us about how God will be shown to be innocent in the worldwide war between good and evil?

In Romans 3 and Isaiah 5, God invites (in a limited way) people to judge who He is and what He does. No one is good enough to judge God. But God invites His people to judge His actions anyway. In the end, we will see the proof that God is fair and holy. God will show everyone in heaven and on earth that He is not guilty of the things Satan accuses Him of doing.

Read Revelation 15:3 and Revelation 19:1–6. What do these verses teach us about how God will show everyone that He is innocent in the end?

All through the Bible, God shows that He cares about His name. Why? You can't have a deep love relationship with someone you hate or don't trust. If someone told your husband or wife terrible things about you, what would you do? You'd show you were innocent, right? If your husband or wife believed those lies, the lies would destroy your relationship.

In the end, God will show that He is innocent, and that Satan lied about Him. The Cross is proof, and so is God's plan to save us. In God's work as Judge, everyone in heaven and on earth will see that God is innocent.

After we get to heaven, we will judge the lost, both humans and angels (1 Corinthians 6:2, 3). When we review the records of their lives, we will see that God isn't guilty of anything Satan said. We will see that all of God's punishments were fair, loving, and holy. For sure, we all have questions that need answering. Before we finish our work in heaven, God will answer all our questions (read 1 Corinthians 4:5).



**After we get to heaven,
we will judge the lost,
both humans and angels
(1 Corinthians 6:2, 3).**

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “The Reward of Earnest Effort,” pages 285–288, in *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 9.

“When we get to heaven, we will understand everything that confused us about God’s plan in this life. We will get an explanation for the things that are hard to understand now. God will explain the mystery of His mercy and love. Where we now see only broken promises, we shall see the most perfect plan. We shall know that God in His love gave us the experiences that seem the most difficult. We will understand that God in His tender care for us makes all things work together for our good. Then we will rejoice with joy that can’t be put into words. Our joy will be filled with praise to God.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 9, page 286, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Do you sometimes feel confused when you try to understand God’s plan for your life? What hope do you feel about God’s plan to explain everything to you in heaven?
- ② Think about everything Jesus gave up to become human and die for us. Also, think about what His decision tells us about God’s love and why we can trust God. What more could God do to save us?
- ③ What is so important about God’s name? What does your answer tell you about how important our name is as Seventh-day Adventist Christians? In what ways do Christians sometimes do things to cause people to lose respect for the name of Jesus? What can we do in our local communities to show people what following Jesus in this life is all about?
- ④ In the end, our best answers to the sin problem are not complete. What can we do now to help people who are suffering while we wait for God to show us His answers to the problem with evil?
- ⑤ Think more about Isaiah 53:4. What does it mean that Jesus carried our sorrow and pain on the cross? How does the Cross help us understand God’s saving plan?



“We will understand that God in His tender care for us makes all things work together for our good.”

THE DOCTOR WHO DIDN'T GIVE UP: PART 3

Dr. Colette Reahl hoped to bring Matrona home before the Sabbath started. Matrona was a 13-year-old Indian girl who was born in Alaska. Colette told Matrona that she was a Seventh-day Adventist. Colette wanted to get Matrona settled into her new home in Anchorage before they spent their first Sabbath together.

But the managers for the adoption center had other plans. The managers told Colette that she could take Matrona home on the Sabbath.

The day before the big move, Colette called Matrona at the adoption center in Anchorage. Colette said, "I go to church each Sabbath. Would you like to go with me?"

Matrona said, "No."

When Matrona arrived to see Colette the next morning, Matrona announced that she wanted to watch TV.

Colette said, "On Sabbaths in my house we watch Christian shows or nature programs."

Matrona was surprised. So, she asked if she could watch a TV show about wild animals.

Colette and Matrona spent the next two months in Anchorage getting to know each other. Then Matrona and Colette moved to Bethel, where Colette had a new job at a hospital. Colette and Matrona built a strong relationship during this time. They had morning and evening worship together. Matrona became a very spiritual person.

Today, Matrona is 15 years old. She loves living in Bethel, Alaska, where she is homeschooled, takes piano lessons, and has many friends. Church is also very important to Matrona.

Colette said, "God brought Matrona and me together." Colette also serves as a Bible worker and is a leader in the church.

