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HQ
2005

Mark

*The Gospel
of
Action*



A Devotional Bible-Study Guide
for Young Adults



<http://cq.adventist.org>

Mark: The Gospel of Action



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Welcome to *CQ's* World



The following pages represent the creative energy of a truly international group of Adventist young adults. The map above indicates the locations of the writers who have participated in *CQ's* writing program for this quarter.

In producing this unique Sabbath School Bible study guide, four hundred individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond individually to the subject under study.

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This Quarter's Illustrator



Sally Phan currently lives in Adelaide, South Australia, with her two sisters, one little brother, and her mum and dad. She is currently studying for a bachelor's degree in visual arts and applied design and one day hopes to become a professional ceramicist. Her interests are food, sleep, sleep, and God (you'll catch her sleeping in almost every morning). Her dislikes are smelly breath and essays. Her favorite expression is "Go deep for God."

Getting the most Out of CQ

FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

CQ is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. CQ's purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the *Adult Bible Study Guide* find that because CQ deals with the same topics, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Four hundred Adventist young adults contribute to CQ each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond creatively and individually to the subject.

Circulation of CQ is about 70,000.

POINTERS FOR STUDY

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.
2. The Bible passages on which each week's lesson are based appear in bold type in the "Logos" portion of the lesson. Read these entire passages.
3. The Bible passages for the week are usually divided into sections on the "Logos" pages. When studying these sections, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the headings.
4. Read the other sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passages.
5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the Bible study guide:
 - "Introduction" is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.
 - "Logos" is a guide for direct study of the Bible passages for the week.
 - "Testimony" presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.
 - "Evidence" approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.
 - "How-To" discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.
 - "Opinion" is a personal viewpoint on the lesson meant to encourage further thought and discussion.
 - "Exploration" provides the reader with a variety of open-ended, creative ways to explore the topic of the week's lesson.

CQ AND THE CHURCH

CQ is the General Conference–approved Bible study guide for the young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. *However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.*

Introducing **Jesus, the Son of God**



"A voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased' " (Mark 1:11, NIV).

Recognizing the Truth

INTRODUCTION

Isa. 40:3; Mark 1:1–11

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God'" (Isa. 40:3, NKJV).

I'll never forget the day I met my new boss. He'd bought the medical center at which I worked, and we'd sent out a zillion letters to the patients informing them of his arrival. He was to start work on August 10. At some stage before that, he'd come in to work to meet the existing staff.

It was a quiet day at work. One of those days when no one wants to see the interim doctor and everyone wants to wait until next week to see the new doctor. One of those days that seem to never end.

A man came into the surgery. He was tall. He was balding. There was nothing outstanding about him. Except there was. He asked for me by name. He came into the nurses' office and leaned against the bed.

And I knew, without anyone telling me, that this was the new boss. There was an air of authority about him, as if he owned the place.

It was a quiet day at work.

Mark launches straight into his gospel with an account of John the Baptist meeting Jesus. It's a simple account. John is preaching repentance and offering baptism. He's also waiting for One greater than he, One whose sandal strap he is not worthy of loosening (Mark 1:7).

John baptized many people. But he always watched for the Promised One. He didn't know for sure that he was waiting for Jesus. He probably didn't even know what Jesus looked like.* But when Jesus came to John, requesting baptism, John knew that he had met the One.

There was no doubt. In John 1:29 we are told that "John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" (NIV).

Moments later, as Jesus came up out of the water after His baptism, a voice from heaven confirmed John's testimony: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11, NIV).

There's no dillydallying here. Mark believed, as did John the Baptist, that Jesus was the Son of God. Period.

**The Desire of Ages*, chap. 11.

Sunday
March 27

A Child You Least Expected

LOGOS

Eccles. 8:7; Matt. 1:21; Mark 1:1–20; Luke 1:31

There was a time in ancient Israel when the people were in distress. Why? It's because after years of bondage and freedom, they were again conquered, besieged, and ruled by a foreign country, and administered politically and literally by a government other than their own. It was the Roman Empire who ruled among them.

According to the teachings of Israel's forefathers, someone very special would be born from the line of David and would forever rule Israel. He would restore God's chosen nation to its glorious days. Then came Jesus Christ, born out of the simplest animal stable.

"The world for Christ was not a place of ease and self-aggrandizement."

A Wonderful Promise (Gen. 3:15; Jer. 33:14)

Even before humanity's fall to sin and misery, a solution was already waiting for them. The Promised One was already on His mission to save the human race.

In school before we submit a project, it passes through a lot of questioning, corrections, and feasibilities. Even at work we do a lot to ensure that fail-safe conditions are met. This is to ensure that in the event of disaster, no harm would happen, no further damage would result, and the trouble would be contained and repaired immediately. In the same manner, it is God's priority to immediately restore balance and harmony throughout the entire universe—which is stirred by one rebellious planet called Earth.

Fulfilling a Solution (Mark 1:2, 3; John 1:23)

During my elementary years at Polillo Adventist Institute, we performed a Christmastime play that portrayed the wonderful birth of Jesus Christ. I was one of the main characters. It was a wonderful opportunity to share with both old and new converts the deep empathy God has for this fallen planet. It is the Lord God's desire that through Jesus Christ we would all be saved.

The young man Jesus, who was born in Bethlehem, grew up in Nazareth, and then, clearing His bench for the last time and carefully putting away the tools He would never use again, left His carpenter shop and set out to Jordan.

"It was the parting of the ways for Him. Behind Him lay the precious memories of boyhood and youth, with pleasant workdays and happy Sabbaths around His old home, and hours of bliss spent with His heavenly Father upon

the mountainside and in the nearby fields and forest.

“Ahead were days of toil and sorrow, of temptation and trial. Messiah would be King someday, He knew, but He must die before He could reign. He would be ‘a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.’ The Holy Scriptures said so. Yet He did not draw back. He must now begin the wonderful ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing to which God had called Him.

“Striding bravely down the steep mountain trail, He made His way to John—to Bethabara, Gethsemane, and Calvary.”¹

The Ministry at Hand (Mark 1:9–18)

Prior to the fulfillment that He would die for the sins of many, John baptized Jesus Christ. John was the forerunner of the ministry of Christ. “And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.”’ . . . When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, ‘You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.’ Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, the son of Heli” (Luke 3:3, 4, 21–23, NKJV).

The ministry of Jesus Christ was now in full force. Of royal descent, however, Jesus did the opposite of what most of Israel wanted: the downfall and annihilation of Roman rule in Israel. Instead, He went about His ministry the other way around: loving His enemies, caring for them, uplifting the troubled, saving the lost, healing the sick, and telling everyone how God loves us so much that He wants us close to Him.

“The world for Christ was not a place of ease and self-aggrandizement. He was not watching for an opportunity to seize its power and its glory. It held out no such prize for Him. It was the place into which His Father had sent Him. He had been given for the life of the world, to work out the great plan of redemption. He was accomplishing His work for the fallen race.”²

Jesus Christ came with a great task that He was able to fulfill two thousand years ago. Today, we are to be glad that such an event already happened. Until that wonderful day we look forward to His return; reconciliation is imminent. Our task: to tell about a wonderful person, born as a child, raised like each one of us, yet able to provide our almost hopeless separation from sin. This was and still is His ministry. It's our duty bound by love to share.

1. Arthur S. Maxwell, *The Bible Story*, vol. 7, p. 96.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 451.

TESTIMONY

John 3:30

“You are closed-minded.”

That sudden remark from a fellow student council member startled me. I felt the impulse to deny her comment, but I chose to remain silent, contemplating what could have been her basis for saying so. Undeniably I was hurt. But why?

I'm in my senior year in the university, but I have yet to recover totally from culture shock. I hear others argue about God's existence. I could not help turning my head on cross-dressing [St.] Eves. Could it ever have dawned upon Adam that his descendant sons would later follow his wife's fashion rather than his own? I could think of many other instances in which I blurted a resounding “Why?” over things that I thought would sadden God.

Can people get any worse? I keep wondering. *Things aren't supposed to be this way. God has a better way.*

Perhaps that's the reason I was hurt. I cannot accept that God's standard of goodness is disregarded, and those who believe in it are discriminated against. But I am rather comforted that “ ‘as it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you’ ” (John 15:19, NIV).

**That the world hates us
should in no way
dishearten us.**

That the world hates us should in no way dishearten us. The Bible has a rich collection of stories of martyrdom, believers who have given up everything and have endured humiliation for God's sake. In most instances the most difficult to surrender is one's ego—the true reason that I reacted as I did to my fellow council member's comment. But “those who are true to their calling as messengers for God will not seek honor for themselves. Love for self will be swallowed up in love for Christ.”*

I have a great lesson to gain from the apostles who have given their Yes to God. They must also have had hurtful remarks thrown at them by the world.

I am still shocked by the news that a close friend of mine is involved in a homosexual relationship. But it will hurt less if somebody comments that I'm closed-minded. What is my ego compared to all the things that God has given up for me?

**The Desire of Ages*, p. 179.

The Power of Actions

EVIDENCE

Matt. 25:40; Mark 3:33–35

“The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1, NIV). This is the opening statement of Mark. Introducing Jesus as the Son of God, Mark implies that Christ has a mission and that it is to proclaim the kingdom of God and fulfill the plan of salvation.

A brief account of the works of John the Baptist proves that John was indeed the fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1, reinforcing the authenticity of the Christian faith. We are all also, from another perspective, like John the Baptist. We should also prepare the way of Christ to our hearts, clear away all obstacles, remove all that will hinder us from reflecting God’s glory before Christ can advance into our lives.

Mark relates the life of Christ and presents Him as a man of action, focusing more on His ministries. He begins his Gospel record with the baptism of Christ, the start of His public ministry. Why focus on Jesus’ actions? What is it in His actions that caught the interest of Mark?

One of the better ways, if not *the* best way, of proving and believing something is to see it first. Before a man, accused of, let us say, stealing, can be convicted of the crime, evidence must be presented first, proving that he really did steal. And the very best evidence that can be presented is the testimony of a witness. This is Mark’s way of proving Jesus is the Messiah, proving by the witness of His divine power, which, presumably, would be more convincing to his intended readers—Christians of a Gentile, perhaps Roman, background. His emphasis on miracles makes apparent his purpose to highlight the mighty power of God as evidenced by the many signs and wonders performed by Jesus.

**What is it in Jesus’ actions
that caught the interest
of Mark?**

But as we all know, although Christ’s character through His actions unfolded right before the very eyes of the people, the sad thing is that they rejected Him. Now we have more than enough reasons to believe in Him. And the best way of expressing that we really believe in Him is by reflecting God’s character through our actions, by showing our concern and love to our fellow human beings. Matthew 25:40 says, “Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (NKJV).

Wednesday
March 30

Public Commitment or Private Confession?

HOW-TO

Mark 1:9–11

I sat in the uncomfortable pews of a half-empty church recently, chuckling to myself as the generously proportioned minister sank into the overfull baptismal font, sending a wave of water over the sides, instantly causing the elderly deaconess to launch into disaster-recovery mode. My friend mused sarcastically, "Such embarrassment at this big public event." This got me thinking. This was no public event like Jesus' baptism. In fact, most of the regular congregation had opted literally to interpret "day of rest" as an opportunity to snooze the afternoon away.

Why, then, are we baptized these days? It's supposed to be a public announcement of our love for Christ. Yet it's not as if we've appeared on TV or the front-page news. Are we missing the point of baptism? Not really. Baptism is necessary for a number of reasons. It is a symbol of our ultimate weapon in

**Baptism is a promise
from God.**

the fight against temptation. Also, it is ultimately designed to make us accountable.

Accountability. I'm always being asked by my girlfriend to make promises: "Promise me you'll pick me up at five." "Promise me you'll return those overdue video rentals." When we are baptized, we confirm our love for Christ to all who are interested, and we accept that these people will hold us accountable. It's a big promise, where God, our church, and our spiritual mentors say, "Promise me you'll live up to what you're saying by being baptized."

And baptism is a promise from God. It's a promise that we'll have the tools to fight off the temptations that will come our way. "He saw the heavens split open and the Holy Spirit descending like a dove on him" (Mark 1:10, NLT). "The light which fell from the open portals upon the head of our Saviour will fall upon us as we pray for help to resist temptation. The voice which spoke to Jesus says to every believing soul, This is My beloved child, in whom I am well pleased."*

Jesus' baptism was a spiritually moving event. But we don't need to get on the front page of the paper to achieve what God meant when He asked for a public commitment of our love for Him. Just focus on the spirituality of the event, as a promise, between you and God.

REACT

1. How does accountability affect our actions?
2. How does Jesus' temptation in verses 12–14 relate to baptism?

**The Desire of Ages*, p.113.

The Presence of Grace

OPINION

2 Cor. 2:15

The first chapter of the book of Mark reveals the Son of God earning great respect and adoration through the response of John the Baptist, when he said these words: “‘After me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry’ ” (Matt. 3:11, NIV). The words tell us of how awesome and exceedingly powerful the ministry of Jesus was. The plan of salvation was unfolding right before the very eyes of John.

Jesus knew His mission; He knew that He would suffer more pain even at the beginning. Right after His baptism, He was tempted but victorious because His eyes never left His Father, the Source of His strength. Many Christians today are failing their faith because they are looking in the wrong direction. Criticism, selfishness, and pride cloud the heart and mind, preventing the entrance of love into their lives. Let us abide in God for He alone is the Source of divine love (1 John 4:16).

Jesus didn't fail in His mission of selecting His very first disciples. Through Him they changed into the kind of persons that He wanted them to become. There is power in the Word of God in transforming every wicked heart into perfection (Heb. 4:12), as evidenced in the life of Peter.

Peter became one of the best-loved disciples because of His warmhearted loyalty and devotion to Christ. At the end of

his life, Peter was an example of courage, filled with the Spirit of Christ. He was indeed an apostle who laid down his life with the deepest gratitude for the mercy and privilege given to Him. His life was a testimony of the power of God's grace. It is evident in his letters that he was one whose “entire being had been transformed by grace, and whose hope of eternal life was sure.”*

Through Him they changed
into the kind of persons
that He wanted them to
become.

REACT

1. To what extent do our wicked hearts have to be transformed into perfection before we can be saved?
2. What does it mean in practical terms to “abide in God”? What actual things can you do today to do this?

*The Acts of the Apostles, p. 517.

Friday
April 1

He Is, Therefore He Is

EXPLORATION

Matt. 3:17

CONCLUDE

There is abundant proof in the Gospels—and indeed throughout the entire Bible—that Jesus is the Son of God. Those who believe and accept Him as such confirm their commitment to Him through baptism. This is the beginning of a partnership between God and the believer that operates as long as we accept His grace in our lives. This transforming grace is the greatest weapon in overcoming sin and a clear channel for God's divinity to be portrayed in us.

CONSIDER

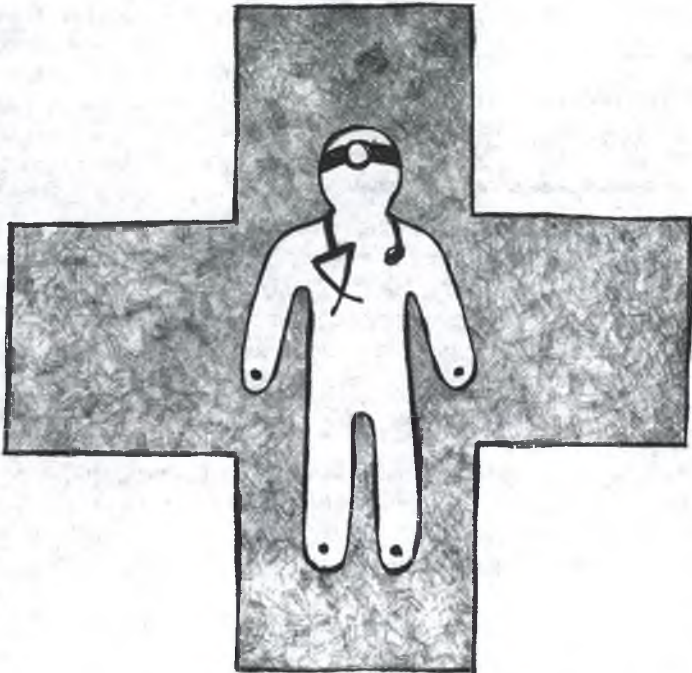
- Painting a picture that shows Jesus performing a miracle or with the dove descending on Him after His baptism. Ask friends or even strangers to interpret what the painting means to them.
- Listing the world religions and the number of followers in each. From this list compare how many people are in a religion that believes that Jesus is the Son of God.
- Memorizing Matthew 3:16, 17 and telling about the circumstances surrounding those texts to someone who doesn't know.
- Visiting a hymns Web site such as <www.cyberhymnal.org> and using the phrase "Son of God" in its search engine. Find a song and sing it or play it.
- Playing a game of biblical "guesstures" with a group of friends. This is a game in which pantomime gestures must portray a physical act of Jesus while here on earth.
- Conducting with friends or classmates a mock trial in which the defendant is role-playing Jesus and is therefore accused of being the Son of God. Have both the defense team and the prosecution give evidence to support their side based strictly on the Bible.
- Journaling your actions for a day and comparing them to what you think—based on your knowledge of the Scriptures—Jesus would do.

CONNECT

The Desire of Ages, pp. 109–113.

Editors Bryan Ball and William Johnsson, *The Essential Jesus*.

Amazing Miracle worker



"Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!'"
(Mark 1:41, NIV).

Health Only to the One Who Wants It

INTRODUCTION

Mark 2:17

Sergio was a young man who, from the age of ten, required a pacemaker for his heart. Whenever he became ill, he and his family lived through great anxiety, but after surgery they became more accustomed to his condition. As time passed and intensive care and rehabilitation became a thing of the past, little by little he learned to ignore his condition; he hated to think about it or about ever again setting foot in a hospital.

After some years passed, it became necessary to replace the apparatus. As he was thinking about his future, he met a man, apparently ill, whose skin was covered with red scars and who smelled awful. Seeing fear in his eyes, the man explained that some time earlier he had experienced fever and coughing and thought

**Little by little his health
was improving.**

that it was simply a cold that would

pass. But as the days wore on and he didn't get better, he recognized that he needed specialized help. He went to a famous doctor's hospital and was diagnosed as having measles.

Despite everything, he was happy because he had been so much worse before. The doctor had given him medications, and little by little his health was improving. "I'll never forget," said the sick man, "that I should go to the hospital, even when I don't feel that ill, because these scars will never let me forget."

Sergio ignored the man's recommendation and refused to think about the doctor, the one who treated all, regardless of how poor, dirty, delinquent, or guilty they were. He thought only about how fortunate he was that his pacemaker was not visible to others and that no one was aware of his condition. He thought he was better off than the man he'd just met, whose scars would tell the world that he had been very ill.

Before leaving, the sick man said to Sergio: "If you ever need health, go to the doctor and he will provide a way out."

Finally, Sergio recognized that he needed a doctor, and he went to the hospital so he could be treated for his heart.

In the same way, the Physician of all physicians is at our disposal at all times. All we have to do is accept His diagnosis and His plan for health. He reminds us of our sinful state and the need we have of a Savior and Redeemer. Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners'" (Mark 2:17, NIV).

A Debilitating Illness

EVIDENCE

Mark 1:40, 41

It's probable that you've never suffered an incurable disease and one so difficult as leprosy. In Bible times this disease was considered to be the most terrible of all. Caused by the virus *mycobacterium leprae*, today the so-called "Hansen's disease" is classified by medical science in various classes according to how it manifests itself.

Leprosy continues to be an infectious disease, contagious only through prolonged and continuous contact with the infected person. But it is not hereditary. It gains ground in the host body beginning with cutaneous lesions, in the form of spots that at first are smooth but soon begin to grow and become irregular. It affects the peripheral nerves and produces debilitating deformities. Feeling is lost, a kind of "anesthesia" sets in all over the body and spontaneous amputations of the fingers and toes may occur.

Jesus has the power to cure and save. The one goes hand in hand with the other.

The disease's progression is very slow, and that's why many who are infected can live for decades with the disease and can die with the disease but not necessarily because of it.

Leprosy was considered a divine punishment. The victim

was required to live far from the city, family, friends, and work. It's not hard to imagine that such individuals bore a heavy load, the discrimination because of fear of contagion and the rejection they felt from God because they considered themselves as being punished.