Colette also said, "The Matrona I met on the phone is very different from the Matrona now. Matrona is a leader for the kids at church and in the community. I see God working in her life and helping her faith grow strong."

Matrona is thankful that Colette didn't stop calling her. Matrona also is thankful for Colette's love as a mother. Matrona said, "I know who God is because Colette never gave up on getting to know me."

Matrona said that God used Colette to change her life. "God led Colette to me, and me to her. God brought me to a good place and gave me peace."

This mission story offers an inside look at Bethel (Alaska) Seventh-day Adventist Church. Bethel Church got part of a 13th Sabbath Offering in 2024. Thank you for your offering on March 29 to help people learn about Jesus.

INSIDE
Story
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY

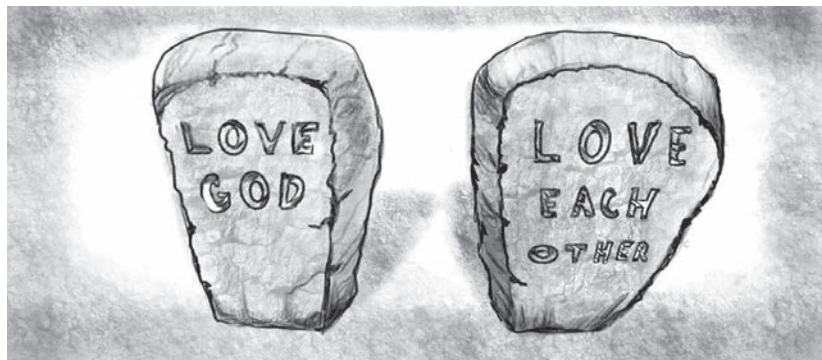


Matrona said, "I know who God is because Colette never gave up on getting to know me."



Dr. Colette Reahl and Matrona

The Two Most Important Commandments



SABBATH—MARCH 15

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 22:34–40; Psalm 135:13–19; Psalm 82; Matthew 23:23–30; Luke 10:25–37.

MEMORY VERSE: “If we say we love God but hate any of our brothers or sisters in his family, we are liars. If we don’t love someone we have seen, how can we love God? We have never even seen him” (1 John 4:20, ERV).

WE BELIEVE that God will make everything right in the end. While we wait for Jesus to come back, what we do as Christians, here and now, does matter. Yes, there are many evils that God won’t stop because of the limits on His power in the worldwide war between good and evil. But we must try to end any suffering and evil we find. Our helping people is part of our job as Christians.

As we saw already, being fair and loving can’t be separated. God loves when we are fair. If we love God, we will love to be fair, too.

Also, if we love God, we will love other people. When we love other people, we show them that we care about them and want what is best for them. When other people are suffering, hurting, hungry, or poor, we must care about their needs. We should ask ourselves what we can do, on our own and as a church, to show God’s love to other people.



We should ask ourselves what we can do, on our own and as a church, to show God’s love to other people.

**THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT COMMANDMENTS
(Matthew 22:34–40)**

If we want to show God's love to people, we first must start with doing the things God commanded us to do.

Read Matthew 22:34–40. How did Jesus answer the lawyer's question?

Jesus said, “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul [spirit], and all your mind.’ This [command] is the first and most important command. And the second command is like [the same as] the first: ‘Love your neighbor the same as you love yourself.’ All of the law and the writings of the prophets [God's special messengers] take their meaning from these two commands” (Matthew 22:37–40, ERV). Do you see that the commandments Jesus says in these verses are quotes from the Old Testament?

Read Matthew 19:16–23. How are Jesus' answers to the rich young man's questions much the same as His answers to the lawyer's question in Matthew 22?

What is going on in this story? Why did Jesus answer this young man in this way? What should we all, rich or poor, learn from this meeting?

“Jesus gave the rich young man a command that would help him become a true Christian. We may think that Jesus' words were too strict. But Jesus' words were really wise. Jesus showed the rich young man what he must do to be saved. Following and obeying these rules were the young man's only hope. His riches and power started to change his heart for the worse. If the young man continued to love his riches more and more, he would love God less and less. But what if the young man loved his riches only a little? Would he lose strength to be a good person? Yes. If we love our things more than we love God, these things will fill our hearts so fully until there's no more room for God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 520, adapted.