In this context the leper in the story came near Jesus. Since Elisha's time no one had heard that anyone could cure leprosy, but this man heard about the Great Physician and decided to seek Him out. It was Jesus who placed Himself in this man's path. Seeing Jesus cure many sick people, the leper sought a possible way out. He ran to the Master, and reaching Him, threw himself at His feet saying, "If You are willing, You can make me clean" (Mark 1:40, NKJV). As Jesus touched the man, He replied, "I am willing; be cleansed" (verse 41, NKJV).

In the original Greek text, the word "cure" has the same meaning as "save." Although in this case the leper asks to be clean, do you believe that the cleanliness that he seeks refers merely to being cured of his physical sickness?

The leper sought a possible
way out.

Monday
April 4

The Christ With Authority

LOGOS

Mark 1:21–2:17

The life of Jesus presents us with some basic lessons that we should consider in understanding the way in which He operated in the lives of those who followed Him.

The theme of this section in Mark is the authority of Jesus. Where did Jesus' authority come from? How was His authority expressed? This is what Mark tries to answer in the selection of stories that he chooses to record.

He has authority over demons. Jesus did not fear the demon because He knew where power came from. I'm always surprised when people talk about Satan. Many times we sound as if the devil has more power than God, but this is not true.

Jesus changes the way we
look at the world.

He is a conquered foe who is fallen and defeated. God will give us the power to overcome and confront the enemy of God face to face and say, "Be gone. You have no authority over me! I am

a Christian, a child of God who has been saved by the Cross. I am victorious through Christ's victory in me."

He has authority over diseases. Disease—a byproduct of sin—shows the scars of a creation that has fallen into a situation that God never planned; however, God has power over disease and can defeat it. When Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law, He sent a message of hope to all those who have been victims of disease. God knows when, how, and whom to heal. That is His prerogative and we should learn to trust in Him.

He has authority over prejudice. When Jesus heals the leper, He demonstrates that His authority exceeds all because He does and says what no one else does. This Jesus who touches the leper in his pain, who incorporates the public life by healing him physically and socially, is the Christ who teaches us that all who consider themselves His disciples begin a process that implies breaking myths that segregate and discriminate against people. To the horror of those at the time, He treats a leper as a human being worthy of compassion, mercy, and love. He integrates him completely into society, something unheard of in His day. What a magnificent lesson for us today!

He has the authority to pardon sins. In the case of the paralytic it is evident that the center of this story is Christ challenging the scribes and their interpretation, demonstrating that His authority is greater than theirs.

The subtlety in the story of the friends who bring their friend to Christ is that they come seeking one thing and leave with something totally different. They seek a

physical cure, but Jesus understands that what the diseased needs the most is forgiveness from sin. He knows well that disease is often caused by lifestyle. Jesus forgives him and thus challenges the entire society of the day, which did not believe forgiveness was possible.

He has the authority to call His followers. When He said to Levi, “Follow me,” such is the authority with which Jesus speaks that the publican sees no other option than to follow Him.

Jesus is the One who calls. Sometimes we give a false impression, especially in church, when we make it seem that a certain board is calling a certain person to serve in the church work. This is false. The call is from Christ, and if a person is not called by Christ, no matter how much an administrative board may try, they will not succeed.

He has the authority to mingle with sinners. This was a challenge to conventional traditions. If Jesus walked the streets of our cities today, what section would He visit first? Who would He mingle with? What parties would He be invited to? Much as it may hurt those of us who are pastors and administrators, I'm certain that He would first visit those who have been abandoned by a society that considers itself Christian. He would embrace those who have AIDS, those who have been stigmatized because of the color of their skin or the difference of their ideas. He would visit houses of ill repute and taverns, and, maybe, He would call, as one of His followers, a thief.

Jesus is the model of authority. Jesus shows the true meaning of authority. He impressed and was able to influence everyone—from the ignorant to the scholar, from the laborer to the prince, from the lay person to the cleric—because He lived what He preached. Power, which came from God, was played out in Him because there was no discrepancy between life and theory; in Him everything was in harmony.

We may be authorized to preach, cure, teach, legislate, or judge, but if our lives are not consistent, we will not have authority, no matter how many papers we publish and titles we possess.

Jesus revolutionizes everything. He changes the way we look at the world. This is the Jesus that we should imitate. He is the Jesus of action, the Jesus who is not satisfied in following trends. He is the One who is willing to embrace the sick, the One who calls sin by its name, the One who is not afraid to look the devil in the eye knowing that he has been defeated. He is the Jesus who loves, who has mercy, and who is not guided by prejudices. He is the Christ who touches, hugs, speaks, challenges, visits, who is present at parties, who breaks down prejudices, who heals. He is the Christ who lives.

Tuesday
April 5

What Is Your Condition?

TESTIMONY

Mark 1:41

Because of his sins, the demoniac became Satan's prisoner. "The secret cause of the affliction . . . was in his own life. He had been fascinated by the pleasures of sin, and had thought to make life a grand carnival . . . He thought his time could be spent in innocent folly. But once in the downward path, his feet rapidly descended. Intemperance and frivolity perverted the noble attributes of his nature, and Satan took absolute control of him."¹ "Secret sin or master passion may hold him a captive as helpless as was the demoniac of Capernaum."²

The same thing happened with the leper. "The disease has made frightful inroads, and his decaying body is horrible to look upon. At sight of him the people

**In what condition do we
find ourselves before God?**

fall back in terror. They crowd upon one another in their eagerness to escape from contact with him."³ Likewise with the paralytic—he had lost all hope of getting well; he felt guilty and

afflicted. "The palsied man was entirely helpless, and, seeing no prospect of aid from any quarter, he had sunk into despair . . . Yet it was not physical restoration he desired so much as relief from the burden of sin. If he could see Jesus, and receive the assurance of forgiveness and peace with Heaven, he would be content to live or die, according to God's will."⁴ Likewise, Levi Matthew, afflicted because he was becoming rich at the expense of the people through theft and extortion, left everything behind to be saved and become a disciple of Christ.

In what condition do we find ourselves before God? Do we feel as if we've failed in our efforts to give up a secret sin? Are we suffering the consequences of our failings and because of them do our friends shun us and show indifference toward us? Do we feel lonely and hopeless? Are our lives filled with feelings of guilt and remorse? Whatever the case, Jesus has the power to cleanse us and free us from sin. His forgiveness is instant and permanent. He does not stop working until we are completely healed. Only when we accept Christ as our Savior and accept Him into our lives will we be healed. Let us fall at His feet with the willingness to leave everything behind for Him, and then will we hear His sweet response, "I am willing; be cleansed" (Mark 1:41, NKJV).

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 256.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 258.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 263.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 267.

Seek, Find, and Live With Jesus

HOW-TO

Mark 1:21–2:17

It's interesting to note that in the miraculous cases we study, all of those who benefit from God's blessings go—in one way or another—in search of Him. Some do so in a conscious manner, others unknowingly (like the demoniac), but all seek Jesus. They turn to Him in faith and believe that they will be healed even though some are brought there through the faith of their friends or relatives. Jesus is sought after as the only solution.

Once found, Christ springs into action: He expels demons, heals, saves, recreates life. Jesus offers salvation. In exchange for what? All He asks is that we have faith in Him and don't give up trying to find Him.

But, what must we do to search for and find this Jesus?

First, we have to know that He exists and that He is all-powerful. This is the gospel mission of all believers. Then—once you know about His existence—the

next step is to search for Him with faith. If we understand that He exists and that to Him we are the most beautiful and important, the most beloved, then we will understand that

To live we need certain
fundamental things.

He—Creator and Director of the universe—is also our Best Friend, Businessman, Physician, Teacher, and, above all, our loving Father.

If we know and accept the above and if we wish that He would be practical with us, we ourselves must do something.

To live, we need certain fundamental things such as breath, food, and physical activity. Without these it would be impossible to live adequately.

That's why to look for and actually live with Christ we need to:

- Study the Bible (food). We must have spiritual nourishment. It is how we look for Jesus each day.

- Pray and meditate (breath of life). It is how we express ourselves and listen to Jesus once we have found Him.

- Witness (daily physical activity). It is the actions we take to make Jesus known. We seek Him, know Him, and live Him. Now it becomes necessary to share Him.

I can assure you that if you follow these steps to find Jesus, you will live happily. They will guide you to a better quality of Christian life. You will enjoy a life that only Jesus can make marvelous and eternal.

Thursday
April 7

Your Greatest Frailty: You

OPINION

Isa. 43:4; Mark 2:17

Your condition of sickness, sadness, loneliness, or sin is fully present in the thoughts of Jesus. He knows when you long to leave suffering behind and be happy. You can be sure that your turn to be healed will come, because He would be willing to spend all the time needed healing until there was no one left to heal, because there are no obstacles that keep Him from reaching you.

There is no lock—no matter what type of disease you have. Not even your lack of faith is a problem. When you ask, “Lord, if You’re willing, if it’s not too much trouble, if it doesn’t bother You, can You heal me?” He emphatically replies, “Of course. I am willing. Be clean! It’s what I most desire.”

However, you may think that what you’ve done has made you become so estranged from Him that you are out of His reach. I’m happy to be able to repeat the very words He used, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to

Not even your lack of faith is a problem.

call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Mark 2:17, NKJV). All of us can be easily counted in this group.

How we find it hard to believe! It’s easier to think of God waiting for us to take a wrong step, but that’s not how it is. “Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honored, and I have loved you; therefore I will give men for you, and people for your life” (Isa. 43:4, NKJV).

An Almighty God with a heaven filled with resources tells you that He will do anything for you, and that’s why He came here—to heal you. He doesn’t do things halfway; He does things in a complete way, until He has turned your life into a diamond. God loves you the way you are, ugly and eaten away by leprosy, but He doesn’t want to leave you that way.

That’s why He touches you in a way that no one else has, even though no one has touched you in that way before. Even before He heals you.

Everyone who sees you, sees faults; but as He looks at you, He sees possibilities. After blessing you, He is able to accomplish in a moment what you yourself in a lifetime cannot accomplish. What’s His secret? It’s that the love of the Father for you is His frailty; and when this love becomes your greatest frailty, you will be stronger.

He's Willing, Are You?

EXPLORATION

Mark 1:41

CONCLUDE

The Great Physician longs to forgive and heal us. No disease of the body or soul is so deadly and disgusting that it is beyond His love or His power to cure. We don't have to wonder how Jesus feels about healing us. He has promised that if we seek His grace and healing, He will answer us, even though our faith may be as tiny as a mustard seed. He waits only for us to recognize our need and to come to Him.

CONSIDER

- Designing a collage that illustrates Jesus' power over the causes/effects of evil listed in Monday's portion of this week's lesson.
- Ranking sins/crimes according to how society views them in order from bad to worst. Compare your list with how you think Jesus' list appears. Are they the same? Be prepared to discuss your answer.
- Researching AIDS and reporting on how it is the modern equivalent of leprosy. Focus specifically on the effects of the two diseases emotionally and socially.
- Composing a rap that retells one of the stories from Mark 1:21–2:17.
- Role-playing situations in which you can reach out to those physically and spiritually "sick" as Jesus did.
- Establishing regular contact with a "leper" (someone who has been rejected by others because of health, economic situation, something he/she has done, etc.).
- Documenting ways in which Jesus shows His power over sin/death in the natural world.

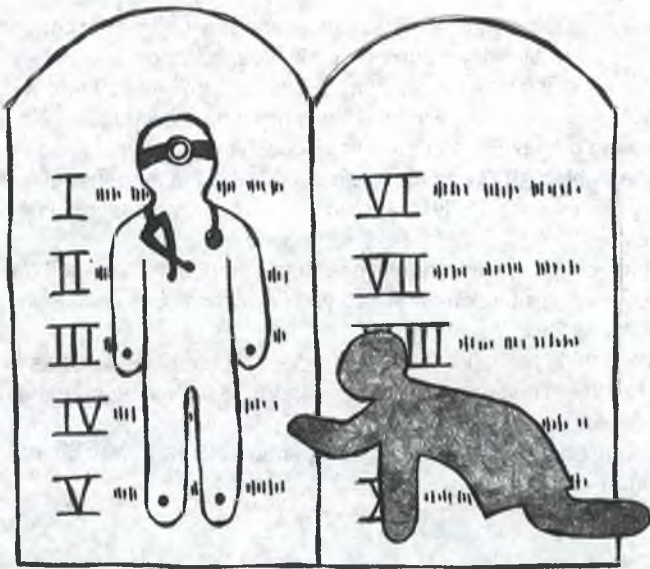
CONNECT

Matthew 7:7–11; Luke 5:17–26; 17:5, 6.

The Desire of Ages, chaps. 26–28.

Max Lucado, *Just Like Jesus*, chap. 3; John Ortberg, *Love Beyond Reason*, chap. 3.

Sabbath healings and hard **Hearts**



“He said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath’ ” (Mark 2:27, 28, NKJV).

Servant's Servant

INTRODUCTION

Phil. 2:20, 21

In his Gospel, Mark is writing to show that Jesus is the servant. Some characteristics of a servant are his activities, abilities, and power. Therefore, Mark emphasizes more than the other Gospels the powerful working of the servant. What do you want in a servant?

In our self-serving culture with its me-first mentality, acting like a servant is not a popular concept. The world defines greatness in terms of power, possessions, prestige, and position. Jesus, however, measured greatness in terms of service, not status. "It is the service of love that God values. When this is lacking, the mere round of ceremony is an offense to Him. So it is with the Sabbath. It was designed to bring men into communion with God."¹

In Matthew 12:11, Jesus gives an illustration about a sheep in a pit to show that doing good on the Sabbath is OK. Doing what is right is OK. That is the issue. It also shows us that it is wrong to do nothing when you have the ability to do something.

We miss many occasions for serving because we lack sensitivity and spontaneity. Great opportunities to serve never

last long. They pass quickly, sometimes never to return again. You may get only one chance to serve that person, so take advantage of the moment.

Heart righteousness is to be preferred over hand ritual. The occurrence of the miracle on the Sabbath taught us that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath. If He is the Lord over the Sabbath, then He is the Lord over the whole law because the Sabbath was the sign of the Mosaic covenant. We learn that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Sabbath and that we find rest in Him. We can also learn what the Sabbath is for. It is for the people. It is for them to find rest. It is not there to make life difficult for people.

An incredible servant of God once said: "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can."²

**It is wrong to do nothing
when you have the ability
to do something.**

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 286.

2. John Wesley, in Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002).

Sunday
April 10

The Lord of the Sabbath

LOGOS

Mark 2:23–3:35

The services had run long. The group had fought crowds all the way out of town. Jesus' ever-growing reputation made walking down a street a difficult process. Every step was a struggle. Every appeal was considered. By the edge of town the crowds faded and the disciples were relieved. They finally had time for themselves. They needed it. They were tired and hungry.

That's when this group of Jewish men committed a crime so reprehensible it qualified them for the death penalty: They ate lunch.

The disciples knew they were breaking the law and so did Jesus. They knew their lunch would make the news. They ate their lunch anyway.

The second and third chapters of Mark display Jesus' challenge to the established Jewish leadership over the Sabbath. They demonstrate that Jesus had not come to work meekly around the edges. He had come to shake things up.

Jesus' renown had begun to draw crowds, making the leaders uncomfortable.

The Bible records six confrontations between Jesus and Jewish leaders over the Sabbath.

His popularity threatened the power and prestige of the Jewish leaders. They responded by placing Him under surveillance. "It was [their] duty . . . to deal with anyone . . . likely to mislead the people. . . . They were there to scrutinize Jesus' every action."¹

When the disciples collected their lunch, the Pharisees took notes. Jesus and the disciples knew about the notes. The Pharisees didn't blend into the scenery during that Sabbath afternoon. "No one could miss them . . . in the synagogue, the front seats were seats of honor and they were sitting there."² Jesus knew what the response would be, yet He did nothing to stop the disciples. He used the situation to challenge the leaders' perversion of the Sabbath.

Jesus' response to the Pharisees was a deliberate affront to their pride and position. "The Jewish teachers prided themselves in their knowledge of the Scriptures, and in the Savior's answer there was an implied rebuke for their ignorance of the Sacred Writings."³ He showed them they had it wrong. He "implies that in their study of the Scriptures [the Pharisees] missed the lesson implicit in the incident He is about to relate."⁴ Human need takes precedence over law.

The man with the withered hand provided another chance for Jesus to challenge the Pharisees. Jesus went to the synagogue fully aware of what could hap-

pen. "For Him to go back into the synagogue . . . was a brave thing to do. It was the act of a man who refused to seek safety and who was determined to look a dangerous situation in the face."⁵ When He met the injured man "He did not hesitate to break down the wall of traditional requirements that barricaded the Sabbath."⁶ Not only did Jesus heal the man's hand, He had him " 'stand up in front of everyone' " (Mark 3:3, NIV). "Jesus wished to take the step He was going to take in such a way that no one could possibly fail to see it."⁷ This healing was an overt message to the Pharisees. He deliberately broke their laws because those laws were invalid.

The Sabbath was too important for Jesus to remain silent. Originally created to give humanity a chance to know its Maker (Exod. 20:8–11), the Sabbath was something Satan savagely attacked. "He worked to pervert [it] because it is a sign of the power of Christ. Jewish leaders accomplished the will of Satan by surrounding God's rest day with burdensome requirements."⁸ Jesus had to change the prevailing view of the Sabbath.

The Bible records six confrontations between Jesus and Jewish leaders over the Sabbath (Mark 3:1–6; Luke 13:10–17; 14:1–4; John 5:1–17; 9:1–34). Each time, Jesus argued that human need overrides ritual law, which had lost sight of the law's real purpose to restore wholeness. Jesus approached this argument with passion. He was "grieved because the Jewish leaders made use of their high offices and positions to misrepresent the character and requirements of God."⁹

Furious, the Pharisees began to spread rumors that Jesus was casting out demons because He was the greatest demon of them all. Their decision to spread this rumor is evidence of their unpardonable sin. The Pharisees "were convinced that a divine power attended Christ, but in order to resist the truth, they attributed the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan. In doing this, they deliberately chose deception; they yielded themselves to Satan, and henceforth they were controlled by his power."¹⁰ The Holy Spirit's work is to convince the sinner of his sin so he can repent. To reject the Holy Spirit is to place oneself out of the reach of repentance and faith. The Pharisees had severed God's means of communication.

The second and third chapters of Mark demonstrate the importance of the Sabbath. They serve as a warning to look beyond conventions, making sure the spirit with which we worship is in keeping with God's purpose.

1. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), p. 67.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 285.

4. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 588.

5. William Barclay, *ibid.*

6. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 286.

7. William Barclay, *ibid.*

8. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 283, 284.

9. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 591.

10. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 323.

Monday
April 11

How Can He . . . ?

TESTIMONY

Mark 2:23, 24, 27, 28

How can He do such things on a Sabbath day? Does He really know what He's doing? How can He allow such things to happen on a Sabbath day? How can He heal on a Sabbath? We must do something about this Man and His followers!

It is so amazing how Jesus reacts to our thinking sometimes. He saw what the Pharisees had on their minds and what they wanted Him to do. They were condemning Him for breaking the Sabbath and doing good on Sabbath, as if they were perfect Sabbath keepers. Did He really break it?

"Christ's approval of what His disciples did here, and His own acts of healing upon the Sabbath day, are often misunderstood by modern writers as proof that

"God ordained that the Sabbath should be a blessing."

He neither observed personally nor taught His disciples to observe the Old Testament laws and regulations in regard to Sabbath observance."¹

"God ordained that the Sabbath should be a blessing, not a burden, and it is to man's interest and not his

injury to observe it. It was designed to increase his happiness, not to work a hardship on him. . . . Sabbathkeeping that consists only, or primarily, in the negative aspect of not doing certain things is not Sabbathkeeping at all; it is only when the positive aspect of Sabbathkeeping is practiced that we may hope to derive from Sabbath observance the benefit ordained by a wise and loving Creator. (See Isaiah 58:13.)

"The legion requirements of the rabbis pertaining to the meticulous observance of the Sabbath were based on the concept that the Sabbath was of more importance in the sight of God than man himself. . . . The rabbis reduced the Sabbath to an absurdity by their rigid and meaningless distinction between what might and what might not be done on that day."²

"The Savior Himself has the right to determine what is appropriate to that day; consequently, the Pharisees were exceeding their prerogatives. The church has no right to load the Sabbath with oppressive restrictions—as did the Jews—or to attempt the transfer of its sacredness from one day to another."³

It is not our duty to tell what must be done and not done on the Sabbath day. All we need to do is what the Lord requires us to do. We are not to waste our time on condemning others on what they do on Sabbath. Let us do what Jesus did and prepare ourselves for His second coming.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 586.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 588, 589.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 589.

To Observe Is to Serve

EVIDENCE

Mark 2:27-3:5

Most Seventh-day Adventists know the fourth commandment. We know how to “keep” the Sabbath. We also know that our Sabbath stems from Judaism.

Though Seventh-day Adventists keep Sabbath holy because of the fourth commandment (Exod. 20:8-11), the Jews point to another text as well, Deuteronomy 5:12-15. Though this text does point to resting on Sabbath, it also mentions the Exodus from Egypt, an important event in Jewish history. The Jews tie the two commands (to rest and to remember the Exodus) together by pointing to freedom. In those times, time off from work was something common only to the upper class. Anyone in the lower class worked seven days a week. The Jewish Sabbath showed that under God everyone is free to rest and worship God.¹

The idea of Sabbath representing freedom is a beautiful image. The Christian Sabbath has an even more wonderful freedom to offer. The Jews have many laws that describe exactly what cannot

be done on the Sabbath, including not even touching a pencil or “separating two threads”² (which would have made my need to sew a button on my shirt last Sabbath against the law). We also

**The idea of Sabbath
representing freedom is
a beautiful image.**

have rules that can be confusing. Many Adventists will not eat at a restaurant on the Sabbath because it causes people to have to work, but I don’t know any Adventists who don’t turn on lights at home (something a strict Jew will not do), an act that requires someone to work at the electric company. It is just this sort of confusing rule-making that Jesus was fighting against in Mark 2:27.

Jesus wanted us to enjoy the Sabbath. Jesus, however, goes beyond just enjoying the Sabbath. In Mark 3:4, 5 healing a man’s hand illustrates His statement that it is OK to do good on the Sabbath. We, as Christians, have the freedom to serve others on the Sabbath.

Most Adventists feel they have done their duty by going to church on Sabbath, an act that cannot be matched with any command in Scripture. Truly keeping the Sabbath involves service. Keep the Sabbath, worship God, and rest, but also, do good. This is what Jesus did, and Jesus is who we are to imitate, not the Jews with all the Sabbath rules or even our fellow Adventists.

1. <www.us-israel.org>

2. Mishnah Shabbat 7:2

Wednesday
April 13

How to Break the Law

HOW-TO

Mark 3:1-5

Jesus knew how to break the law. In fact, He had a knack for doing it—especially when people were around to witness His acts of insolence. What kind of example was Jesus really setting? What are we to learn from Jesus in regard to respecting human laws? In order to change the system, Jesus had to make a public and defiant stance against the system. Here are three common themes on how and why Jesus broke the law:

- Jesus acted openly.
- Jesus did it exclusively for the good of others—He received joy in return.
- Jesus used it to teach a lesson.

He came to expose the fallacy of human ways. From Jesus' example we are to understand that God's laws are designed with everyone's good in mind; whereas,

**Jesus knew how to
break the law.**

human laws are created in a spirit of selfishness. The creator of the law benefits from it while others are oppressed by it. Not so with the law of God. It is perfect and it perfects the character of those who keep it. Jesus

got joy from restoring a man's withered hand, especially in doing it on the day God created for human restoration. It angered him to see the selfishness exhibited by the leaders and legislators of the Jewish society. Not one of the people who were healed or helped on the Sabbath ever refused the healing. They never said, "It's the Sabbath, Jesus of Nazareth. I can wait until tomorrow to be healed." If ever a calamity were to fall one of those leaders, it would be quite certain that they would seek the healing hands of Jesus, no matter the day.

And we too can learn from Jesus' selfless example. There may be times when we have an opportunity to protest a system or ideology that may or may not be oppressing us directly. We do, however, have the right and the responsibility to "break the law" in order to bring either justice or healing or peace to some soul, and thus fulfill the law of Christ—the law of love.

REACT

1. What role should a Christian play in international conflicts such as civil wars in Africa or southeast Asia?

2. Is it OK to work in a hospital on Sabbath? How about helping a neighbor mow his lawn?

Hidden Agendas

OPINION

Mark 2:22

Let's not make the mistake of assuming that all the disciples of Christ were perfect. At some turning point the disciples turned their back on the lessons that Christ had so lovingly and patiently taught them. Despite the fact that they heard His teachings, witnessed His miraculous healings, and felt the Word of God burn in their hearts—they all fell short in one way or the other. Each disciple had his own hidden reasons for associating with Jesus. Notwithstanding this information, we know that at the point of each challenge a choice for eternity was ultimately decided.

In contrast, there is one disciple whose life we can't seem to understand. And that is the life of Judas. In retrospect it is hard to understand how he could make such a foolish choice. Judas witnessed Jesus' mission firsthand. He was Jesus' financial campaign manager! God's eternal plan was explained and demonstrated before the eyes of Judas and the other disciples. So how could this happen?

The life of Judas is a simple lesson of evaluating the reason that you joined or continue to stay in God's remnant church. Many of us today see the work and the Word of God. We embrace positions and serve in the church. Unfortunately some of us may fail to realize God's plan for us because we are too focused on our own personal agendas. Judas failed to lay aside his agendas and allow God's changing power to transform him.

**He was Jesus' financial
campaign manager!**

"Judas had the same opportunities as had the other disciples. He listened to the same precious lessons. But the practice of the truth, which Christ required, was at variance with the desires and purposes of Judas, and he would not yield his ideas in order to receive wisdom from Heaven."¹ Judas failed to realize his motives. He wasted his time and ultimately lost his soul.

"It is the motive that gives character to our acts, stamping them with ignominy or with high moral worth."²

Let us examine ourselves to see how many agendas we actually do have. Our focus should not be on perfection but on persistence in allowing God to change us, which will cancel any hidden agendas we have.

REACT

What role do motives play in the quality of service for God?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 294, 295.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 615.

Friday
April 15

Sabbath for a Servant

EXPLORATION

Matt. 20:25–28

CONCLUDE

As a servant, Jesus observed the Sabbath by doing good things for others, even when it meant contradicting the Pharisees' traditions. He proved that the Sabbath is a blessing, not a burden—a day for worshiping God, resting, and serving others. Humans are valued more than laws, and we must focus on how best to follow God's laws for ourselves, rather than condemn others who think differently, or judge how they observe the laws. Failing to keep all of God's plans for us in order to pursue personal agendas will ultimately cause us to lose our souls.

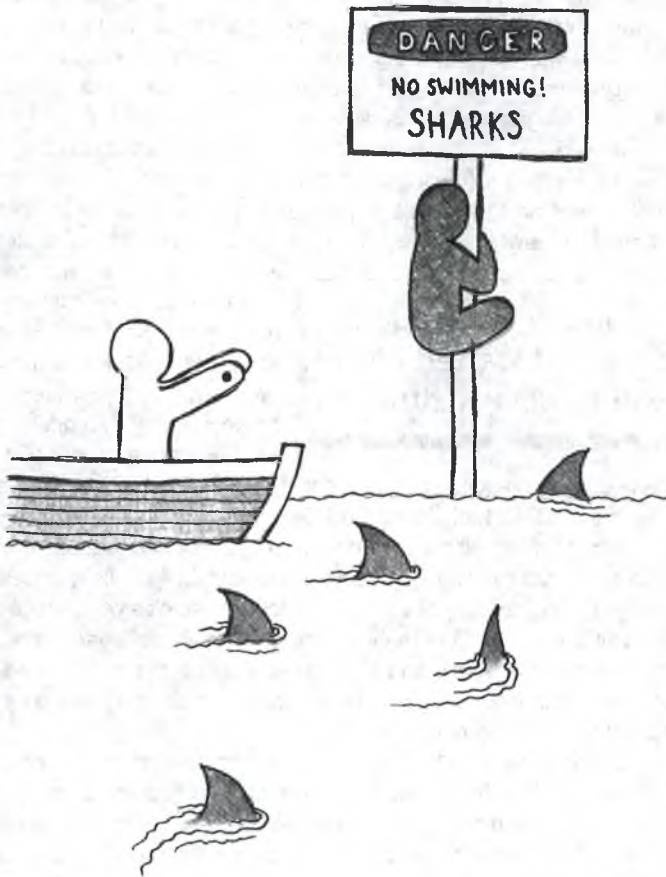
CONSIDER

- Volunteering your time or talents to the creative development of a Sabbath School class.
- Designing greeting cards and writing Bible verses in them. Distribute or mail them to shut-ins and church members in the hospital to let them know you are thinking of them.
- Praying with your church's intercessory prayer group. Keep a prayer journal so that you can go through it during the week.
- Viewing the video *Chariots of Fire* (1981). Think about how Eric Liddell would define the Sabbath.
- Listening to, or singing the hymn "Give Your Best to the Master," number 572 in *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*. Think of what Jesus' mission and sacrifice means to you, and how that helps you to serve others.
- Cooking a meal and serving it to family or friends you have not seen lately.
- Donating canned goods or clothing to your local homeless shelter.

CONNECT

John Eldredge, *Waking the Dead: The Glory of a Heart Fully Alive*.
<<http://www.unification.net/ws/theme138.htm>>

By Galilee



**“They were terrified and asked each other, ‘Who is this?
Even the wind and the waves obey him!’ ”**
(Mark 4:41, NIV).

INTRODUCTION

Mark 5:36

“Jesus told the synagogue ruler, ‘Don’t be afraid; just believe!’” (Mark 5:36, NIV).

Demon possession was rampant in Kotale village where my family lived as missionaries. Across the lagoon from our house lived a man named Gello. Even though Gello was prohibited from physically harming our family by the village men who protected us, he was still capable of pronouncing curses upon our family.

Nearly every single night Gello would scream curses at us in three different languages—Tok Pison, Gogodala, and English. Around sunset each evening, Gello would start his ranting and raving, yelling that we were not wanted in the village and that we were going to be subject to the torment of his god.

Even though it was an annoyance, my parents did not become initially concerned about his disturbances. Yet, as time went on, they felt that his curses and

Gello appeared outside his house and started his previous nightly ritual.

incantations were not bringing honor to God and their ministry among the Gogodala people of Papua New Guinea. Therefore, one night as they heard Gello begin his nightly shrieking, my parents made a decision and

knelt down to place the matter in God’s capable hands. By the time my parents rose from their knees, Gello had stopped his usual screaming.

My parents went to sleep without the noise from across the lagoon. However, this was not the end of the road between my parents and Gello. Initially, it was quiet for a few days, but Gello gradually overcame whatever obstacles were keeping him from screaming at our family. One night as the sun slowly set over the horizon, Gello appeared outside his house and started his previous nightly ritual. As soon as my parents heard the noise, they again knelt down and started praying for Gello and the spirits that possessed him.

Again, before they arose from their knees, Gello had ceased his shouting. After this time, Gello was never heard from again. God had answered my parents’ prayers and eliminated the dishonor that Gello was bringing to their ministry.

Many would not have thought that a simple prayer in faith would produce such amazing results as my parents’ prayer did, but with God anything is possible. To all appearances, Gello did not seem like “good soil,” but God was still capable of working in his life. Even though we have not yet seen Gello freed from the chains that Satan has placed upon him, we still have faith that God will work amazing miracles in his life—such as the one that He performed when His children prayed, children who were a light on a lampstand and whose faith moved a mountain of demon possession.

Why Galilee?

EVIDENCE

Mark 4:1

Galilee is the name of the northern region of Palestine. It was bordered on the south by the Plain of Esdraelon and on the north by Lebanon and the southern slopes of Mount Hermon. The total size of the region was about 40 miles long and 25 to 30 miles wide. When the Israelites invaded the land of the Canaanites, Galilee remained in possession of the Canaanites for a long time. Eventually the Israelites merged with the natives of Galilee. The distinct dialect that emerged in this region may have been in the mixture of the people.¹

Jesus chose Galilee as the center for His ministry. Most of His miraculous signs were performed in this region. The central spots were in the city of Capernaum and by the shore of the Lake of Galilee (Mark 4:1). A sloping amphitheaterlike inlet lies halfway between Capernaum and Tabgha and has excellent natural acoustics, allowing someone to be heard easily on the shoreline.² This was probably the setting where Jesus spoke the parables that are discussed in this week's lesson.

Galilee was certainly the region that benefitted most from Jesus' miracles.

You may have the same questions I had when I first found out that the ministry of Jesus was centered in Galilee: Why Galilee? Why not Jerusalem? Was not Galilee nicknamed "Galilee of the Gentiles"? My Greek professor, Dr. Regazzi, suggested to me the following reasons:

● Jesus' ministry was focused on the common people. The common people were more receptive than the Pharisees. They knew they were sinners and they had more of an open heart than their religious leaders.

● Jesus could perform and teach freely in the region of Galilee without arousing attention from the religious authorities that were seeking to arrest Him.

● Jesus centered on this area to fulfill prophecy. We find Isaiah talking about Jesus in Isaiah 9:1 this way: "In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan" (NIV).

When Jesus decided to begin His ministry—by teaching and performing miracles—He knew whom to address, how to address them, and where to address them. Galilee was not the only region Jesus visited, but it was certainly the one that benefitted most from His miracles.

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1. *The SDA Bible Dictionary*, vol. 8, pp. 381, 382.

2. David E. Garland, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 2002).

Monday
April 18

By Galilee

LOGOS

Mark 4:1–5:43

The gospel word is like seed (Mark 4:13, 14).

This is your first truth: God works for you with your cooperation. The gospel, His truth, is indomitable. Even on the sidewalk. Birds eat seed off the sidewalk. Then maybe they drop it elsewhere—on the car's hood, on the housetop, on my head. Sometimes seed and gospel growths sprout on rooftops, but sidewalks are not the best place to throw the Word. Even if it has potential to grow, somebody may stifle a miracle just by stepping on the sidewalk.

Have you stepped on the Word lately? Did you notice? What's there to notice, the simple vulnerability of truth under foot, crushed like dandelions before they could ever smile through the cracks between the concrete slabs?

And what is to notice about the sidewalk? Nike jogger traffic, dogs dodging Hush Puppies and leaping at paper floating like butterflies, skateboards and scooters flirting with impunity, segways dodging poodles, and bikes and tramps and cops and delivery vans that stroll and ride it with and without reason?

Your heart may be a sidewalk. Did the Word come to your heart just so your crowd could step on it? The gospel is God-power. Will the seed grow in your heart? The gospel is eternal life buried in the clay of your humanity to sprout

The gospel is God-power.

shoots of passion for Jesus and to stretch stalks with the ripe fullness of harvest grain in worlds won by your witness. Seed yields seed one hundred times over—proving and illustrating God. This is a metaphor of incomparable paradox: simple vulnerability simultaneous with unimaginable mastery, depending on your cooperation.

Why are you afraid? Have you no faith? (Mark 4:40, 41).

The twelve men in the fishing boat on the lake have not yet grasped the truth that God works with cooperation. What they have grasped is that Jesus needs escape for sanity's sake. They usually protected Him (Matt. 19:13; Mark 10:13). The eastern shore of the lake offers respite—sparse population and no Pharisees.

Jesus suggests crossing over. That means sailing—familiar activity. They may not get His stories (Mark 4:10), but they have got sailing. So they take Him, just as He is (verse 36) into their seagoing craft. He goes to sleep in the stern, head resting on the coarse leather cushion on which the steersman usually sits. For the steersman, Jesus' presence is a complicating matter. He has taken his pillow and sleeps where the steersman needs to be working. Once he adjusts to working

around the dead weight of a very tired man, the sailing goes more smoothly.

But not for long. From the 1,000-foot-high mountains on the eastern shore, wild winds plunge into the gorge without warning and lash the sea into a fury before 40- to 50-mile-an-hour gusts. The steersman, his four rowers, and the boat's dozen occupants are roused from evening reverie into furious action to save ship and life. Waves wash over the sides of their bark, flooding the boat. They work to keep it upright, to keep it from filling with water, to keep themselves alive. It is all very normal and sensible and desperate. Meanwhile, Jesus sleeps. "Absorbed in their efforts to save themselves, they had forgotten that Jesus was on board." Steersman included.

I really can't avoid Jesus at first, can I? But then I learn to work around Him, until I can get along without Him, until I forget He is there at all—until I realize how hopeless things are without Him. Then I cry out: "Jesus, I'm drowning!"

He wakes up and everything changes because He speaks two words. Yet He doesn't understand what made me afraid, which leaves me more off balance than ever. Who is He? Why isn't He afraid? Because He knows He is God? No, no, no! God doesn't tire and fall asleep. But men who know God can sleep anywhere. "It was not as the 'Master of earth and sea and sky' that he reposed in quiet. That power He had laid down and He says, 'I can of Mine own self do nothing' (John 5:30). He trusted in the Father's might. It was in faith—faith in God's love and care—that Jesus rested, and the power of that word which stilled the storm was the power of God."²

He could sleep because He had grasped the first truth: God-power does for you as much as you will let it do. God works for you—with your cooperation.

REACT

1. Is the account of Mark 5:1–20 compatible with the thesis that divine success in human experience requires our cooperation? Explain your answer.

2. Since spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ is so important, what lessons can we learn and apply from what Christ taught in the parable of the sower?

3. What are some different forms of mission work that are not often thought of that could use more workers sowing seeds and how can your talents be put to use in some of those areas?

4. What is the "eternal gospel" message that is referred to in Revelation 14:6? What makes this message eternal, i.e., applicable even prior to and after the existence of humans?

5. In the parable of the sower and the seed (Mark 4:13–20), why isn't Christ clear about the message He is sowing? He tells us that the seed is His Word, but what exactly is the content of His Word?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 334.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 336.

Tuesday
April 19

Have You Sown Any Seeds Lately?

TESTIMONY

Matt. 28:19, 20

"By the parable of the sower, Christ illustrates the things of the kingdom of heaven, and the work of the great Husbandman for His people. Like a sower in the field, He came to scatter the heavenly grain of truth. And His parable teaching itself was the seed with which the most precious truths of His grace were sown. Because of its simplicity, the parable of the sower has not been valued as it should be. From the natural seed cast into the soil, Christ desires to lead our minds to the gospel seed, the sowing of which results in bringing man back to his loyalty to God. He who gave the parable of the tiny seed is the Sovereign of heaven, and the same laws that govern earthly seed sowing govern the sowing of the seeds of truth."

"Christ's mission was not understood by the people of His time. The manner of His coming was not in accordance with their expectations. The Lord Jesus was the

**These maxims and tradi-
tions became an obstacle.**

foundation of the whole Jewish economy. Its imposing services were of divine appointment. They were designed to teach the people that at the time appointed, One would come to whom

those ceremonies pointed. But the Jews had exalted the forms and ceremonies and had lost sight of their object. The traditions, maxims, and enactments of men hid from them the lessons which God intended to convey. These maxims and traditions became an obstacle to their understanding and practice of true religion. And when the Reality came, in the person of Christ, they did not recognize in Him the fulfillment of all their types, the substance of all their shadows."²

"The Lord is calling upon His people to take up different lines of missionary work, to sow beside all waters. We do but a small part of the work that He desires us to do among our neighbors and friends. By kindness to the poor, the sick, or the bereaved we may obtain an influence over them, so that divine truth will find access to their hearts. No such opportunity for service should be allowed to pass unimproved. It is the highest missionary work that we can do. The presentation of the truth in love and sympathy from house to house is in harmony with the instruction of Christ to His disciples when He sent them out on their first missionary tour."³

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 33.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

3. *Messages to Young People*, p. 217.

Faith and How to Grow It

HOW-TO

Mark 4:20

In Mark 4:20, Jesus ends His explanation of the parable of the sower with: “These are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit” (NKJV). The healthy soil was able to take in the seeds and allow them to grow. We can apply this parable to our faith development in Christ.

The text gives us three steps to follow to become good ground:

1. Hear the Word. Jesus instructs us “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear” (verse 23, NKJV). He also says, “Take heed what you hear” (verse 24, NKJV). The first step we must take in developing our faith is simply to listen. We need to take note of what God has to say. Just simply hear the word.

2. Accept the Word. Next, we must take to heart the message God speaks to us. We must decide to believe that what He says is true.

3. Bear fruit. This is the action step. Now we must take a leap of faith. We make a request of God, believe He will follow through, and move ahead with the plan until He shows us otherwise. It is also important to remember what Jesus says in Mark 4:25. “Whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him” (NKJV). In other words, if we do not act on our faith, we lose it.