God may not ask us to sell everything we own. But what are you holding on to that you may need to give up? How will keeping these things cause you to lose your everlasting life if you don't let go of them?



“If we love our things more than we love God, these things will fill our hearts so fully until there's no more room for God.”

THE TWO BIGGEST SINS (Psalm 135:13–19)



What is completely different from love for God? Love for false gods, whatever those “gods” may be.

Jesus said that the two most important commandments are love for God and love for other people. When we obey these commands, we must give up things so that we may show that we love other people. When we do, we show that we understand what following Jesus is really all about.

Now, if the two most important commandments are love for God and love for other people, what are our two biggest sins?

Read Psalm 135:13–19. What do these verses teach us about a sin that we read about elsewhere in the Bible?

The Old Testament talks about how we must love God above everything else (read Deuteronomy 6:5). What is completely different from love for God? Love for false gods, whatever those “gods” may be.

Read Zechariah 7:9–12. What angers God? How is this thing and the sin of worshiping false gods connected to the two most important commandments?

God doesn't like our worship of false gods. He also doesn't want us to hurt other people. Remember, God is love. So, He becomes angry when we hurt other people or aren't fair to them.

The two biggest sins in the Old Testament are connected with the two most important commandments: to love God and to love other people. So, the two biggest sins are really failing to love as God commands us. You can't keep the commandments if you don't love God and if you don't love other people.

In 1 John 4:20, 21, we read: “If we say we love God but hate any of our brothers or sisters in his family, we are liars. If we don't love someone we have seen, how can we love God? We have never even seen him. God gave us this command: If we love God, we must also love each other as brothers and sisters” (ERV).

How do you explain to someone why our love for God can't be separated from our love for other people? How are these two ideas connected?

GOD LOVES BEING FAIR (Psalm 82)

The Bible announces that God loves being fair and hates evil (read Psalm 33:5; Isaiah 61:8). God cares deeply when we aren't fair to people. When we aren't fair and hurt other people, God gets angry. In the Old and New Testaments, God helps and defends the poor and needy. He gets angry with the people who hurt them and show them no mercy.

Read Psalm 82. How does this poem show us that God cares about our being fair in this life? What does this poem mean for us today?

Many Bible thinkers feel that Psalm 82 warns us about leaders who aren't fair. Psalm 82 also talks about the time when God will judge "the gods" who work with the evil leaders on this earth and give them power. (These gods, as we saw already, are really demons.) God asks the leaders, " 'How long will you stand up for those [evil people] who aren't fair to others [innocent people]? How long will you show mercy to sinful [filled with sin] people?' " (Psalm 82:2, NIV).

God commands these leaders to " 'defend the poor and orphans. Protect the rights [the needs] of the poor. Help those [people] who are poor and helpless [in need]. Save them from those [people] who are evil' " (Psalm 82:3, 4, ERV). In this poem and in many other Bible verses, the Old Testament writers command God's people to be fair. This message is very important. We see it in the writing of God's special messengers and in Jesus' teachings.

God does not keep secret the things He expects His followers to do. God tells us in Micah 6:8: "The Lord has told you what is good [holy]. He has told you what he wants from you: Do what is right [fair] to other people. Love being kind [nice] to others. And live humbly [with no pride in your heart], trusting your God" (ICB).

We read this same message all through the Bible. Jesus said, " 'All people will know that you are my followers if you love each other' " (John 13:35, ERV).

How would our families and churches be different if we followed Micah 6:8? How can you show this important rule in your life?



" 'Defend the poor and orphans. Protect the rights [the needs] of the poor. Help those [people] who are poor and helpless [in need]. Save them from those [people] who are evil' " (Psalm 82:3, 4, ERV).

GOD WANTS US TO BE FAIR (Matthew 23:23–30)

The prophets in the Bible were God's special messengers. The prophets told the leaders of Israel to be fair. Again and again, the Bible warns us not to hurt people and to be fair. When the prophets asked God to punish evil, they were really asking God to fill the land with leaders who were fair and showed mercy to the people.

The prophet Isaiah talks about the evil happening in Israel in his day. His message to the people was about being fair in everything they did. This message is important for us today. "Learn to do good. Look for what is right [correct] and fair. Speak strong words to those who make it hard for people. Stand up for the rights [needs] of those [people] who have no parents. Help the woman whose husband has died" (Isaiah 1:17, NLV). Isaiah also warns the leaders "who write evil laws and make life hard for the people. They are not fair to the poor" (Isaiah 10:1, 2, ERV). Then Isaiah asks these leaders, "What will you do on the day when the LORD punishes you? On that day trouble will come from far away. Who will you run to for help? Who will you trust your riches with?" (Isaiah 10:3, NIV).

In the same way, the prophet Jeremiah announces God's message. He warns that God will judge the king "who builds his palace by [with] doing evil. He cheats people so he can build its upper rooms. He is making his own people work for nothing. He is not paying them for their work. . . . Your father was satisfied [happy] to have food and drink. He did what was right [holy] and fair. So everything went well for him. He helped those who were poor and needy. So everything went well for him. That's what it means to know God," says the Lord" (Jeremiah 22:13, 15, 16, ICB).

Read Matthew 23:23–30. What are "the really important teachings of [in] the law" (verse 23, ERV) that Jesus talks about?

Jesus cared about being fair. He said, "You who pretend to be someone you are not! You give one-tenth part of your spices, and have not done the most important things of the Law, such as [like or as in the following examples] thinking what is right and wrong, and having pity and faith. These you should have done and still [continue to] have done the other things also" (Matthew 23:23, NLV).



"'Help the woman whose husband has died' " (Isaiah 1:17, NLV).

WHAT DOES THE LORD REALLY WANT? (Luke 10:25–37).

In Luke's story about Jesus, Jesus announces to a lawyer that the two most important commandments are love for God and love for our neighbor. Then the lawyer "wanted to make himself look good [holy]. So he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?' " (Luke 10:29, NIV). Jesus answers the man's question with the surprising picture story about the good Samaritan.

Read the picture story about the good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37. What are these verses saying about being fair and showing mercy?

Jesus did more than talk about being fair. Jesus lived the sermon He preached about being fair. Jesus was, and will be, the answer to His people's prayer for fair leaders (read Luke 4:16–21, along with Isaiah 61:1, 2). Jesus is the Savior that all people need.

Satan is completely different from Jesus. Satan wanted to steal God's power and His throne. But Jesus became a human so that He could help sinners who are hurting and suffering. Jesus won the fight against the enemy when He gave up His life to save us. Can we really say we are Christians if we don't care about being fair and showing mercy?

Psalm 9:8, 9 announces, "The Lord will judge the world by [with] what is right [holy and fair]. He will decide what is fair for the nations [people groups]. The Lord defends those [people] who suffer. He protects them in times of trouble" (ICB). The writer of Psalm 146:7–9 adds, "He does what is right [holy; good] for those who have been hurt. He gives food to the hungry. The LORD frees people locked up in prison. The LORD makes the blind see again. The LORD helps those [people] who are in trouble. The LORD loves those who do right [are fair]. The LORD protects strangers in our country. He cares for widows and orphans, but he destroys the wicked" (ERV).

As we see, the Bible plainly tells us that we should help people all around us who are in need and hurting.

What can we learn from Jesus' life and work about helping people in need? Maybe we can't do miracles the way Jesus did. But how can the help that we do give be a "miracle," too?



But Jesus became a human so that He could help sinners who are hurting and suffering.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “The Sabbath,” pages 281–289, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Jesus asked the Jewish spiritual leaders a question. Was it against the law on the Sabbath day to save or to kill? When Jesus asked this question, He showed the leaders the evil plan that was in their hearts. The leaders hated Jesus. Their hate made them very angry. The leaders wanted to kill Him. While the leaders wanted to kill Jesus, Jesus was saving lives and making many people happy. Was it better to kill on the Sabbath, as they wanted to, than to heal the sick, as Jesus did? Was it more holy on the Sabbath day to have a heart filled with hate and with a wish to kill than to love all people? When we love people, we will show them mercy.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pages 287, adapted.