Open yourselves to what
God has to say.

Mark 5:25–34 relates the story of a woman who had been sick for many years. She *heard* about Jesus and about His works (verse 27). And when she heard about Him, she *accepted* that what she heard was true and decided: “If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well” (verse 28, NKJV). Then the woman *acted* on her belief. She came up behind Jesus, touched His clothes, and immediately she was healed. Jesus told her, “Daughter, your *faith* has made you well” (verse 34, NKJV, emphasis supplied).

Jesus speaks of a man who scattered seed on the ground. The seed sprouted and grew, though the man “himself does not know how” (4:27, NKJV). Faith growing is a process—just like grain growing: “First the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head” (verse 28, NKJV). But no matter how small our faith is at its beginning—even if it is as small as a mustard seed—it will grow (verse 31). Our job is to allow God to work. Open yourselves to what God has to say, accept His words, and go forward in faith, believing that He will take care of the rest.

Thursday
April 21

Give Me Mine

OPINION

1 John 4:18

OK, I will admit it: I'm a selfish person; and I don't know whether I'm comforted or discouraged by the fact that I know I'm not alone. This disease has seemed to cripple millions of people around the world and throughout the ages. And Christians—those who claim to follow Christ—are not immune to this disease.

Think about it for a moment. Many times we approach our Christian experience from a selfish motivation. We can't wait to get to heaven so we can walk on those streets of gold some day. Or perhaps we are excited about our new healthy lifestyle because it ensures a few more years of pleasure seeking on this earth.

Amid this sobering reminder stand the disciples, scared for their lives on a sinking boat. Waking Jesus up from His peaceful rest, they scream, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" (Mark 4:38, NIV).

**That is the definition
of fear.**

The heartbreak of Jesus is infinite. The twelve that He had chosen to demonstrate His selfless love to the world thought only of themselves when the going got tough. Never was it a thought in

their mind to wake Jesus up so *He* wouldn't drown.

After calming the storm, Jesus sorrowfully asks them, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (verse 40, NIV).

I look at my life and realize that far too often I worry about my personal safety when I face adverse times. Never mind Christ's cause, what about me? Of course, fear will strike me when I'm thinking only about self. That is the definition of fear: worrying about how self is going to be affected. It is for this reason that John reminds us, "Perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18, NKJV). Perfect love (*agape*), by definition, thinks nothing of self and therefore has no reason to fear for self.

Perhaps Christ looks down on His church and sorrowfully cries, "Do you *still* have no faith?" Until Christ's bride attains a faith that puts God, and ultimately, others, ahead of self, He has no choice but to delay His return to heaven with a bride by His side. Imagine millions of people in heaven, walking around worried only about themselves! What a sight that would be. Except for the addition of a few vanity items like streets of gold and mansions for all, heaven would be no different from earth. Actually, it would probably be worse because we mortals would have more material possessions to be selfish about.

To both the disciples and us, we are reminded, "When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own."*

**Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 69.

Show No Fear

EXPLORATION

Mark 4:41

CONCLUDE

Fear is not a word that is far removed from human experience. We all have had our share of moments when our lives seemed to pass before us. Fear can also have the tendency to bring out either the best or worst in us. By definition, however, fear also means the respect and reverence that we demonstrate to God. Down through the ages the disciples and people of God have learned to let go of fear and rely only on God's strength and Word to keep their faith alive. The greatest challenge for Christians is to let go and "only believe" (Mark 5:36, NKJV).

CONSIDER

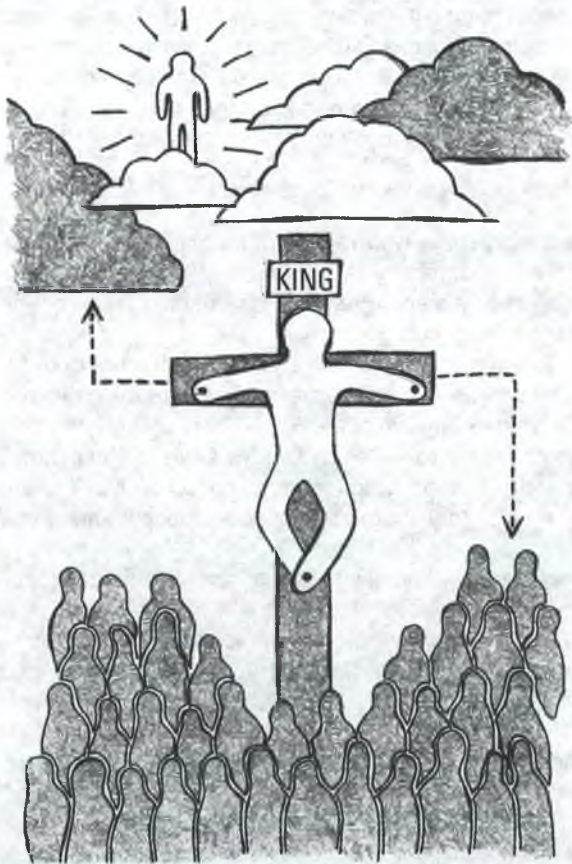
- Photographing people who represent roughly the four major life stages, doing activities that require faith and a "just-do-it" attitude. For example, a baby taking its first steps. Prepare these photos in a presentation format and share with your church family.
- Listening to songs that have faith as the core theme—both from Christian and secular genres—and compare/discuss their main differences.
- Viewing the video *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness* (1958). Think about the way in which faith is exhibited by Gladys Aylward, the central character.
- Reading and preparing a drama script based on Mark 4, Jesus and the wind and waves story, for a group of young people and/or presentation at church.
- Organizing a group of people to "adopt" a less fortunate community group and begin an ongoing welfare ministry—keeping in mind Jesus' example as He ministered among the common people and met their felt needs.
- Taking an inventory of members of your church group, journaling faith experiences, and producing a small booklet to distribute as an encouragement in faith development for new believers.
- Conducting a real-life experiment based on the parable of the sower. Observing the growth of plants for which the seeds have been planted in different environments, as represented in Mark 4:20. Think about the "hear the word, accept the word, and bear fruit" principle in faith development.

CONNECT

Jesus Freaks dc Talk and the Voice of the Martyrs, stories on pages 144, 170, 221, and 238.

Doug Batchelor, *Seven Steps to Salvation*, chaps. 15, 18, 20; Dirk Devries, *Quick Takes for Teens*, vol. 2, pp. 24–31.

Confrontation in Galilee



“They all saw Him and were frightened. But immediately He spoke with them and said to them, ‘Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid’ ”
(Mark 6:50, NASB).

God's Tunnel Project

INTRODUCTION

Mark 6:50

In December 1987, two groups of engineers started to dig. One group started digging in Sangette, France. The other group started digging at Shakespeare Cliffe, England. They were constructing the channel tunnel, the most expensive engineering project in the European Union, costing \$31 billion. It took them three years to meet under the English Channel and three and a half years to finish all the tunneling for all three tunnels. They used tunnel boring machines (TBM), specially built to dig the channel tunnel. The largest of these had a diameter of 8.78 meters, a length of 250 meters, and weighed 1,200 tons.

On average, they dug 150 meters per week, but under good conditions they dug up to 428 meters per week. The engineers had concerns about whether these huge machines would meet in the same place so they used computerized laser-guidance systems and radar to keep each TBM on track.

Despite their best efforts the engineers encountered various problems with collapsing walls, leaking roofs, and flint in the clay. They fixed jammed conveyors and bugs in the laser-guidance system. The constant problems that faced the engineers forced them to run over budget. However, in 1994 the channel tunnel was opened for business, carrying high-speed trains from England to France in just 20 minutes through 31 miles of tunnel, 26 of which are under water.

Rather like the tunnel engineers, Jesus' mission on earth—building a link between God the Father and humanity—hasn't all been clear sailing. This was the universe's most ambitious and expensive project. Even though He started on a high, He soon encountered various difficulties and opposition. The religious leaders were following Him about and actively challenging Him at every opportunity.

Some of His followers found some of His teachings unpalatable and left Him. It seemed as if there were times when Jesus made great progress, and then at other times things seemed to slow right down. But despite the difficulties, Jesus managed to keep on track. How did He do it? And how can we copy Him?

It does seem that life as a Christian isn't straightforward. We run into difficulties and meet with resistance. Do we crumble and stop or do we press on? It took Jesus three and a half years to build the link between God and humanity and now we can have open access to the Father through Jesus Christ.

**Despite their best efforts
the engineers encountered
various problems.**

LOGOS

Mark 6:1–7:23

From Your Hometown (Mark 6:1–6)

The people of Jesus' hometown didn't want to see beyond their prejudices. They wanted to be who they wanted to be. Why change for someone they knew? They probably believed change should come from some unexpected, extraordinary source, not from some ordinary carpenter's son.

Often we fail to see the extraordinariness of ordinary people. They become ordinary because we see them every day and fail to recognize the unique individual. If we wait upon God's Spirit and open our eyes, we could recognize, and appreciate, Jesus in His hometown, in His church, and in His people.

At Work (Mark 6:7–13)

Jesus cared about the details—the details of people. Having been dismissed by His hometown, Jesus turns to His ordinary disciples and sends them on an extraordinary mission. Fishermen? Preach? With God, it isn't who you "be." It is what you are willing to be. And these disciples were willing to be God's.

He sent them in pairs. It is easy for one person to lose sight of what is important. One can get so into searching for God that they lose sight of Him altogether: They become more important than the message. Pastors of popular ministries

Pastors of popular ministries sometimes *become* the ministry.

sometimes *become* the ministry. Jesus probably understood that that temptation usually befalls ministers and therefore sent them in pairs for their own spiritual balance. Jesus also knew that His disciples needed the strength that comes from partner-

ship—with each other and with God. That pretty much defines the idea of Christian fellowship: Ministry is working together for, and with, God.

It would've been faster to send them individually and thus covering more people. However, the emphasis was not in area, or baptisms—the emphasis was on substance. There was no one to impress with statistics; the strength of the gospel existed on the quality of, and reason for, preaching.

In Servers and Service (Mark 6:30–44)

They come back from their preaching experience and tell Jesus all about it. He wants to spend some quality time with the Twelve, but the crowd surrounds them. Jesus, ever the Savior, fellowships with the multitude. He asks the disciples to serve the people and performs a miracle to make it all possible. Service with an

understanding of their need. (This is the first recorded instance of a combo meal: more than five thousand served!)

The disciples are overwhelmed by the crowd. However, being disciples, they do what is needed at the time—believing Jesus is in control of the situation.

When you believe that Jesus is in control, you know you will be all right.

In eastern cultures, people who serve are usually the last ones to eat. The unspoken rules of etiquette dictate that guests leave enough food so those who are serving may enjoy the meal. When the meal was over, there were 12 baskets of food left. These weren't leftovers, but food for the 12 disciples who served and needed to eat. The servers are never forgotten in ministry.

Beyond the Fear (Mark 6:47–52)

Having experienced the joys of ministry, having been fed, being so near to Jesus, the disciples still didn't get it. When a storm rocks their boat and their Messiah walks toward them, they mistake Him for a ghost and are disturbed.

This is so much like me! I profess faith, yet I'm often cowering because a storm seems to have collapsed my sails. It is easier to believe I am going to die than recognize salvation in the midst of chaos. But in the midst of chaos Jesus walks toward me, calming my fears and my storms. God is the antidote for fear: Prayer and worship are the daily recommended dosage.

Beyond Rituals (Mark 7:1-22)

By the time of Jesus, laws had been carved into intricate rituals. They robbed the individual of a personal experience with God. People were so caught up in rituals that they failed to see humanity.

This mass of people who were (and are) all redeemable, were sorted out like sheep into saved and unsaved groups. Once again Jesus demonstrates the need for understanding. Worship occurs when the heart, the mind, and the body stand for true testimony for the One who deserves all worship. And the people couldn't give up their ways for God. You can almost hear Jesus sigh.

Beyond the Foreigner (Mark 7:24–30)

Having been dismissed by His hometown, feared by His disciples, questioned by His leaders, Jesus is amazed by the faith of a foreigner. A woman, who was not from His people, understands the Messiah and stands witness. Her verbal sparring with Jesus speaks volumes to the need of the gospel to all people.

Her act of faith stands witness that in the midst of rejection, fear, and ridicule, God can bring testimony from outside the remnant. Perhaps that was what Jesus needed: to know that people still believed. Perhaps that is what God is looking for: people to look beyond what they've been taught to see and still believe in His ministry.

Monday
April 25

With Every Breath

TESTIMONY

Mark 8:11

Something like your everyday TV shows, Jesus' life was a drama, always edited by the Pharisees so as to make them look good to the audience. They always looked for a way to make Him look bad, a way to humiliate Him in front of their friends. Nothing He did was good according to their holy book or code of righteousness in which they looked for guidance. They claimed to follow God's Word while rejecting God's Son. They claimed to be in search of truth, yet Jesus was not quite good enough for them. As always, finding a way to make Jesus look bad was their mission. Even though His goodness to the people created multitudes of followers, He was still hated by the Pharisees.

"For a time it had seemed that the people of Galilee would receive Jesus as the Messiah,"¹ that they would even accept him as king. They had opened up to Him,

**They claimed to be in
search of truth.**

brought Him their problems, and accepted that His word was the truth and that He was truly sent by the Father. But the Pharisees would not have it. It only inflamed them more to see that such a Man could make such

a big impact on the people. "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse" (Rom. 12:14, NKJV). This was indeed Jesus' way of living, for even when He was persecuted daily without rest, He only repaid this kind of treatment with mercy and love.

Even at the cross, when they had finally condemned Him, He offered them salvation. "The disciples noted the rage of the spies as their false teaching was exposed. They saw the angry looks, and heard the half-muttered words of dissatisfaction and revenge."² Jesus did no wrong but He had to be condemned because He was exposing them in every way. Their lies and twisted truth were coming to the surface too fast.

Did they choose to accept Him? No. Instead they spat in His face and crucified Him. Any one of us would have fought back and not allowed ourselves to be ridiculed in such ways, but Jesus remained true to the words of His Father and to His mission. He was persecuted more than anyone on this earth, but until death He remained our Counselor and Preacher of the truth.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 395.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 398.

Christians — Why Afraid?

EVIDENCE

2 Cor. 5:7

If the eleventh chapter of Hebrews could be written by a contemporary writer, a few more names would surely be added to the alumni of faithfulness. One of those who lived “by faith” was Martin Luther.

“Zealous, ardent, and devoted, knowing no fear but the fear of God, and acknowledging no foundation for religious faith but the Holy Scriptures, Luther was the man for his time. Through him, God accomplished a great work for the reformation of the church and the enlightenment of the world.”¹

Through diligent study and experiences that conflicted with this newfound light, Luther was convinced of the corruption and false traditions that filled the papacy. And in 1515 he pronounced publicly that the requirements of salvation through works and indulgences was wrong, and through *sola fide*, only faith, does one gain salvation through Jesus Christ. Crowds of hopeful and weary believers flocked to hear these sweet teachings.

“The glad tidings of a Saviour’s love, the assurance of pardon and peace through His atoning blood, rejoiced their hearts and inspired within them an immortal hope.”²

Power, not truth, ruled the hearts of the papal leaders.

But others charged him with heresy and accused him of acting out of pride and hasty judgment. Even those dignitaries who agreed with him feared the retribution of the church. Power, not truth, ruled the hearts of the papal leaders. To squelch Luther’s claims, he was excommunicated from the church, monitored extensively, and finally summoned to appear before the Diet to answer allegations of sedition, rebellion, impiety, and blasphemy. He was threatened incessantly by those who demanded a retraction. But Luther felt that he must “continue faithfully to maintain the truth, notwithstanding the storms that were beating upon him.”³

Luther said, “God does not guide me, He pushes me forward. He carries me away. I am not master of myself. I desire to live in repose; but I am thrown into the midst of tumults and revolutions.”⁴

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 120.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

4. *D’Aubigné*, b. 5, chap. 2.

From Consumers to Contributors

HOW-TO

Mark 6:34

Leadership development always begins with showing concern for the emerging leader, then securing a foundation, and finally drawing commitment.

Jesus models this process in Mark 8: For the second time, Jesus fed thousands in a miraculous way (verses 1–9), teaching the disciples that God can provide food. A deeper lesson came later when they recognized that Jesus had performed the miracle to show them that God would meet all their needs (verses 17–21). Jesus also warned them to guard their attitude and perspective (verses 14, 15).

By doing this, Jesus slowly moved His men from consumers to contributors. Jesus wanted to get emerging leaders to think about issues beyond themselves. Note these steps in the stages of His developmental process:

1. Shepherd

THEN: He met their immediate needs;

NOW: He provides security.

2. Equipped

THEN: He trained them to serve;

NOW: He provides opportunities.

3. Developer

THEN: He mentored them to lead others;

NOW: He provides personal challenge.¹

Despite Christ's best effort, the disciples consistently missed the spiritual application He provided specifically for their benefit. Sadly, so it is with us today. God continues to reveal Himself to us in miraculous ways; and although we accept deliverance, we fail to recognize the power behind the miracle.

Similarly, when Jesus fed the multitude for the second time, He used this event as an opportunity to demonstrate His power not only to meet physical and spiritual needs but, more important, to exemplify the worth of a soul. Yet, in the midst of the multitude, the disciples saw only problems instead of opportunities.

"What irony! In the midst of a bakery—in the presence of the Eternal Baker—they tell the 'Bread of Life' that there is no bread. How silly we must appear to God!"² How tragic that His own disciples doubted right up to the very end—even when He admonishes them with the great gospel commission, "When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted" (Matt. 28:17, NKJV).

1. John C. Maxwell, ed., *The Maxwell Leadership Bible, New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers), p. 1208.

2. Max Lucado, *The Inspirational Study Bible, NKJV* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1995), p. 1264.

Sandy Stones and Stony Sand

OPINION

Mark 6:4–11

You are walking barefoot on a beach, enjoying the air, sea, and sky. The awesome beauty of God's nature enralls you as you marvel at His creativity and power. You can see the painted sunset off in the distance, hear the crashing, lapping waves of the sea, and feel the warm, wet, squishy sand between your toes. All of a sudden, bathed in all this natural luxury, you step on a hard, pointed rock that pierces the bottom of your foot and causes bleeding. The peace has been breached; the tranquility is utterly annihilated by your pain and blood. This is the feeling that I get from the opening verses of Mark.

When I read the first few verses of Mark 6, I am truly concerned. The story here is that Jesus has returned to His hometown of Nazareth and is the speaker for the hour at the synagogue one Sabbath. Everything was going well until He reveals to the churchgoers that they need to repent and be forgiven of their sins.

At this point, they show their true colors; they talk about Jesus' past and upbringing, "Isn't this the carpenter's Son?" In other words, they

**At this point they show
their true colors.**

were saying, "Who does He think He is, telling us to repent?" Now we all know that no one is perfect; however, it is most unpleasant when "church folk" begin making accusations, especially on the sacred grounds of the synagogue. They meant to imply that Jesus could preach all the sermons He wanted, as long as He did not pull them out of their comfort zone of being the "chosen" people.

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus renames the disciple Simon, meaning pebble, to Peter, meaning rock. "On this rock I will build My church" (NKJV). He was strong enough to become the basis of a church, yet at the Master's betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane and unfair trial, Peter proved to be very, very weak—a sandy stone, falling apart at the point of pressure. I see this trait in the Nazarenes who witnessed Jesus' sermons and miracles. They were willing to hear His words and see His miracles, as long as they were not offended by correction. In their rejection of Jesus, they had become sandy stones, appearing to be the real thing when they really were not. Other people rejected Jesus when He refused to become king at their whim. Jesus knew His calling and would not be swayed by the crowd.

EXPLORATION

Mark 6:1–13, 30–56; 7:1–22

CONCLUDE

When Jesus visited His hometown, He was criticized and rejected. He did not force Himself and His message on the listeners. Instead, He moved on to towns where He was eagerly welcomed. In fact, He preached to a crowd of people who wouldn't even leave to get food. And so He performed a miracle for them. Today Jesus is still unwelcome to many, but where He is listened to and embraced, He brings gifts beyond expectation.