“While the leaders wanted to kill Jesus, Jesus was saving lives and making many people happy.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① “Every false religion teaches its followers not to care about human needs.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 287, adapted. Why and how is this quote correct? What can we decide to do to show that we care about people’s needs in our church and in our community?
- ② Who is my neighbor? Who is your neighbor? How should following Jesus make us more loving and caring, the same as the Samaritan? Remember, the Samaritan went out of his way to show love.
- ③ God loves being fair and showing mercy. How should we live so that our lives show what matters most to God? What things can we do personally to pay more attention to “the really important teachings of [in] the law” (Matthew 23:23) that Jesus talked about?
- ④ When Jesus talked about God’s work as judge, He often talked about it along with the topic of love. When God does His work as Judge, He will ask how much did we show that we really love other people? How much do we stand up for people who have been hurt or punished for no reason? Read Matthew 25:31–46 as you seek to answer these questions.

STUCK IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Ki-nam left South Korea to work as a student Bible worker in the Middle East. Ki-nam came to the Middle East with a travel license or passport that allowed her to stay only for a short time. She needed another special license to stay for a full year. The manager of the apartment building where she stayed agreed to sign papers to help Ki-nam stay in the Middle East. Ki-nam needed this proof to get the new license. But then the manager refused to sign the papers. He told Ki-nam she needed to give him a lot of money first.

Ki-nam didn't have the money. She couldn't move to another apartment because it was hard to find apartment-building managers who would rent to foreigners.

So, Ki-nam prayed. "Lord, You sent me here. I have faith that You can solve my problem." Ki-nam prayed every day for two months. Her parents in South Korea prayed. The leader for the student Bible workers put Ki-nam's name on the house church's prayer list, and the members prayed, too.

Then the day arrived when Ki-nam needed to go to the passport center to get her new travel license to stay in the Middle East for a whole year. But she didn't have the signed papers that she needed to get the license.

Just before Ki-nam went to the passport office, the leader for the student Bible workers called her. The leader said, "I may have an answer to your problem. Let's go."

The leader explained that a church member knew a business owner who sold houses for a living. The church member went to talk to the business owner and asked, "Can you help my friend?"

The business owner said, "Bring her passport. I'll give her the proof she needs."

Ki-nam was surprised when she heard the good news. She said, "Thank You, God."

The business owner signed the papers, and Ki-nam got her special license. After that, Ki-nam didn't doubt that God would bless her year in the Middle East. And He did. Seven people were baptized because of her work. Ki-nam said, "God used me to save people. God never makes mistakes when He asks you to do something. He helped me every step of the way. I thank Him!"

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in South Korea sends Bible workers worldwide to help people learn about Jesus. Thank you for your 13th Sabbath Offering on March 29. Your offering will help South Korean Adventists share the Good News about Jesus at home. The student Bible worker's name was changed in the story.

INSIDE
Story

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



**"Lord, You sent me here.
I have faith that you can
solve my problem."**

Love Does Everything the Law Commands



SABBATH—MARCH 22

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Exodus 20:1–17; Romans 6:1–3; Jeremiah 31:31–34; Matthew 23:23, 24; James 2:1–9.

MEMORY VERSE: “Do not owe people anything. But you will always owe love to each other. The person who loves others has obeyed all the law” (Romans 13:8, ICB).



Romans 13:8 tells us that when we love the people around us who need our help, we do everything the law commands us to do.

A LOCAL CHURCH held a special meeting to talk about what they should do about a member who was making trouble. One person at the meeting told the pastor, “We can’t make decisions because of mercy.” We can’t? The pastor wondered what this person understood about God and His law. Mercy must be an important part of how we fix problems with people when they make mistakes. Mercy is a part of love. Romans 13:8 tells us that when we love the people around us who need our help, we do everything the law commands us to do.

If love obeys the law, we should be careful not to think that the law is separate from love. Love is not separate from the law in any way. In the Bible, the two agree. God, who gave us His law, is love. So, God’s law is the law of love. As Ellen G. White puts it, the law shows us who God is. (Read *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 305, adapted.)

God’s law is not a set of important rules that doesn’t mean anything for our lives. More than anything, God’s law shows us His love for us.

THE LAW OF LOVE (Exodus 20:1–17)

God's law is more than important rules. God's law shows us a relationship. We see this relationship very clearly in the Ten Commandments. The basic rules of the Ten Commandments were already part of Adam and Eve's lives in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. The rules of God's law are rules of love. They show us the relationship that God wanted to have with people. The rules also show us the relationship God wanted us to have with other people.

The Lord wrote the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) on stone (Exodus 31:18). The commandments show Israel their special relationship with God. God wrote His commandments down after He saved His people from Egypt. The commandments showed God's love and His promises to His people (read Exodus 6:7, 8 and Leviticus 26:12). One can see that the first four commandments and the last six show us what a healthy relationship with God and other people should be.

Read Exodus 20:1–17. How do these verses show us two important rules: (1) love for God and (2) love for people?

The first four commandments show our relationship with God. The last six show our relationships with other people. Both our relationship to God and to other people must be under the control of these two parts of God's law.

Jesus connected the two parts of God's law together. Jesus taught that there are two important commandments: (1) " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul [spirit], and all your mind' " (Matthew 22:37, ERV; compare with Deuteronomy 6:5). And (2) " 'Love your neighbor the same as you love yourself' " (Matthew 22:39, ERV; compare with Leviticus 19:18).

The first four commandments are the ways we must love God with all our heart, mind, spirit, and body. The last six are the ways we must love other people. We must love them the same as we love ourselves. Jesus says that these two love commandments are an important part of the law (Matthew 22:40). So, love is the foundation for the whole law of God. We often hear people say, "We don't need to keep the law. We just need to love God and people." Why is this idea false?

Can we show love for God or people if we break His law? Explain your answer.



One can see that the first four commandments and the last six show us what a healthy relationship with God and other people should be.

THE LAW IS HOLY (Romans 6:1–3)

Love is the beginning of God's law. When God supports the law, He supports love. That is why Jesus died to save sinners. Jesus died so that He could support the law at the same time that He showed us mercy. In this way, Jesus could be both fair and show mercy to everyone who believes in Him (Romans 3:25, 26). When God saves us, He shows His support for His law. So, the law doesn't stop being important when God saves us.

Read Romans 6:1–3 and then Romans 7:7–12. Pay careful attention to verse 12. What do these verses tell us about the law, even after Jesus died?

Some people think that mercy and God's saving plan make us free from keeping the law. But Paul says that we must not keep sinning so that God will give us more mercy. The ones who believe in Jesus have been baptized into His death. So they must stop sinning and live in Jesus.

The law of God isn't sin. The law of God shows us our sin and shows us that we are evil without Jesus. "So the law is holy. And what the law says is holy and right and good" (Romans 7:12, WE). The law also shows us our need for God to save us and for His mercy. God's saving mercy comes only from Jesus. So, "does this mean that we do away with the Law when we put our trust in Christ? No, not at all. It means we know the Law is important" (Romans 3:31, NLV).

Jesus didn't come to destroy the law. He came to keep everything that the Law and the Old Testament promised. That's why Jesus says, "I tell you the truth. Nothing will disappear from the law until heaven and earth are gone. The law will not lose even the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter until all has happened" (Matthew 5:18, ICB).

God's law shows us that He is holy. The law also shows us that God is love, that He is good, and that He is the truth (Leviticus 19:2; Psalm 19:7, 8; Psalm 119:142, 172). We must remember that God wrote the Ten Commandments on pieces of stone Himself (Exodus 31:18). The law written in stone shows us that God and His government don't change. Love is the foundation or beginning of His government. This Bible truth is an important idea in the worldwide war between God and Satan.



Jesus died so that He could support the law at the same time that He showed us mercy.

LAW AND MERCY (Jeremiah 31:31–34)

As we saw already, God's law and His mercy work together, not against each other. Both rules and forgiveness work together with God's love. Both the law and mercy show that God is fair. During Old Testament times, God's people saw that His law showed His mercy. The "gods" of the non-Jews didn't show their followers what they wanted from them. But the God of the Bible teaches His people about the things that please Him. What pleases God? He wants the best for all of His people.

We must remember that the law can't save us from sin. The law can't change human hearts. Because we are sinners, we need God to remove our old evil heart. Then we need Him to give us a new spiritual heart.

Read Jeremiah 31:31–34. What do these verses teach us about God's promises to give us a new heart? Compare this promise with Jesus' words to Nicodemus in John 3:1–21 about being born again. Also read Hebrews 8:10.