CONSIDER

- Reading (on the Internet or at the library) about a person in politics, religion, or entertainment who you feel faces prejudice.
- Helping someone who teaches younger children in Sabbath School. Think about whether you feel accepted by the children. How does their level of acceptance affect your ability to minister to them?
- Listing rituals you perform at church that hold no meaning for you. Think about how you could make them more meaningful.
- Asking someone close to you (a parent, sibling, roommate, spouse, boss, friend, etc.) to share what positive change they would like to see you make. Then make it.
- Creating a musical rendition depicting Jesus' calming of the storm. If you don't play an instrument, you can use recorded music and add sound effects.
- Sketching out an idea for a welcome sign that would let Jesus know He is welcome at your church or Sabbath School room.
- Calculating how many loaves of bread and how many fish it would take to feed a crowd of 5,000 men plus women and children.

CONNECT

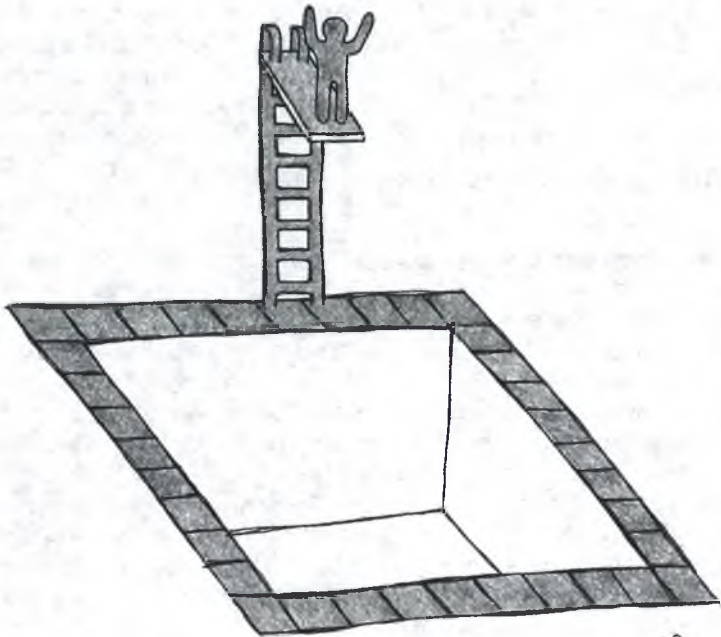
The Desire of Ages, chaps. 39; 40.

Alfred Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1, pp. 635–695;

G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Mark*, pp. 131–166; Adam

Clark, *Clark's Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 188–192.

The Passion predicted



“When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, ‘Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me’ ” (Mark 8:34, NKJV).

Sabbath
April 30

More Than Just Wood and Nails

INTRODUCTION

Gal. 4:4, 5

John and Sebastian are good friends. They share math class every day. John, a Christian, witnesses to Sebastian—who is not a Christian—about the love of God. He has told him about Christ dying on the cross to save him from eternal death. John hoped that Sebastian would give his life to Christ, but Sebastian was not interested in salvation.

Sebastian is a high diver for his school. One night he went to the school's large swimming pool to practice his high diving. He climbed to the highest platform, stood

**Even if you are rejected
by others, Christ has
died for you.**

upright with his arms outstretched, ready to dive. He hesitated, noticing the light of the moon, making a figure on the wall that looked like a cross. Just then the janitor came in and turned on the lights. When Sebastian looked down more than 20 feet below, he saw that the pool

was empty of water. Since then, Sebastian has given his heart to God.

The Old Rugged Cross is more than just wood and nails. It was on the cross that the Son of God was sacrificed for your sins and mine.

Hollywood might view the Cross and its significance as an avenue for production of a movie to generate a profit. But the action of this significant object means life for the human family. When the cross was raised upright and the first Promise was there hanging, all men could be drawn to the glorified Savior of the world. The man Christ Jesus came and died on a cruel cross for the sins of the world. God's purpose knows no haste and no delay for "when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, . . . to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:4, 5, NKJV).

Our Lord Jesus Christ came to this world as the unwearied servant of man's necessity. His compassion knew no limit. In every community through which He passed, He laid His hands on some, looked on some, and spoke to all who were in the hearing of His voice. There were no ends to how Jesus healed the people. He healed all who needed healing. Those rejected by men were assured by Jesus that He was here to save them. He taught His disciples that He was here to save the outcast for He was going to die for them (verses 4, 5).

Even if you are rejected by others, Christ has died for you no matter how you may feel. Jesus Christ is still in the saving business and He wants to save you and me. Let us live with the hope that one day we will see Him.

The Origin of the Cross

EVIDENCE

Mark 8:37; 1 Cor. 15:22–24; 1 Pet. 4:12, 13

Mark is the shortest of the Gospels, yet in some respects it is the most vigorous and powerful of them all. Mark emphasizes Jesus as a man of action. A characteristic word of Mark is *eutheos* or (*euthas*) “straightway,” or “immediately,” which he uses more often than all the other Gospel writers together.

Mark was not an eyewitness to the events he described, though familiar with the Gospel because he had heard Peter’s account of it. Writing his book for non-Jews, he explained Jewish customs (such as the Passover) for readers not familiar with such events. He relates the life of Jesus largely in chronological order. His emphasis on miracles makes apparent his purpose, which was to highlight the mighty power of God as evidenced by Jesus’ many signs and wonders. Mark proves Jesus is the Messiah by the witness of His divine power, which, presumably, would be more convincing to his intended readers—Christians of a Gentile, perhaps Roman, background.

At the close of His ministry, Christ explained to His disciples that His own life of self-abnegation was an example of what theirs’ should be. Calling His disciples, and those who lingered near, He said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Matt. 16:24, NKJV).

Many of us accept only
half the gospel.

A cross is a manmade object and an instrument of torture and death associated with the power of Rome. Nothing manmade can have any power over divinity. Jesus took it upon Himself to die for us in the most humiliating way. He not only died but was also resurrected, yet many of us accept only half the gospel. We accept the ministry of the Cross but not that of the resurrected Lord.

In addition to secular history, these are the reports of the New Testament writers themselves. Archaeologists and historians are constantly verifying the accuracy of the biblical account of history.

The Cross destroys anything connected with sinful humanity, but cannot touch anything divine. By showing itself powerless to destroy anything divine, it confirms its powerlessness. Fire can only refine the gold and increase its glory. In this manner, the cross became the acid test that makes a separation between sinful humanity and perfect divinity.

At the Cross, the Savior’s divinity was confirmed. Even the Roman centurion was compelled to exclaim, “Truly this Man was the Son of God!” (Mark 15:39, NKJV).

Monday
May 2

The True Example of Selfless Service

LOGOS

Mark 7:24–9:13; Eph. 5:2; Heb. 12:3

The True Nature of Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:2; Heb. 12:3)

The hostility of the priest, rulers, scribes, and the Pharisees dogged the footsteps of Christ throughout His earthly ministry. His true nature was one of love. Jesus uses every opportunity to seek out and help those in need. He taught His disciples that salvation was also for the non-Jews. His work was not restricted to time and place. He stood up for principles and opposed injustice. Jesus came to reveal who God is and His love for humanity. “The great controversy is the selfish system of Satan and the selfless system of God in collision. While Lucifer stated he would be like the Most High (Isa. 14:14, NIV), Christ is the Most High.”¹

Encounter With the Scribes and Pharisees (Mark 8:11, 12)

Since the scribes and Pharisees did not want to believe that Jesus was the Son of God, they murmured and complained and sought to take His life. But not all were

True Christians should be more concerned with the salvation of their neighbors than with their stock portfolio or business.

oblivious to the prophecies that portrayed Christ as the suffering servant. Many sincere individuals looked forward to seeing the Promised One. We are often too quick to point fingers at ancient Israel

and wonder at their blindness, yet many today shut their eyes to the signs of His second coming.

Unconditional Acceptance (Mark 7:25–30; John 6:37)

Jesus accepts everyone where He finds them and leads them to where He wants them. He said, “ ‘All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out’ ” (John 6:37, NKJV). Through the eyes of His omnipresence, Jesus saw a woman of Phoenicia who according to the custom then, was an outcast of society. Jesus saw that she had a need. He used that need to grant the woman her wish and to show to His disciples what His true mission was all about. “He taught them that self-seeking as was the custom of the Pharisees were not to be named among them.”² He sought in their presence to break down the barriers between Jews and non-Jews.

Let us beware lest we try to rebuild the barriers between ourselves and our neighbors or those of another religion. In God's sight all humans are equal.

Jesus' Revelation of God (Matt. 1:23; Mark 7:36, 37; John 1:14)

Jesus came to reveal to humankind who God is. His name reveals His divine nature—God with us. Both believers and demons address Him as the Son of God (Matt. 8:29; Mark 1:1).

Although Jesus told those He healed not to tell anyone about the miracles, they simply couldn't keep it to themselves. "That which had led the Jews to reject the Savior's work was the highest evidence of His divine character."³

Taking Up the Cross and Following Him (Matt. 16:24; 1 Pet. 2:21)

"Jesus gave up all His glory to bear the shame of the Cross. He explained to His disciples that His own life of selfless service was an example of what theirs should be."⁴ Love for souls for whom Christ died means crucifixion of self and self-ish ambitions. "He who is a child of God should henceforth look upon himself as a link in the chain let down to save the world."⁵

True Christians should be more concerned with the salvation of their neighbors than with their stock portfolio or business. God calls all of us to be workers with Him. Many feel that it would be a great privilege to visit the scenes of Christ's life on earth, but we need not go to Bethlehem, Nazareth, or even Capernaum to walk in His footsteps. We shall find footsteps beside the bedside of the sick, in the hovels of poverty, in the crowded alleys of great cities, and in any place where humans are in need of consolation.

REACT

1. Jesus Christ was the manifestation of God in human form, so His actions during His earthly life were actions that any of us could imitate. How does this relate to the performing of miracles?

2. Why didn't Christ simply cure everyone in the whole world at one time while He was in this world? Why did He just repair a few local problems?

3. To what extent, if any, should Christians participate in politics? Explain your answer.

4. What was the fundamental message of Christ about the nature of God?

5. To what extent is Christianity different from other faiths?

1. David Metzler, *Daily Devotion for Adults*, p. 7.

2. C. Mervyn Maxwell, *The Message of Daniel*, God Cares, vol. 1.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, p. 238.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 239.

Tuesday
May 3

The Mission of the Messiah

TESTIMONY

Mark 7:24–37

When Jesus cast out the evil spirit from the daughter of the Syrophenician woman and opened the deaf person's ear and loosed his tongue from the impediment, it clearly indicates that He was the long-awaited Messiah. "Every miracle that Christ performed was a sign of His divinity. He was doing the very work that had been foretold of the Messiah."¹

"Jesus stood before the people as a living expositor of the prophecies concerning Himself. Explaining the words He had read, He spoke of the Messiah as a reliever of the oppressed, a liberator of captives, a healer of the afflicted, restoring sight to the blind, and revealing to the world the light of truth."²

"In the sufferings of Christ upon the Cross, prophecy was fulfilled. Centuries before the crucifixion, the Saviour had foretold the treatment He was to receive. He said, 'Dogs have compassed Me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed Me:

"Jesus stood before the people as a living expositor of the prophecies concerning Himself."

they pierced My hands and My feet. I may tell all My bones: they look and stare upon Me. They part My garments among them, and cast lots upon My vesture.' Ps. 22:16-18. The prophecy concerning His garments was carried out without counsel or interference from

the friends or the enemies of the Crucified One. To the soldiers who had placed Him upon the cross, His clothing was given. Christ heard the men's contention as they parted the garments among them. His tunic was woven throughout without seam, and they said, 'Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be.'"³

"Every important aspect of the life and mission of Jesus—His nature, His birth, the events of His life, and, most particularly, His sufferings and death—were all foretold by the prophets of old. Not only that, but every act of His life was performed in fulfillment of a plan that existed from eternity."⁴

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 406.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 237.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 746.

4. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 284.

The Cross: Humanity's Future

HOW-TO

John 20:31; Rom. 10:11-13; Gal. 3: 28

God sent Jesus directly to earth. He came as an example to show humans how to survive in a wicked and sinful world. The Cross was inevitable. Christ lived, died, and resides today in the hearts of humankind. His crucifixion was for the redemption of humanity.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is seen performing a number of miracles: He restores sight to the blind, loosens the tongue of the dumb, provides for the hungry, casts out demons, and heals other infirmities. He healed people despite who they were, Jew or Greek, bond or free, as long as they believed (Gal. 3:28). Jesus' aim was to "show that His love was not to be circumscribed to race or nation."* Hence, salvation is for all.

Do you believe Jesus can still work those miracles today? Have you entered into a personal relationship with Him? In what way does your belief in Christ advance your relationship with Him?

**Jesus is an all-wise,
all-knowing, and
all-powerful God.**

How can one engage in a close relationship with Christ? Here are a few useful hints:

● **Share your problems.** Humans always wish to have someone with whom they can share their difficulties. Christ is the best Person you can tell your problems to because He knows the conflict and the solutions long before you perceive them. He is the greatest Problem Solver.

● **Believe.** Whatever you ask of Christ, you must believe that He is able. He is an all-wise, all-knowing, and all-powerful God. He knows what is best for us and is capable of doing everything we could possibly ask of Him. All Jesus requires of us is our belief in Him.

● Jesus gives every man the freedom of choice. He says, I place before you life and death, truth and error; however, He advises us to choose life. Now it is for us to accept His compassionate love and share it with souls hungering for the light of truth. Think about this seriously: Do you think Christ would still have come and died had you been the only sinner on earth?

Jesus' destiny was earth, and His purpose was the Cross. His reason was you. His desire is for all of His created beings to reign with Him in eternity.

**The Desire of Ages*, p. 402.

Thursday
May 5

Whose Passion Was It?

OPINION

Eph. 5:2; Heb. 12:3

Other than having an emotional/sexual meaning, passion in the context of the Cross means, as stated by the Oxford dictionary, "The suffering of our Lord at the cross." The suffering of our Lord was predicted centuries before the Crucifixion. Did He have to die? Could someone else have taken His place? Jesus had to die. He was the only One suited to save the fallen human race.

The passion of the Crucifixion could not have been anybody else's. Jesus, historically, came from both the Moabites as traced from Ruth's genealogy and also from Boaz's genealogy. Both together, by their union, make up the genealogy of David from which the Lord came (Ruth 4:13-22).

The Cross means the beginning of a one-on-one relationship with God.

Jesus not only came from Jewish descent, but also from the Moabites who were considered heathen, hence making Him the only true sacrifice. He came to save both the Christians and the heathens. The sacrifice was one that only Jesus could provide.

Many times we see the cross as simply the wood on which the Savior died, but it was more than that. It means the end of ceremonial services and the beginning of a one-on-one relationship with God. How good can that be? Now, because of the Cross, we can go straightway to the Father and have our own problems solved.

"By coming to dwell with us, Jesus was to reveal God both to men and to angels. He was the Word of God,—God's thought made audible."*

This week the Cross as seen and recorded by Mark will be emphasizing the passion that was predicted.

REACT

1. Why should we trust God to fulfill His purpose in our life?
2. How should we treat those who are less fortunate than we are?
3. How can we encourage a friend who has been rejected by men and feels unworthy of God's love?
4. Jesus' first coming guaranteed His second coming. How much do you agree with this statement?
5. While Jesus was on earth, He was always performing miracles. Do you believe He is still doing so? What are some of the miracles that are evident in your life?

**The Desire of Ages*, p. 19.

God's Plus Sign

EXPLORATION

1 Cor. 1:18

CONCLUDE

The story of the Cross is about a compassionate Savior. He went through ultimate agony because you matter. When the truth grips the core of your being, you will never be the same. The story of the Cross also reveals the sensitivity of God to the pain that sin brings upon people. You will live in awe at the reality of God's unconditional, forgiving love. This reality will help you treat people lovingly. Thus, the Cross today becomes a powerful symbol of God's love through its vertical and horizontal dimensions—connecting you to God and connecting you to fellow beings. You will add new relationships when you believe in the Cross. How appropriate it is, then, to call the Cross “God's plus sign”!

CONSIDER

- Composing a cinquain—a short, five-line poem, about the Cross. The first line is a single-word title—Example: Cross. Second line, two words describing the title; third line, three words, expressing action; fourth line, four words expressing a feeling in a phrase; and fifth line, one word, repeating the title or giving a synonym for it.
- Listing things that you do for others that show you care. Rank them in order of frequency of use and then reflect on how to improve these activities.
- Role-playing the conversation between God the Father and Jesus in heaven just before Jesus came to the earth. Especially debrief on the sufferings and death Jesus was to go through, feeling the emotions of the Father and the Son.
- Making a collage of a cross using picture cutouts of items related to the Cross—literally or symbolically, such as, trees, wood, nails, people, heart, etc. Place it where you can see it often and meditate on the love of God.
- Listening to or singing the song “The Old Rugged Cross,” thinking of the words so powerfully portraying God's love to humankind.
- Brainstorming with a friend on the personal meaning of the Cross and Christ's death.

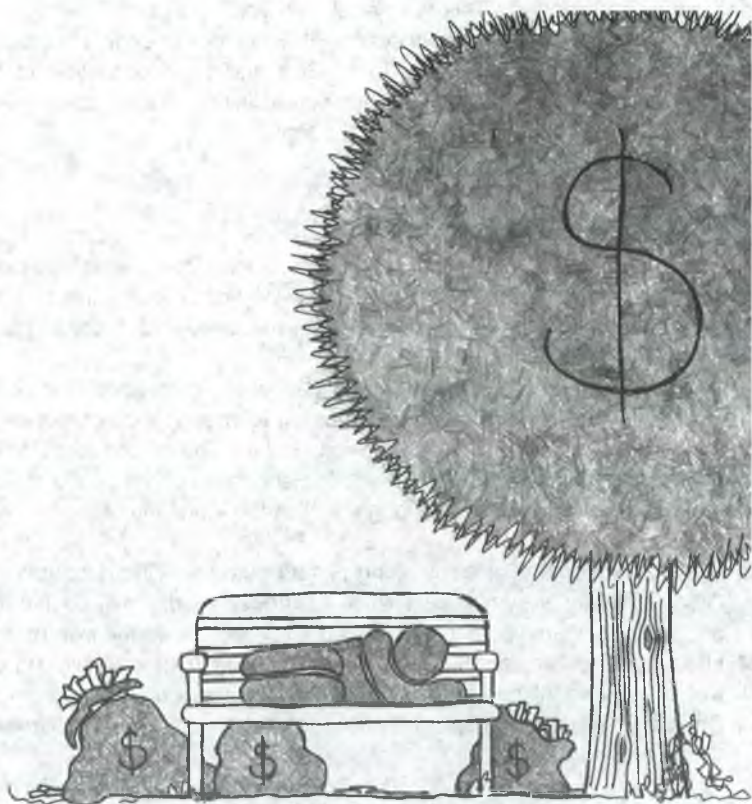
CONNECT

Mark 15.

The Desire of Ages, chaps. 78; 79.

Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, pp. 199–205.

Teaching the Disciples



“ ‘If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all’ ” (Mark 9:35, NIV).

BiFocal Vision

INTRODUCTION

Mark 9:23; 10:27

Wealth. Beauty. Brains. Success.

Winning. Achieving the C's—Charge account, Condominium, Carats, Career with six-figure salary, Cash to spare, fancy Car. Fame and glamor. Media attention. Success.

The King dressed up as a commoner, divinity taking on humanity. Turning the other cheek. Seeking the kingdom first. Laying up treasure in heaven. Success.

Can these seemingly polar opposites be reconciled? What if you woke up one day and found out that all the things you prized and loved were worthless? What if everything felt empty? What if your values and morals were challenged?

Christianity claims to have a solid Rock in Jesus. What does the Cross mean to you? What does Jesus stand for? What hope does He offer for our present and the future?

As a public figure, Jesus was surrounded by multitudes, including those who would discredit Him. Crowds were running to Him and greeting Him. Casting out spirits and healing the sick, He taught that “ ‘If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes’ ” (Mark 9:23, NKJV).

Jesus was surrounded by multitudes, including those who would discredit Him.

So it is possible to do great things for the Lord. Yet God's lenses paint a different world from ours.

Like the disciples, could we be missing the point sometimes? Success through our tunnel-vision eyes means climbing to the corporate top at all costs. Instead, Jesus used a child as a model for greatness (verses 35–37; 10:31, 41–45). In God's kingdom, *greatness comes from service and humility*, not ego or works. In Mark 9:39–43, Jesus was not into exclusivity—the gospel, the gifts of the Spirit, all work done in His name and for His cause is recognized.

Jesus is amazing. He picked a motley crew to be His disciples and lovingly and patiently taught them His values. He countered human pride, arrogance, and ambition with love and grace. Jesus worked with each of His disciples and transformed them, never giving up on them. The lessons took time to sink in. They were lost on some but what a legacy for us! Our human nature predisposes us to spiritual failings. Jesus has set the record straight and fixed the cracks in the mirrors, directing us to look to God's ideals. This week, take time to examine various aspects of spiritual success, and let God do the transforming work in your life.

Sunday
May 8

True Christian Success

LOGOS

Mark 9:14–10:31

In the dim, blue-stained light of the morning, four figures shuffled down the worn hillside path. Jesus, at the front of the group, had once again succeeded in stumping Peter, James, and John.

“What do you think ‘rising from the dead’ means?” one of them whispered to the back of his hand, hoping that Jesus wouldn’t hear. It was so difficult to know parable from fact. The others shrugged and darted their blurry eyes at one another. They were still trying to catch up from missing a night’s sleep and from the eerie shock of seeing Christ’s transfiguration.

Their discussion was interrupted when they began to hear mass pandemonium down at the base camp. Teachers

**Who would have thought
that you could lack some-
thing by having everything.**

of the law were flailing their hands and pointing as they shouted their accusations. Not just one argument was going on, but several—one for each disciple who wished to defend himself

and his lack of spiritual capabilities. Christ had to, once again, step in as supplement for His disciples’ inabilities.

Failure While Everyone Is Looking (Mark 9:14–29)

“A man in the crowd answered, ‘Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not’ ” (Mark 9:17, 18, NIV).

When it really counted and Jesus was away, the disciples ended up making themselves look foolish in front of a crowd. Why was it that they failed? Jesus said later, “ ‘This kind [of evil spirit] can come out only by prayer’ ” (verse 29, NIV).

We, like the disciples, become comfortable in the midst of spiritual warfare. But it is during the times that we can’t see the salvation of God that we need even more faith in His saving grace.

We typically say, “Show me and I’ll believe you.”

But here Jesus says, “Believe Me and I’ll show you.”

Instead of doubting their ability to share God’s healing, the disciples should have realized that this was obviously an important soul that Satan desperately did not want to lose. This miracle required all of God and nothing but a conduit from the disciples.

What Children Know About Salvation (Mark 9:30–50)

“They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, ‘What were you arguing about on the road?’ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest” (verses 33, 34, NIV).

Everyone wants to feel important. The disciples seemed to be trying to prove their value in Christ’s earthly kingdom. Who would sit at His right hand? Who would sit at His left?

“He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me’ ” (verses 36, 37, NIV).

Jesus then begins to share what He wishes the disciples would focus on. Don’t worry if others are doing miracles in Jesus’ name. Focus on those who need miracles. Don’t focus on your hand and miss out on the touch of God. Don’t focus on your foot and miss the path that God is leading you to. Don’t focus on your eye and miss the Savior in front of you.

Jesus Talks About Divorce (Mark 10:1–12)

The Pharisees were pretty upset by Jesus and His teachings. Many of them prided themselves in their righteous lifestyle. But Jesus comes along and says, “I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:20, NIV).

The Pharisees had heard rumors about Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in which He blasted them on their teachings on murder, divorce, adultery, oaths, eye for an eye, and loving each other. He followed each of their teachings with the words “but I tell you.” Who did He think He was? Only God has the authority to change law.

But while they were trying to find a weakness in His teaching, Christ used this opportunity to reinforce that we are called to a higher standard of righteousness. Relationships are not merely contracts, but opportunities to exhibit true faithfulness.

The One Thing You Lack: Everything (Mark 10:17–31)

Mark continues to illustrate the weaknesses and behaviors of Christ’s followers by sharing the story of the rich young man. Once again, Jesus says that our righteousness must surpass that of the Pharisees by being selfless. Who would have thought that you could lack something by having everything. Jesus never intended His people to stockpile wealth, but to use it to help His children in need. That is true Christianity.

You’ll notice that the Scriptures don’t tell us that the rich young man didn’t go and sell everything; it just says that it would be very difficult. It wasn’t impossible.

Monday
May 9

Faith's Connection With Heaven

TESTIMONY

John 6:37

What causes spiritual failures?

In what ways did the disciples show their spiritual failing?

Why did Jesus treat the children as He did?

"It is faith that connects us with heaven, and brings us strength for coping with the powers of darkness. . . . But many feel that they lack faith, and therefore they remain away from Christ. Let these souls, in their helpless unworthiness, cast themselves upon the mercy of their compassionate Saviour. Look not to self, but to Christ. . . . Faith comes by the word of God. Then grasp His promise, 'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.' John 6:37. Cast yourself at His feet with the cry, 'Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.' You can never perish while you do this—never."¹

"The nine disciples were yet pondering upon the bitter fact of their own failure. . . . Their unbelief, that shut them out from deeper sympathy with Christ, and the carelessness with which they regarded the sacred work committed to them, had caused their failure in the conflict with the powers of darkness."²

**"The cross was just
before Him."**

"Now the cross was just before Him; and His own disciples were so filled with self-seeking—the very principle of Satan's kingdom—that they could not enter into sympathy with their Lord, or even understand Him as He spoke of His humiliation for them."³

Jesus was ever a lover of children. "In the children who were brought in contact with Him, Jesus saw the men and women who should be heirs of His grace and subjects of His kingdom, and some of whom would become martyrs for His sake. He knew that these children would listen to Him and accept Him as their Redeemer far more readily than would grown-up people."⁴

REACT

How is it that the disciples' faith was not strong enough to cast out the demons from the possessed boy? What is the difference in the faith Christ demonstrated, which made it successful in removing the demon?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 429.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 436.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 512, 515.

Then and Now, That's Power

EVIDENCE

Mark 9:24, 29

This week our study centers on Christ's practical lessons, instructing the disciples privately and publicly on the basic fundamentals of the power of prayer, spirituality, and Christian doctrines. Many of these events occurred in the autumn of A.D. 30. The week will contrast God's way of salvation versus humanity's way.

The private teachings concern humility and greatness (Mark 9:33–36), enough work for everybody to do (verses 38–41), and causing others to sin and how to deal with our own sin (verses 42–50). The public teachings were on marriage (10:1–12), children and their importance (verses 13–16), and finally the tragic story of the rich young ruler and the costs of heaven in earthly terms (verses 17–31).

The first major theme for all of us to learn is the power of prayer. This week's study begins with the demon-possessed boy which follows the mount of transfiguration. By these stories, we see

the glorified Jesus on the mount compared to a satanic demon-possessed young boy; the glory of heaven versus the damning effects of the devil. The disciples were dumbfound-

**The first major theme for
all of us to learn is the
power of prayer.**

ed that they could not heal the young boy; the father, who expected him to be healed, complained to Jesus and by faith asked for his son to be healed.

In this story, it is not who you claim to know, but in whom you believe. Two points need to be made first. Even though the disciples personally knew Christ, they really did not understand how powerful prayer was to Jesus—something they would not understand until Pentecost. Second, it was the man's faith that healed his son. Jesus calmly told the demon to leave and later admonished the disciples that it was the power of prayer that cast the demon out.

The second major theme that is very apparent in these stories is that our way of thinking is not Jesus' way of thinking. Witness today how many homosexual partners are wanting to be married and how some churches allow this. As I write, they are going to courts demanding to be married and trying to change laws and constitutions allowing same-sex marriage. Christ made it very clear by quoting Genesis in Mark 10:6 that "God 'made them male and female'" (NIV).

Finally, don't miss the universality of the gospel message. People of other faiths are doing God's work, and we shouldn't hinder them or question their motives. Heaven is large enough for other faiths that are doing the work of God in Jesus Christ's name.

Wednesday
May 11

How to Be a Spiritual Success

HOW-TO

Mark 9:35; 10:27

True success depends not on what we can do for ourselves, but what God can do in and through us. All of humankind can be used as a vessel by God to spread His everlasting message of love, joy, and peace. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus gives us many examples of how we can live a truly successful spiritual life. "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all" (Mark 9:35, NKJV). The spiritual giants of the Bible were great men and women because they lifted Jesus up in their lives. They constantly followed Jesus' example by being a servant to all men, not just those who held a high position here on earth.

A majority of our failures here on earth come because we do not have faith in Jesus to pull us through the tough times. We do, however, have hope: "Jesus looked at them and said, 'With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible'" (Mark 10:27, NKJV).

Jesus, the Creator of the universe, can supply us with any resource we need.

Now that we know Jesus can supply all our needs, here are a few steps we can take to become a spiritual success:

- Get into the habit of daily morning devotion. Just as breakfast is the most important meal of the day, our daily devotion to Jesus should be one of the first tasks we accomplish each morning. Beginning your day with Jesus is a key ingredient to living each day of your life to the fullest. Ask for His guidance in prayer each day, and He will lead you down the right path.

- Think long-term, not short-term. Our lives as Christians should be viewed as a marathon, not a sprint. There will be many bumps in the road that may cause us to waiver in our beliefs, but we should hold fast till He comes.

- Faith is the victory. Our media likes to portray people as either winners or losers. The first question everyone asks after a sporting event is, "Who won?" Jesus has already conquered Satan and his angels at the cross of Calvary. As followers of Christ, we need to stay rooted and grounded in His Word.

- Keep perspective. When we view our lives here on earth, let's keep Hebrews 12:2 in mind: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (NIV). What a promise to have: Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords, is our personal Author and Perfecter.

Lives of the Rich and Famous

OPINION

Mark 10:17–23

In Mark 10:21, Jesus told a man to give up everything he had accumulated in his life in order to get into heaven. Does Jesus actually want us to be poor?

“The Bible does not condemn the rich man because he is rich; it does not declare the acquisition of wealth to be a sin, nor does it say that money is the root of all evil. On the contrary, the Scriptures state that it is God who gives the power to get wealth. And this ability is a precious talent if consecrated to God and employed to advance His cause.”¹

Jesus wasn’t asking this man to give away his money because money is bad. He asked for this because the man was not using his wealth for God’s will. When we agree to be a disciple of Christ, we agree to let God influence every aspect of our lives, and it is obvious that Jesus knew that the money was holding this man back. So how do we accumulate wealth and still be rich in God’s eyes?

“The sincere Christian appreciates the warning given by Jesus, and is a doer of His word, thus laying up his treasure in heaven, just as the world’s Redeemer has told him he should do. He views an eternity of bliss worth a life of persevering and untiring effort. He is not misdirecting his efforts.”²

“He has not lost by any means the power of accumulation; but he employs his active energies in seeking for spiritual attainments. Then all his entrusted talents will be appreciated as God’s gifts to be employed to His glory. By him, property will be prized, not hoarded, valued only inasmuch as it can be used to advance the truth, to work as Christ worked when He was upon the earth, to bless humanity. For this purpose he will use his powers, not to please or glorify self, but to strengthen every entrusted gift that he may do the highest service to God. Of him it can be said, ‘Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.’

“God does not condemn prudence and foresight in the use of the things of this life, but the feverish care, the undue anxiety, with respect to worldly things is not in accordance with His will.”³

**Jesus wasn’t asking this man
to give away his money
because money is bad.**

1. *Councils on Stewardship*, p. 138.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 158.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 158, 159.

True Spiritual Success

EXPLORATION

Mark 9:35

CONCLUDE

One interest of humanity is to define, quantify, formulate, or legalize important aspects of life, including Christianity. After all, how else can you clearly know what spiritual success or spiritual failure is? Go to church, pay tithe, say you love God, don't sin—and eternity is yours? Why do we embrace this limited, misguided understanding of God, never inviting Jesus to give us a new heart and a new spirit? Is it too hard to take our eyes off our outward spiritual condition so we can look to Jesus Christ? When focusing only on a superficial understanding of spiritual success, you don't need to know the character of God, you don't need to understand the meaning of the Cross, and you don't even need to ask any questions. God invites you to study His Word to see the big picture and to become Christlike, so you can hear the Creator proclaim, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:23, NKJV) and not "I never knew you" (7:23, NKJV). True spiritual success comes through a deeper understanding of the character of God.

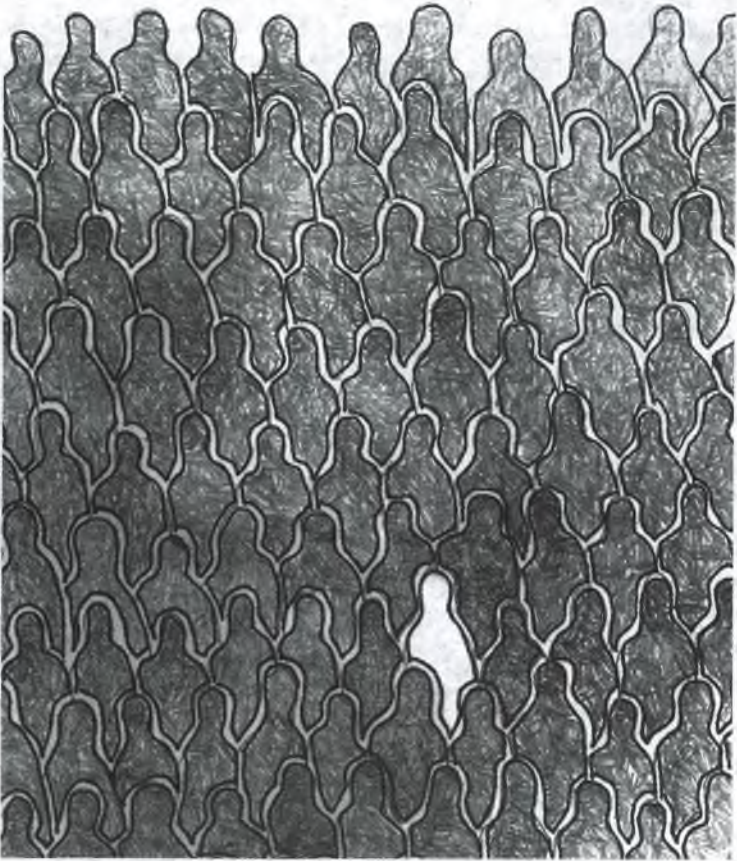
CONSIDER

- Creating a church mural to depict the scene described in Mark 9:34–37.
- Interviewing individuals in a mall or on a street corner to compute the percentage of individuals who believe they: (a) have obtained spiritual success, or (b) can obtain spiritual success, or (c) cannot obtain spiritual success.
- Composing a modern-day version of Mark 9:33–50, and sharing it as a monologue.
- Leading a song service that includes mission-theme songs.
- Directing and participating in a church walk-a-thon to raise funds for needy church members or needy community members. Remember to model the first-shall-be-last and the last-shall-be-first attitude.
- Listing your top five most important assets, qualities, talents, possessions, etc., and assess how you use those for Christ.
- Cultivating a "stewardship garden," one in which the "first fruits" and the "last fruits" are donated to the needy.

CONNECT

The Desire of Ages, pp. 432–442; *Steps to Christ*.

The final Journey



“ ‘Even the Son of Man did not come to be served,
but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many’ ”
(Mark 10:45, NASB).

The Journey to Salvation

INTRODUCTION

Mark 10:45

The sun beat steadily on the back of my neck as I stood on the outdoor track at my high school regional track meet. Due to an unforeseen injury by our star runner, I was placed as the final leg on the 800-meter relay. My legs trembled and my stomach did flip-flops as I watched how close the race was.

I looked over to my opponent and almost fainted when I realized that she was the national women's champion for the 800-meter race. As I positioned my feet and hands to receive the baton, thoughts of failure and defeat crowded my mind—I could never beat this girl. Suddenly the cool object was placed in my sweaty palms and I began running. I blocked out the cheers and boos of the crowd and focused on my goal. Even though my chest burned and I felt dizzy, I knew that stopping was not an option—I could not fail because my team was depending on me.

Through the pain in my body I continued to run and I did not stop until I crossed

I looked over to my opponent and almost fainted.

the finish line. I decided to close my eyes because I did not want to see the disappointment on my teammates' faces when they told me that we had lost the race. When I opened my eyes,

my coach swooped me up in the air. I then realized that the opposing team had dropped the baton and we had won.

During Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem, He traveled with the heavy weight of our salvation. Not only did He know the events that would transpire leading up to His death (Mark 10:32, 34), but He also understood the importance of His mission.

Jesus knew that He would be betrayed and that His beloved disciples would not stand with Him. This realization caused Him to experience human emotions such as isolation (10:32), depression (14:33), and anxiety (verse 36). He tried to explain to His disciples the events that would transpire, but they were afraid and confused (10:32). Jesus knew that His friends would fail Him—He knew that humanity would reject Him—but His love for us transcended all. Jesus' destiny was to conquer and defeat the forces of evil. His mission was our salvation.

The Evidence of Service

EVIDENCE

Mark 10:43–45; 11:22–24; 2 Cor. 4:15

Bill was on his way home from work on a rainy but otherwise ordinary day. Never did he expect that lightning would strike a large tree right above a corner on the highway he was traveling. Never did he dream that just as he rounded that corner, a massive branch from that tree would crash through his windshield, pinning him in his car. Suddenly an ordinary trip home for Bill became a life-and-death struggle.

In a similar sense, as Jesus and His disciples make the journey to Jerusalem, little did the disciples realize the life-and-death struggle that was at stake. While the disciples envisioned the fulfillment of their fondest dreams as Jesus set up His earthly kingdom, Jesus endeavored to give them evidence of His much greater plan. He spoke of things that amazed them, yet in the end proved not only to be true, but also the evidence on which their faith could rest. (See Mark 11:22–24.)

Today, some 2,000 years later, we too are on a journey home. The struggle is just as real and the stakes are just as high. The evidence given to the disciples is just as relevant to us because

the same lessons Jesus was trying to teach them we must learn ourselves. For example, Jesus taught His disciples that while the world exercises lordship and authority over their subjects, “Yet it shall not be so

**Suddenly an ordinary trip
home for Bill became a
life-and-death struggle.**

among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all” (Mark 10:43, 44, NKJV). Then, just a few years later, the great apostle Paul boldly reminds us, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2, NKJV). (See also 1 Corinthians 9:19; 10:33.)

The greatest evidence—then and now—remains Jesus’ demonstration of eternal love. “Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45, NKJV). And this same love is what God longs to put in our hearts as evidence from which others can be led to believe. “This is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, . . . By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:11, 16, NKJV).

Monday
May 16

The Radical, Ransoming Jesus

LOGOS

Mark 10:32; 11:25

Jesus was always unconventional. He was never viewed as a “safe” option in His lifetime. He was always seen as someone who made a difference, who was radical, even dangerous. In fact, He was killed because the controlling powers decided He just was not safe to have around.

Jesus was radical even for the radicals. He Himself said He didn't come to bring peace but a sword. Jesus used a direct approach and was no stranger to controversy. He called the religious leaders of His time “ ‘whitewashed tombs . . . full of dead men's bones’ ” (Matt. 23:27, NKJV). He called the respected pious men of His day hypocrites. He called the king a fox. He identified the establishment as a “ ‘brood of vipers’ ” (12:34, NKJV). He was identified as a glutton and a drunkard. He accused the religious leaders of turning the temple into a den of thieves. In His public addresses He clearly showed what He thought of the narrow-mindedness of religious tradition. Jesus had no time for mock holiness.

Jesus astonished people, His disciples included (Mark 10:32). Why? Because

Jesus makes the comfortable uncomfortable.

He turned their whole value system upside down! He cared nothing for wealth or social position or power. He didn't even bother talking to Herod, the ultimate insult to a king. To Pilate

He was brief and to the point, not seeking any favors.

Most of all, Jesus was not “nice.” He represented nothing of that niceness which is so characteristic of Christianity today, a bland amorphous faith that is simply—well—nice.

Jesus challenged the religious norms of His time. He did not accept the accepted wisdom. He demanded rethinking of the givens.

Forgive your brother seven times? More than anyone would have the right to expect—in normal human circumstance? No, says Jesus, don't even count your acts of forgiveness.

In contrast to the belief that wealth was a sign of God's blessing, Jesus says it is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God than a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Even Jesus' disciples were astonished at this one, asking, “ ‘Who then can be saved?’ ” (Matt. 19:25, KJV).