God wrote the Ten Commandments on pieces of stone (Exodus 31:18). But God also writes His law in the hearts of His people (Psalm 37:30, 31). God's law of love is not something that is outside of us. It is part of our hearts and every part of who we are. God is the only One who can write His law on our hearts. He promised His chosen people that He would write it there for them (read Hebrews 8:10).

We can't save ourselves with our law-keeping. God saves us because of faith in His mercy. We don't save ourselves. God's saving mercy is His gift to us (Ephesians 2:8). We don't keep the law so that God will save us. We keep the law because we already are saved. We don't keep the law so that God will love us. We keep the law because God already loves us. God's love for us helps us to love Him and other people (read John 14:15).

At the same time, the law shows us our sin (James 1:22–25; Romans 3:20; Romans 7:7). The law also shows us our need of a Savior (Galatians 3:22–24). The law leads us in the best ways of life and shows us God's love, too.

What is your hope when God judges you? Is it your law-keeping? Or is it Jesus' gift of mercy and holy life? What does your answer tell you about what God's law can and can't do for you?



God also writes His law in the hearts of His people (Psalm 37:30, 31).

LOVE KEEPS THE WHOLE LAW (Matthew 23:23, 24)

The relationship between love and the law is very important. The Bible tells us that when we love, we keep the whole law.

In Romans 13:8–10, Paul teaches us that “the person who loves others has obeyed all the law” (Romans 13:8, ICB). After Paul talks about the last six commandments, he announces, “All these commands and all other commands are really only one rule: ‘Love your neighbor the same as you love yourself’ ” (Romans 13:9, ERV). Paul teaches that “love doesn’t hurt others. So loving is the same as obeying all the law” (Romans 13:10, ERV). What type of love obeys all the law? What does this love look the same as?

Read Matthew 23:23, 24. As we already learned in last week’s lesson, what are “the really important teachings of the law” that Jesus talks about in verse 23? Read Deuteronomy 5:12–15 and Isaiah 58:13, 14. How do these verses show us the connection between the law and God’s plan to save us?



After Paul talks about the last six commandments, he announces, “All these commands and all other commands are really only one rule: ‘Love your neighbor the same as you love yourself’ ” (Romans 13:9, ERV).

Jesus says that “the really important teachings of the law” are being fair, showing mercy, and faith. One law, more than any other law, shows us that God’s wish to save us also is connected with His being fair. That law is the Sabbath. The Sabbath helps us remember the time when God made the skies and the earth. The Sabbath also helps us remember that God makes His people free from sin and slavery. The Lord wants us to feel joy for the Sabbath and in Him (Isaiah 58:13, 14). Isaiah 58 also talks about doing loving works to help other people. God wants us to feed the hungry and welcome people with no homes into our houses (read Isaiah 58:3–10).

All these teachings (and many other teachings) help us to understand what keeping the law really means. When we don’t break the law, we keep it. But we also must do good. We must do works of love that show God’s faith and mercy. Keeping the law is about more than not breaking the law. Keeping the law means doing good works.

ABOVE ALL, LOVE PEOPLE (James 2:1–9)

If loving God means we keep His whole law, then we can't fully keep God's law when we only stop doing bad things, right? The law of love commands us not to do evil. The law of love also causes us to do acts that show God's love to other people. We must show God's love to other church members and to people outside the church in our communities. The people on the earth really need to see God's love.

Read James 2:1–9. What important message do these verses give us?

James teaches us that the rich must not hurt the poor or make life hard for them. Then James talks about the law of love for our neighbors. He says, "If you obey this law, you are doing right" (James 2:8, ERV).

As Ellen G. White says, "When we love people, we show God's love on this earth. Jesus is the King of glory. He came to put this love in our hearts. This love makes us children of one family. Jesus said, 'Love each other as I have loved you' (John 15:12 [ERV]. When we love people the way that Jesus loved them, His work for us is done. We are ready for heaven. We have heaven in our hearts."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 641, adapted.

When we love people as Jesus loved them, we will be ready for heaven! Wow! This thought is very powerful. It shows us what it means to really be Jesus' followers.

Jesus commands His followers to " 'love each other just as I loved you' " (John 13:34, ERV). Jesus also says, " 'All people will know that you are my followers if you love each other' " (John 13:35, ERV). Love is so important to our Christian faith because God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). If we say we love God, we will also love other people (compare with 1 John 3:11; 1 John 4:20, 21).