The first will be last; the last will be first. Whoever wishes to be great must be a servant. Wisdom and praise not from the educated adults but from babes and children. Such ideas fly in the face of contemporary beliefs and rip the ground out from

all the self-satisfied professional religionists. Jesus operates in opposition to the concepts of His time, and it is hardly surprising that those in power and authority react against him and try to enforce their leadership. Jesus is antiestablishment, and they demand to know “By what authority are you doing these things?” (21:23, NKJV).

As a consequence and because of such division on the very basics of who God is and how He operates, Jesus is placed in confrontation. So He speaks bluntly.

To the Pharisees: “‘You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me?’ ” (22:18, NIV). To the Sadducees: “‘You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God’ ” (verse 29, NIV). Of the teachers of the law: “‘Do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, . . . You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness’ ” (23:3, 4, 27, 28, NIV).

To all those who claimed to speak for God and yet did not know him: “‘You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel’ ” (verse 24, NIV). (Pointed, and funny too! Don’t tell me the common people did not laugh at that one.)

The Gospels reveal many instances in which Jesus confronts others, mainly to gain thought and reflection—perhaps even to shock people out of their comfort zone, to disturb their equilibrium. Jesus makes the comfortable uncomfortable. Why? Because it is the only way to face the desperate importance of His message.

Next He tells them that He’s about to be betrayed, killed, and then will rise again—enough to shock even the hardened cynic.

What was He saying? That He was paying a huge price to save us from ourselves. Giving His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). And don’t get sidelined into asking who He paid the ransom to or what the currency was. He was simply saying that to save us cost Him greatly.

For to save us from our sinful selves, to break through the veneer of self-righteousness we all wear like our best outfit, to shock us into the realization of our doomed state, the radical, unconventional Jesus goes to the Cross.

Nor is the Cross some pleasant aspect of religiosity—however much we may want to sanitize it. The way of Jesus, His journey to Jerusalem, is the way of the Cross. For on the Cross, which certainly is as far from nice as you can get, the radical Jesus challenges us to come to Him, to be won back to love and trust in Him, to receive the salvation only He can give. Radical ransom. God at work saving you and me. Do you dare to be as radical?

REACT

1. Do you see Jesus as radical? Explain your answer.
2. In perfecting our character to be like that of Jesus, how do we react to religious extremists who carry out suicide bombings? What is our call to action in telling the story of Jesus to them?

His Priceless Compassion

TESTIMONY

Mark 10:45

How could they ever think that the Man they loved most, their Friend, would be betrayed by one of them and soon crucified? "Christ presented His future, illustrating it by the things of nature, that the disciples might understand. The true result of His mission was to be reached by His death."¹

But Christ's words to His disciples made little impression on them, for their hearts harbored pride and ambition to hold the highest positions in His kingdom.

"The Saviour's promise to His disciples is a promise to His church to the end of time."

So Jesus set about to help them realize their selfish condition by cleansing their hearts through the communion service in the upper room.

"Jesus said to the disciples, 'Ye are clean, but not all.' He had washed the feet of Judas, but the heart had not been yielded to

Him. It was not purified. Judas had not submitted himself to Christ."²

At the last hour of His life on earth, His disciples' hearts were still in doubt and in fear. But God comforted them with His promises (John 14:1-3).

"The Saviour's promise to His disciples is a promise to His church to the end of time. God did not design that His wonderful plan to redeem men should achieve only insignificant results. All who will go to work, trusting not in what they themselves can do, but in what God can do for and through them, will certainly realize the fulfillment of His promise."³

Though Christ knew Judas from the beginning, He still made cleansing available to him. The priceless compassion of Christ for His disciples is the same love He has for His children here on earth. If we walk in His sight, He is always ready to receive us.

REACT

1. When we examine Jesus' unconventional life, how does that impact our view of the Father?

2. In the gospel of Mark, Christ told His disciples three times what was going to happen to Him, but the disciples missed the big picture. How are we like them?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 623.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 649.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 667.

Inspect My Fruit

HOW-TO

Mark 11:12–14

The curse on the fig tree seems harsh and out of character for Jesus. Upon closer inspection of the matter, however, we see that this tree provides a perfect object lesson for the disciples. The nature of a fig tree is to produce fruit first and then leaves. Anyone seeing a fig tree full of leaves rightfully should expect at least one fig on the tree. Jesus found none. The tree gave the appearance of having fruit but when closely inspected it did not have any. To a hungry Jesus, this tree was a great disappointment. “That barren tree, flaunting its pretentious foliage in the very face of Christ, was a symbol of the Jewish nation. The Saviour desired to make plain to His disciples the cause and the certainty of Israel’s doom.”*

When Jesus saw the fig tree full of leaves, He expected it to have fruit. On the surface Israel had the appearance of having a relationship with God: temple services, evening sacrifices, and yearly feasts. But a closer inspection revealed a nation that lived for human praise and did not care for the poor or the sick and did not want to share the love of God with others. They were all leaves and no fruit.

We present ourselves as Christians to the world, therefore, when the world looks at us it expects to see the fruit of a Christlike character. To ensure that we bear this fruit we must:

**They were all leaves
and no fruit.**

1. Pray without ceasing. Communicating with God deepens your relationship with Him and strengthens your faith. Keep the lines of communication open between you and God throughout the day, and the Holy Spirit will direct you in your daily life. “Certainly God has heard me; He has attended to the voice of my prayer” (Ps. 66:19, NKJV).

2. Study God’s Word. “All these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition” (1 Cor. 10:11, NKJV). For every problem or situation in life God has provided a “how-to guide” through His Word. By having a consistent study life, you equip yourself to present a Christlike character to all you come in contact with.

3. Apply what you’ve learned. Make a conscious decision to practice the principles learned in God’s Word. When you do so, these actions will become second nature to you and soon you will be producing fruit as well as leaves. “Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart! They also do no iniquity; they walk in His ways” (Ps. 119:2, 3, NKJV)

* *The Desire of Ages*, p. 582.

Thursday
May 19

If Stones Had a Voice . . .

OPINION

Mark 10:32

A current television commercial in the city of Melbourne, Australia, asks this question: "If a city had a voice, where would it be?" The scene then cuts to the Melbourne Cricket Ground (host of the 2006 Commonwealth Games) with a seating capacity of over 100,000 people, all screaming in jubilation as a local cricket hero guides the ball to the boundary to score four runs.

There is something special about sharing a moment of excitement with others in unison. Whether it is at a concert, play, or sporting event, etc., celebrating together can be exhilarating.

As Jesus begins to ride the donkey into Jerusalem, He is surrounded by crowds of people all shouting "Hosanna" and celebrating what they believe is the turning point for the political future of the

Will we find ourselves astonished?

Jewish people. It was so loud and convincing that, according to Luke's account, religious leaders asked Jesus to quiet the crowds from all the commotion. To this Jesus

replied, "Even if the crowds were quieted, then the stones would have a voice" (Luke 19:40, author's paraphrase).

Mark 10:32 states that as Jesus led the way to Jerusalem, the disciples were "astonished" (NIV) and those following were "afraid" (NIV).

The disciples would have been astonished because their Master had never encouraged this kind of adoration toward Him. He had always hushed them when they spoke of His being the future King. Now He was riding a donkey in a procession privileged only for royalty.

Others were afraid. Ellen White explains that as Jesus looked over the city of Jerusalem, He wept over what was about to take place. Many were unsure as to why Jesus was acting this way.

Jesus often did unexpected things. Uprooting tables and cursing trees are just a couple of examples found in this week's lesson. I wonder how we as professed followers of Christ will truly respond in the anticipation of the returning King? Will we find ourselves astonished? Will we find ourselves afraid?

I would suggest that current world events point to the soon return of Christ. How are we responding? How are others responding? I sometimes hear Adventists try to quiet the subject of the Second Coming because they do not want to heighten the premature anticipation of the event. But I wonder—if the stones had a voice, what would they say?

The Upside-Down Kingdom

EXPLORATION

Mark 10:45

CONCLUDE

The Jews thought that Jesus had come to set up an earthly kingdom, but His was an upside-down kingdom marked by service to others rather than splendor and glory for Himself. This unselfish love earned Him the intense hatred of the religious authorities—the very people who should have embraced Him. As a result, He was treated cruelly and eventually crucified. This path of pain was the only way to secure our salvation. The question is: Will we receive this salvation and demonstrate the same love in our lives? This will produce fruit in us and others will come to believe based on this evidence.

CONSIDER

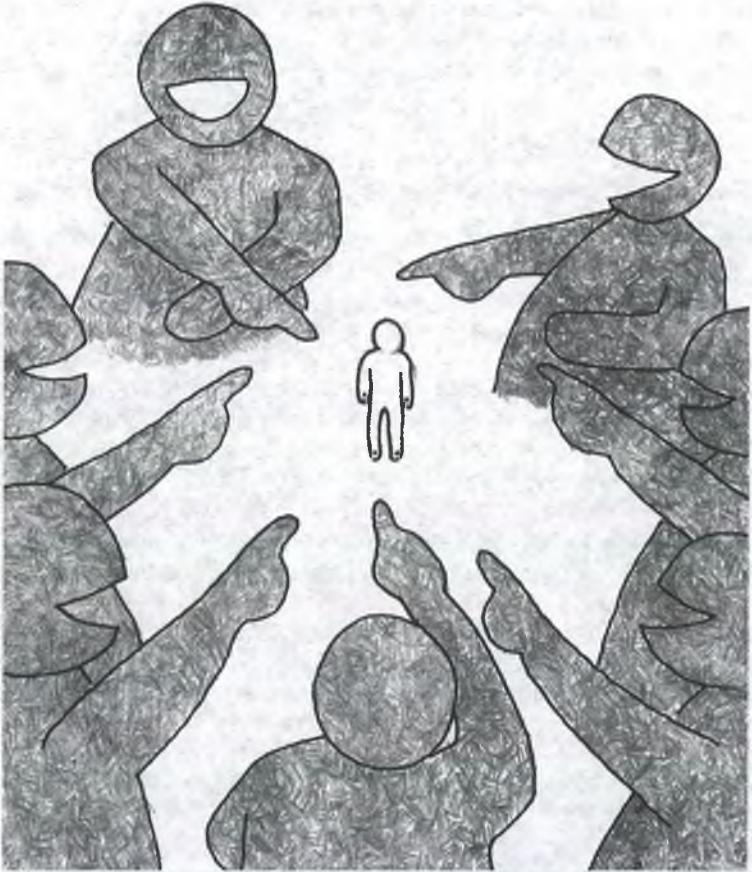
- Videotaping your church service and sharing it with a sick person or a shut-in.
- Calculating how many needy people are served throughout the world based on reports from ADRA and other service organizations.
- Debating the virtues in serving those who do not seem to be interested in helping themselves.
- Performing a skit in which you are a modern-day news correspondent reporting on the radical and unconventional acts of Jesus.
- Cooking soup or baking bread and sharing it with a friend, neighbor, or classmate.
- Tutoring a child *pro bono* whose parents cannot afford a tutoring service.
- Attending a spiritual gifts workshop to discover or confirm your spiritual gifts, then asking the Holy Spirit to help you find ways to use them.
- Landscaping the property of a senior citizen.

CONNECT

The Desire of Ages, pp. 231–235.

Steve Daily, *The Heresies of Jesus*.

Last Days in the Temple



“ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment’ ”
(Mark 12:30, NKJV).

Do We Take God as a Joke?

INTRODUCTION

Mark 11:27–12:44

In Mark 11:27–12:44, we see Jesus being confronted by the priests and teachers, and their questioning Him regarding what authority He has to heal and minister to people. Jesus replied in parables, expressing His forgiveness, love, and ownership of the people.

All throughout Jesus' life, He was questioned by both Jews and Gentiles as to His purpose. They took Jesus as a joke. Jesus simply told them, "You'll see My work through people and you'll see My blessing and how I help people."

Throughout life's history, we have seen how people treat Christians when they say they believe in God and when they tell about the miracles of how God works through them. In the year 2005, Christians are faced with a lot of obstacles and too many of us take God as a joke.

One day in my philosophy class, the teacher asked if we believed in God. With the exception of one boy, everyone said Yes. He said there was no such thing as God.

I was shocked, but I had to realize that not all people do believe in God, for He has given us the freedom of choice as to whether or not to follow Him.

**In my philosophy class
the teacher asked if we
believed in God.**

The boy in my class went on to ask, "How can you live your life by what is written on paper—written by some drunk old men?"

Honestly, I didn't know what to say because he really, truly believed that there was no God. He took God and the Bible as a joke.

How many people believe this? How many people think like this? This is certainly something we need to be aware of and work toward changing.

But how do we change such attitudes when, as the text shows us, it is not only unbelievers that take God as a joke, but those who profess to believe and know Him?

As we look at this week's lesson and the questions the leaders ask of Jesus, let us stop trying to trip up God or to get Him to agree with our particular religious belief, but instead, ask ourselves the hard question: Do we take God as a joke?

Sunday
May 22

Getting to the Heart of the Matter

LOGOS

Mark 11:27–12:44

Just as Jesus' ministry in the Gospel of Mark is initiated by a series of tests in the wilderness (Mark 1:12, 13), it is culminated in a series of challenges to Jesus' authority. Significantly for those who consider themselves believers is that while the first series of tests comes directly from Satan himself, these final tests come in a series of questions from religious leaders well versed in the Scriptures. Through each of these challenges, however, Jesus sees to the heart of the matter and answers the truly important questions left unasked.

The Authority of Jesus (Mark 11:27–33)

Upon Jesus' return to Jerusalem, He is met in the temple courts by what appears to be an official delegation of religious leaders seeking to know by what authority Jesus acts. Instead of simply answering the question on the level it is asked, Jesus patiently assesses the situation and offers a question of His own, effectively turning the tables. Knowing there was no answer that would allow the leaders to win this verbal jousting they had initiated, they choose not to answer, and so do not have their question answered either.

This parable has been directed against Jesus' questioners.

The Parable of the Tenants (Ps. 80:8–16; 118; Isa. 5:1–7; Jer. 2:21; Mark 12:1–12)

Though not answering the question directly, Jesus instead tells a parable. To understand this parable in the same way those in Jesus' presence would have, one needs to review other biblical imagery of vineyards clearly interpreted as God's relationship to His chosen nation, as in Isaiah 5:7 where it says: "The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry for help" (NKJV).

It is clear, then, that this parable has been directed against Jesus' questioners. But He has also addressed the matter of authority. He is implying that He is sent by God, and He's driving home John the Baptist's earlier reference pertaining to His authority.

Political Matters (Mark 12:13–17)

The next encounter Mark recounts moves into the political realm with Herodians now joining the Pharisees in questioning Jesus. The provincial poll tax in question, though extremely unpopular, had been paid by the Jews since Jesus was a boy. Again, Jesus successfully avoids the trap set for Him and instead gets to the heart of the matter. Since the people have already acknowledged their subservience by carrying coinage bearing Caesar's image (and it should be noted that Jesus had to ask someone else for such currency as He apparently carried none), then they should return it when demanded by Caesar. More importantly, however, is the assertion that Caesar has no right to demand that which belongs to God.

Spiritual Matters (Mark 12:18–40; Psalm 110)

Having failed to paint Jesus as one who would incite rebellion against political authority, the Jewish leaders now seek to confine Him to a particular religious interpretation. The Sadducees were what we might term today religious “conservatives,” as they accepted only the written law of Moses, denying the validity of the oral tradition. Because of the limited acceptable texts, then, this group did not believe in resurrection and a number of other ideas that come to us from other sources throughout the Hebrew Bible.

As has been His way throughout this series of interrogations, however, Jesus moves past the superficial right to what matters most. Jesus simply points out that these seemingly pious people have missed the whole point—God is God of the living!

The Greatest Commandment (Lev. 19:18; Deut. 6:4, 5; Mark 12:28–34)

After all the fabricated questions, we finally hear a sincere question and are reminded that he who asks in earnest receives an answer (Matt. 7:7). This particular teacher of the law asks what the greatest commandment is. Now this is a simple question, hardly likely to trip up any Jew, for the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4, 5 is recited daily.

However, Jesus goes further—as God is so prone to do with those who earnestly seek Him. The Jews would be familiar with the command to love the Lord with heart, soul, and strength; but to this, Jesus adds the mind, emphasizing that loving God is a complete act.

The Widow's Offering (Mark 12:41–44)

Finally, the questions come to an end, and we have a simple observation of Jesus regarding the sincerity of a poor widow's commitment as contrasted with the disingenuousness of those we have seen throughout the passage trying to prove their supposed righteousness.

TESTIMONY

Ps. 19:7; Isa. 43:12; Jer. 7:4; Matt. 21:33–44

“The husbandman chooses a piece of land from the wilderness; he fences, clears, and tills it, and plants it with choice vines, expecting a rich harvest. . . . So God had chosen a people from the world to be trained and educated by Christ.”¹

“God desired to make of His people Israel a praise and a glory. Every spiritual advantage was given them. God withheld from them nothing favorable to the formation of character that would make them representatives of Himself.”²

“[The Jewish people] forgot God, and lost sight of their high privilege as His representatives. The blessings they had received brought no blessing to the world. All their advantages were appropriated for their own glorification. They robbed God of

the service He required of them, and they robbed their fellow men of religious guidance and a holy example. . . . Thus they made sacred things appear a farce, saying, ‘The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are

“The parable of the vineyard applies not alone to the Jewish nation.”

these’ (Jer. 7:4), while at the same time they were misrepresenting God’s character, dishonoring His name, and polluting His sanctuary.”³

“The parable of the vineyard applies not alone to the Jewish nation. It has a lesson for us. The church in this generation has been endowed by God with great privileges and blessings, and He expects corresponding returns. . . . On this earth, the earth whose soil has been moistened by the tears and blood of the Son of God, are to be brought forth the precious fruits of Paradise. In the lives of God’s people the truths of His word are to reveal their glory and excellence. Through His people, Christ is to manifest His character and the principles of His kingdom.”⁴

“A congregation may be the poorest in the land. It may be without the attraction of any outward show; but if the members possess the principles of the character of Christ, they will have His joy in their souls. Angels will unite with them in their worship. The praise and thanksgiving from grateful hearts will ascend to God as a sweet oblation.”⁵

1. *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 285.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 288.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 291, 292.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 296.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 298.

Honor Challenges in the Gospel of Mark

EVIDENCE

Mark 2, 3; 4:35–41; 6:1–6; 7:1–13; 8:11–13; 9:9–13; 10;11:27–33; 12

Throughout the book of Mark, culminating in the debates of chapter 12, we see Jesus met with a series of questions. It is important to understand, then, the role questions played in Jesus' culture.

Most of us are familiar with the "Socratic method," in which a student is taught through a series of questions rather than simply being told the answer. Within the Hellenistic culture, where men gathered in public places to discuss important matters (Acts 17:17–21), questioning was a regular course of action.

As we see throughout Mark, however, this questioning is not simply a disinterested request for information, but more likely an attempt to prove a point; stump, embarrass, or provoke an opponent; or put another to shame.

This matter of honor and shame also explains why these questions always present a "win-lose" situation instead of allowing for the possibility of a "win-win" scenario. In the first century, honor was seen as something limited in scope; therefore one's claim to honor was seen as a threat to another's. This is demonstrated in a godly way in John the Baptist's statement regarding his need to decrease so Jesus could increase (John 3:30).

Ideally, since it was upon God's authority that Jesus' claims rested, more would have responded as John the Baptist did and would not have questioned these claims. It must be remembered, however, that those questioning Jesus did not accept that His authority came from God and, as many of these people were religious leaders, His claims, then, threatened their position and own claims to honor.

If the questions asked are not simply neutral requests for information, neither are the answers given neutral responses. Throughout Mark, we see Jesus recognizing what underlies the question and answering accordingly. Interestingly, in the vast majority of the exchanges in the texts listed for today, Jesus answers the question with a question of His own.

In this zero-sum game, it is easy to see who the losers are—those who are silenced, cannot give an answer, or must resort to plotting in order to avenge their loss of honor. Jesus' adept handling of these challenges proves not only to the audience at hand that He is an honorable teacher, but also to Mark's readers centuries later.

Throughout Mark we see
Jesus recognizing what
underlies the question.

Wednesday
May 25

Answering the Tough Questions

HOW-TO

Mark 11:27–12:44; 1 Pet. 3:15, 16

We are told, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason” (1 Pet. 3:15, NIV). This is exactly what Jesus did in the passages we’ve looked at this week in Mark.