1 Peter 4:8 tells Christians, "Most important of all, love each other deeply, because love makes you willing to forgive many sins" (ERV; also read Hebrews 10:24 and 1 Thessalonians 3:12).

Think more about the idea that we must love people the way that Jesus loved them. How does this teaching help us better understand the idea that God will make us fit for heaven in this life? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.



"When we love people as Jesus loved them, we will be ready for heaven!"

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “‘The Least of These My Brethren,’ ” pages 637–641, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“When we serve other people and help them, Jesus helps us. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. People who help other people will drink the living water and be filled. They will avoid exciting entertainment. They will not wait for some change to happen in their lives. The most important topic that interests them is how to save people who are ready to die. Then their friendships with other people will cause wonderful things to happen. The Savior’s love will cause hearts to join together as one in peace and agreement.

“When we understand that we are workers together with God, we will say God’s promises with meaning and interest. God’s promises will burn in our hearts and on our lips. God asked Moses to serve people who fight against God and don’t know Him. God gave Moses this promise: ‘I myself will go with you. And I will give you victory [success].’ Exodus 33:14 [ICB]. The Lord also said, ‘I will be with you.’ Exodus 3:12 [ICB]. God makes these promises to everyone who serves Jesus and seeks to help His poor, suffering people.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 641, adapted.



The Savior’s love will cause hearts to join together as one in peace and agreement.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–8. How does 1 Corinthians 13 help us understand who we should be as Christians?
- ② What separates the sheep from the goats in Matthew 25:31–46? How can we make sure we don’t misunderstand what Jesus says in these verses? Why do these verses not teach that our works save us?
- ③ Read the last part of the quote again from Thursday’s lesson study: “When we love people the way Jesus loved them, His work for us is done. We are ready for heaven. We have heaven in our hearts.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 641, adapted. What does this quote mean to you? What does this quote tell us about God and about heaven itself? How can we live more as the citizens of heaven right now? How is sharing and showing God’s love the answer?

KNEELING IN FRONT OF A STATUE

As an opera singer, Maria sings in front of large crowds. Maria has sung in a dozen countries. One country Maria visited was North Korea. There, she saw people bow down in front of a 72-foot tall statue of Kim Sung. Kim Il Sung was the first leader of North Korea.

Maria is a loyal Seventh-day Adventist. (Her name has been changed in the story to protect her.)

During the visit to North Korea, Maria and a group of other singers went to the Mansu Hill Grand Monument, which shows heroes from the country's history. At the center of the monument is the very tall statue of Kim Il Sung. (A second 72-foot statue of Kim's son, Kim Jong Il, was later added to the monument.)

A crowd stood around the statue of Kim Il Sung. Maria saw foreigners from Italy, France, and other countries. She saw North Koreans. They all bowed in front of the statue. Then Maria learned that she also was expected to bow to show respect.

A tour guide told Maria, "You must kneel down."

Maria thought about the first commandment, which says, " 'You must not worship any other gods except me' " (Exodus 20:3, ERV). The second commandment also forbids us to bow down to any statues: " 'Do not make for yourself statues of gods that look like [the same as] anything in the sky. They may not look like anything on the earth or in the waters either [too]. Do not bow down to them or worship them' " (Exodus 20:4, 5, NIV).

As Maria stood there, she remembered the story about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. These three young men refused to bow to the 90-foot tall gold statue of King Nebuchadnezzar, in Daniel 3. Maria thought, "The book of Daniel really is not a made-up story or a fairy tale! That same story happens in real life in North Korea and in other places every day."

Maria stood straight and tall. She did not bow down.

Some people may think there's nothing wrong with bowing down to Kim Il Sung's statue. But Maria saw the experience as much more. During that time, Maria believed that God was asking her to take a public stand for Him.

Several days later, Maria gave a copy of *Steps to Christ* to her tour guide. She prays that the tour guide and all North Koreans learn about Jesus.

This quarter's 13th Sabbath Offering will be used to share the Good News about Jesus with people in North Korea and other countries nearby. Thank you for planning to give a big offering this Sabbath.

INSIDE
Story
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



Maria stood straight and tall. She did not bow down.