Let us learn, then, from Jesus’ example how to “give an answer to everyone who asks”:

1. Listen. Really focus on what is being asked as well as what is underlying the question. Too often we’re so busy preparing our response that we neglect to listen to the question. Don’t jump ahead of your questioner and assume you know what will be asked or for what reason.

2. Ask questions. There is always a reason for a question. Dig deeper and ask questions of your own to understand better what the other person is truly seeking.

Though Jesus’ return questions were not necessarily used for clarification purposes, we do see how He always gets to the point of the true question at hand, not necessarily the surface-level one that was actually asked of Him.

There is always a reason
for a question.

3. Respond. We’re further counseled that our answers should be delivered “with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience” (verse 15, 16, NIV). People may have all kinds of motives for their questions, but a child of God should always be above reproach. In Mark 12 we see many questions asked to try to trip Jesus up, but He did not argue or expose their motives except as His spirit contrasted theirs. Further, in His response to the one question asked of Him sincerely, we see a beautiful example of gentle and respectful dialogue.

4. Get feedback. Make sure you have truly answered the question asked of you and be open to a continuing dialogue, as Jesus was with the teacher of the law who inquired as to the greatest commandment. Not only do we see the teacher respond, but we see positive reinforcement of the response by Jesus. People asking questions regarding spiritual matters must have an opportunity to respond to what the Spirit reveals to them.

Of course, being “prepared to give an answer” (verse 15, NIV) implies an ongoing personal relationship with our Lord and Savior. When Jesus was tested in the wilderness, Satan used Scripture. Only through Jesus’ intimate knowledge of the Word was He able to respond to Satan’s temptations, just as Jesus used scriptural references to ground His responses to the religious leaders in Mark 12.

“Not Far From the Kingdom”

OPINION

Mark 12:28–34

In the passage of Mark we've been looking at this week, the Sadducees and Pharisees were trying to catch Jesus doing something out of His character so they could say that He wasn't true. By Jesus' indirect response to their questions through parables, they got the hint that they couldn't catch Him and that perhaps His claims to be the Son of God were not so unfounded. Further, His healing, miracle-working, and loving-kindness only made people want to know more about Him anyway.

Also, the questions that Jesus was asked showed that the religious leaders of His day didn't really know and understand who He was. The questions were really a breeze for Jesus and the Pharisees and Sadducees had to be impressed that Jesus really knew and understood what His mission on earth was.

In the midst of all this came a sincere question: “‘Of all the commandments, which is the most important?’ ” (Mark 12:28, NIV). At the conclusion of this exchange, Jesus comments that the teacher of the law is not far from the kingdom.

Not far, but not quite there yet either. As those who believe in the soon coming of Christ,

we may not be far from the kingdom, but what bridges the gap between being close and being in?

We have already asserted that the questioner was sincere. It is also reasonable both by his title and his question that he is well versed in the Scriptures. He also affirms Christ's answer, showing his belief that what Jesus has said is true. Finally, he takes the discussion a step further in rightly stating that loving God is more important than burnt offerings and sacrifices.

So what else is there? Perhaps the answer lies in his very own statement. It is one thing to know that love is the greatest thing to God—it is another thing to act upon that. And so we see a man very close to the kingdom, for he has a correct “head” knowledge of God—it is only for his heart to catch up.

What a terrible tragedy it would be for Jesus to return finding so many who know of Him, but who do not truly know Him. Let us commit today truly to be Christians—loving with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength—and live up to all that name entails, that we may enter into the kingdom instead of settling for being “not far” away.

**In the midst of all this
came a sincere question.**

What Is Your Question?

EXPLORATION

Mark 12:30

CONCLUDE

Unwillingness to take God's claims seriously continues to plague both believers and unbelievers. We, like the religious leaders, often try to discredit Jesus and force Him into our limited picture of God. Jesus does now what He did then—He looks straight into our hearts and answers the underlying question. We must be willing to let go of our pride as John the Baptist did and love with our hearts as well as our heads. As our hearts open in love to God, we will receive wisdom from Him to meet questions and challenges to our faith.

CONSIDER

- Painting or sketching the scene in Mark 12:28–34 of Jesus and the scribe who was “‘not far from the kingdom of God’ ” (verse 34, KJV).
- Evaluating the evidence in the Gospel of Mark for and against Jesus' claim to be the Son of God. Jesus often answered challenges to His divinity with a challenge to consider what He said and did. Make a table that presents both the evidence that supports and disproves (according to His enemies) His claim. Is there solid evidence to support our faith in Jesus as God?
- Asking a friend to make up a list of “tough” questions about faith and practicing the listening and answering skills mentioned in Wednesday's portion of this week's lesson.
- Listening to and singing “Every Day” by Phillips, Craig, and Dean as a prayer of dedication to God. Compose your own song of commitment.
- Creating gestures that express physically the meaning of a poem or song that talks about total love for God.
- Reflecting over each category of love mentioned in the first commandment: heart, soul, mind, and strength. Ask yourself for each area: How do I love God with all my _____? Am I living out my love for God in this area or am I holding back part of my _____ for myself? Pray over the results of your assessment.

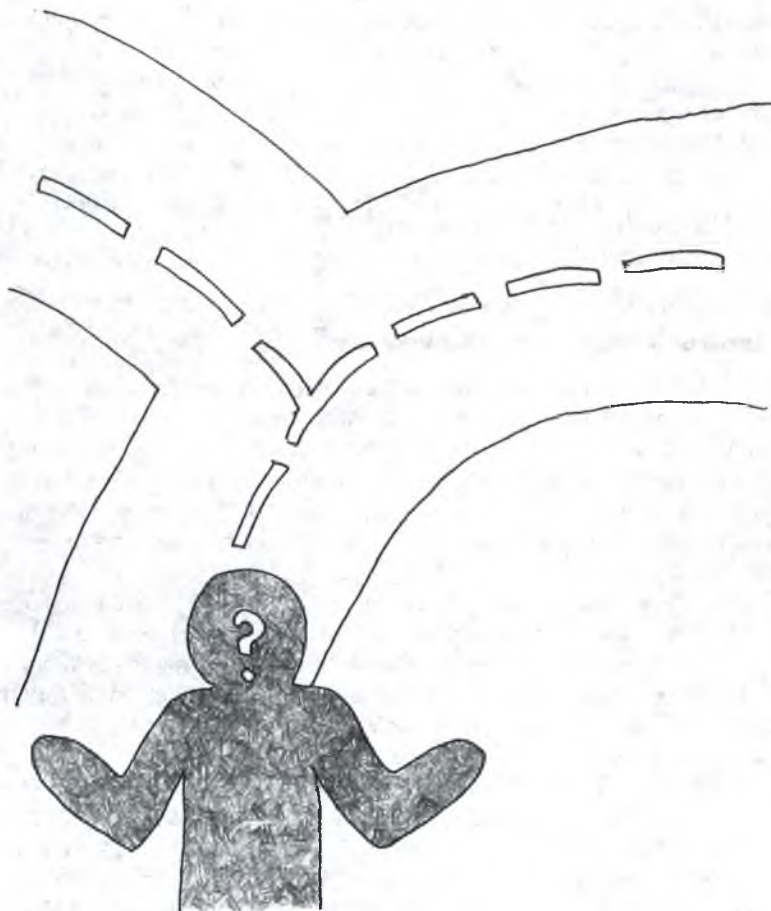
CONNECT

1 John.

The Desire of Ages, chaps. 65–67.

Ty Gibson, *An Endless Falling in Love*; Nicky Gumbel, *Questions of Life*, chap. 2.

Predictions of the end



“ ‘The gospel must first be preached to all nations’ ”
(Mark 13:10, NIV).

The Best You Can in the Days to Come

INTRODUCTION

Mark 13:10

When I graduated from college a few years ago, many wanted to know what I would do with my degree and my life in general. I had no exact answer in spite of the fact that I had thought about it consistently ever since I'd begun my college career. My ailing paternal grandmother had overheard the queries from the well-wishers and waited until I approached her with my dilemma.

"Just tell them you'll do the best you can." Indeed, a profound and direct answer to a pressing question.

"What are you going to do now that you've graduated?" they continued to ask.

My reply had begun to take shape, "The best that I can."

**Indeed, a profound and
direct answer to a
pressing question.**

Sometimes it is difficult to assume the role of one of a young generation entrusted to preach the Advent message of the last days, to be among the

ones who close the door and turn off the lights, so to speak. Jesus' words as recorded in Mark 13:10 leave us with a daunting and immense responsibility.

Mark 13:10 says, "The gospel must first be preached to all nations" (NIV). As you read these words, your prayer should be that millions of others will also do so. As long as there is religious liberty, the endless possibilities will be at our hands. Of course, the challenges are greater as the enemy becomes more astute and sophisticated.

That is why we are called to persevere without fear, to "publish" the gospel to all nations and not to fear repression. Mark 13:11 tells us to persist and "not worry beforehand about what to say" (NIV) because the Holy Spirit will speak through us. Or as Lincoln E. Steed has so eloquently put it recently, "The end of history must be seen as focused on Jesus Christ. Unless He is the consuming center to our proclamation, we will not be serious about religious liberty."*

Although the end is near, don't let anyone declare that history is over. As long as you are a part of it, the history of humanity continues until God decides that it is time to meet our Savior. We still have the liberty to praise our God. Indeed, you will be a part of history if you heed the call of Mark 13:10. But for now, do the best you can. " 'Occupy till I come,' " says the Lord in His parable in Luke 19:13 (KJV). Whatever your occupation, the best is all you can do.

*Lincoln E. Steed, <<http://adventistreview.org/2004-1501/story1.html>>

The Time Perspective

EVIDENCE

Mark 13:23

Just imagine that you spent a long day with Jesus at the temple. As you leave, you descend into the Kidron Valley and then ascend 400 feet to the Mount of Olives. You look down 300 feet at the panoramic view of the temple and the city of Jerusalem. Mark tells us that Peter, Andrew, James, and John accompanied Jesus and that they comment, “ ‘What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!’ ” (Mark 13:1, NIV). Ingrained patriotism, pride, and joy course through their veins. Some of the white stones were as large as 66 by 7 by 9 feet. Then Jesus predicts the temple’s destruction. The disciples had no idea how and when that could possibly take place.¹

In A.D. 69 there were four Roman emperors. Out of all the turmoil and civil war, Vespasian emerged the victor. Meanwhile, his son Titus laid siege to Jerusalem. A large number of Jews died from hunger. Three rival factions in Jerusalem only hastened the city’s capture. Titus and his troops captured Herod’s fortress in July and on August 5 they captured the temple and set fire to it. That was the anniversary of the destruction of the first temple by the Babylonians. It took another month for the rest of Jerusalem to be captured.²

The disciples had a hard time grasping Jesus’ words.

The disciples had a hard time grasping Jesus’ words. They had mixed thoughts spinning in their heads: the impregnable temple, Jesus’ triumphal entry, the second cleansing of the temple, the soon-to-be-established kingdom. Jesus does not draw a clear distinction between what refers to the destruction of Jerusalem and His second coming. In the disciples’ thinking what refers to the two were closely linked. They were unable to grasp what Jesus had been teaching them for the past year. Knowing the future events would have been more than they could cope with.³

Because we look back with the perspective of time, it is easy for us to wonder why the disciples just didn’t get it. The confusing voices of all their experiences meant that this huge experience that loomed before them with all its implications was difficult for them to conceptualize. Are we any different from them? We are living in the end time. Do we grasp this huge event, which impacts not just this world, but also the whole universe? Are we alert? Jesus has told us everything we need to know.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 495.

2. Everett Ferguson, *Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), p. 398.

3. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 496, 497.

Monday
May 30

Did Jesus Have Cable?

LOGOS

Dan. 8:9–14; Mark 13:1–36; 1 John 4:16–18

When I read Mark 13, it seems as if Jesus is reading off a script from the latest CNN daily update. The tragedies, disasters, and everyday immorality sound far too familiar. I am challenged to remember that this is an ancient text of a supernatural revelation direct from God's Son. In this short passage, Jesus prophesies the circumstances, not only of the first-century fall of Jerusalem, but of His own second coming to earth.

The Setting (Mark 13:1–4)

Jesus is actually answering a question from His disciples. They have just left the temple, where Jesus was teaching the people and defending Himself before a group of Pharisees and Herodians. As they go out, the disciples are boastfully commenting on the beauty of the temple. Like many of the Jews at that time, they saw that structure as the vital center of their religion. They were anticipating the day when God would restore their physical nation to a place of temporal glory and power. They were rattled when Jesus'

They were rattled when Jesus' response foretold the demise of such a magnificent spiritual place.

response foretold the destruction of such a magnificent spiritual place. They waited until they were outside the city on the Mount of Olives to ask Jesus for more details.

Jesus Prophesies (Mark 13:5–27)

"Jesus did not answer His disciples by taking up separately the destruction of Jerusalem and the great day of His coming. He mingled the description of these two events. Had He opened to His disciples future events as He beheld them, they would have been unable to endure the sight."¹ Jesus follows in the mold of the Old Testament prophets—using the literal, physical nation of Israel as a type or model of God's people down through time. He begins with language that His disciples, as Hebrews, would identify with. He speaks of kingdoms rising and falling, wars and rumors of war, natural disasters that were traditionally associated with God's judgment against sin (verses 7, 8). He moves on into a description of political persecution and even treason, tying their thoughts into the history of Israel's perpetual cycle of slavery and redemption (verses 9–13).

In the center of His prophecy, Jesus quotes from the prophet Daniel (8:14) in referring to the most horrible concept for the devout Jews: the desecration of the Most Holy Place in the temple. This signified the end of the world for them. Their universe could not exist without the temple as a location for God's presence with them. If it was gone, God was gone. But Jesus goes on. This horrible event is followed by a time of trouble beyond their wildest imagination; something worse than the Flood, Egypt, Babylon, or Rome. Deception would be everywhere as people desperately follow anyone promising relief. The only safety that Jesus gave was in remembering the things that He had said.

Finally Jesus closes the prophecy with the depiction of His second coming. He promises that God will overcome and put an end to all the suffering that they would have to endure. He calls them to look for Him, not just a building.

The Analogies (Mark 13:28–37)

As His custom was, Jesus tied His teaching into a parable that would put the truths of eternity into a setting that His audience of farmers, fishermen, tax collectors, and others could understand and remember. He emphasizes the value of being on the alert and ready when the Master returned.

Fear the Opposite of Alert?

Jesus couches His description of the terrible events ahead in phrases of comfort: “Do not fear,” “Do not worry.” He places these things in the context of the much bigger picture of God's plan for humankind. In that case, an earthquake or war or interrogation does not have much significance. He calls His disciples—and us—to focus our attention on Him and His plan, so that we will not become afraid and turn from Him.

At the close of this passage, Jesus repeatedly speaks of being on the alert and keeping on the alert. Often we embrace Christ's comfort and do not fear the trials we see ahead. But equally as often, we put ourselves in the shoes of this servant and look for the Master's return with fear and trembling. However, Jesus' counsel here to be on the alert is set in a framework of anticipation—not with fear, but with joy. When a servant is merely a slave to a violent, selfish owner, naturally, he or she is afraid. But when someone becomes a disciple of Christ, they are adopted and serve from love and joy. In this case the servant being on the alert is juxtaposed with being fearful (1 John 4:16–18). The servants of a loving Master look for His return with anticipation; straining their eyes from the top of the wall, anxiously hoping to catch the first glimpse of their Lord on the horizon.

* *The Desire of Ages*, p. 628.

Tuesday
May 31

The Not-too-Distant Future

TESTIMONY

Mark 13:1–4, 30, 31

Christ's second coming—just like Peter, James, John, and Andrew, we want to know how and when this will happen.

Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened" (Mark 13:30, NIV).

It's guaranteed. And that future is not too distant. It will happen in our generation, and so we feel as if we are trapped in time's continuum. How could we be deprived of the most important detail of our earthly existence, which is when our sufferings end and our hopes are fulfilled?

"The exact time of the second coming of the Son of man is God's mystery."¹ God has His own perfect time, which our finite mind can't fully grasp.

"We are not of that class who define the exact period of time that shall elapse before the coming of Jesus the second time with power and great glory. Some have set a time, and when that has passed, their presumptuous spirits have not accepted rebuke, but they have set another and another time;

It will happen in our generation.

but many successive failures have stamped them as false prophets."² So, "When will these things happen?" (verse 4, NIV).

"God gives no man a message that it will be five years or ten years or twenty years before this earth's history shall close. He would not give any living being an excuse for delaying the preparation for His appearing. He would have no one say, as did the unfaithful servant, 'My lord delayeth his coming,' for this leads to reckless neglect of the opportunities and privileges given to prepare us for the great day."³

"We are nearing the great day of God. The signs are fulfilling. And yet we have no message to tell us of the day and hour of Christ's appearing. The Lord has wisely concealed this from us that we may always be in a state of expectancy and preparation for the second appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ in the clouds of heaven."⁴

We expect a bright future—Christ's second coming. And we won't be disappointed because that future is sure and not too distant.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 633.

2. *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 335.

3. *Last Day Events*, p. 34.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

Coming, Coming Soon—Jesus!

HOW-TO

Mark 13:1–36

Will you be ready when Jesus comes? For millions of believers—Christians and non-Christians—when Jesus returns, that will be a day of rejoicing, a day of celebrating the second coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the One who will save His people from their sins. It will also be a day of mourning for those who chose not to believe.

I will be ready when my Savior comes. I am looking forward to the day when I can finally look at the face of pure love. At that time I will be able to say thank You to Jesus for dying for an ungrateful sinner—me!

How can you get to know someone you have never seen but known all your life? Here are a few ways to prepare:

1. Study. Pull an all-nighter if you have to—after all, your life depends on it. I am not speaking of studying His Word every now and then, but that you study His word every minute. When you desire to know someone intimately, you want to stay in that person's presence. That way you can constantly have open communication and be able to pick up on tone of voice, facial expressions, or gestures.

2. Hang out. Parties are a great way to relax with friends, enjoy good (or bad) food while doing something together. Like people gathering together, it feels good to fellowship with Jesus and with people who believe in the things you do. When we have the essence of Christ, then people will notice and want what we have.

3. Splurge on gifts. It feels good for the person receiving this tangible expression of love and for the giver who was able to find an object to show that love. Take it from Mary: Jesus knows how to appreciate good gifts, so go shopping for love, patience, kindness, faithfulness, and respect and keep them wrapped in your heart. One day you will be able to deliver your gifts in person.

Revelation 21:4 reveals the end result. Now we just have to get ready. I will be ready! Will you?

**Pull an all-nighter if you
have to.**

REACT

What five things will make the top of your Things-to-Do-to-Get-Ready-for-Christ's-Return list?

Thursday
June 2

Even So, Come Sooner, Lord Jesus

OPINION

1 Pet. 3:11–13

A friend of mine closed a recent email saying, “I can’t wait for Jesus to come.” I responded, “I’m with you. The sooner we stand face to face with Jesus, the better. I ache for Him to return.” That was no exaggeration. When I look at my wife and children, and then look at the world we have to live in now, the one as it was in the days of Noah—come soon, Lord Jesus!

Then I read on page 633 in *The Desire of Ages*, “By giving the gospel to the world it is in our power to hasten our Lord’s return. We are not only to look for but to hasten the coming of the day of God.” The NIV says, “You ought to live holy and godly lives . . . and *speed its coming*” (2 Pet. 3:11, 12, emphasis supplied).

So how can we hasten “The Day”?

1. Repent and turn to God. Peter said “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ” (Acts 3:19, 20, NIV). This is the foundation of everything.

2. Keep watch. “Those who are watching for the Lord [Mark 13:32–35] are purifying their souls by obedience to the truth.”¹ You’re probably familiar with the phrase, “self-fulfilling prophecy.” Or “you get what you expect.” So, when you are

That was no exaggeration.

“eagerly seeking knowledge of everything but [the] Bible, Christ comes as a thief.”²

3. Work earnestly. “With vigilant watching they combine earnest working. Because they know that the Lord is at the door, their zeal is quickened to cooperate with the divine intelligences in working for the salvation of souls.”³

Part of the “earnest working” involves preaching the gospel. Me? Preach? “‘Do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit’” (Mark 13:11, NIV).

4. Stand firm. Right before Jesus returned to heaven He said, “‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth’” (Acts 1:7, 8, NIV).

Therein lies the answer, I believe, to Jesus’ sooner return: a solid connection with the Holy Spirit, created through a daily relationship with Jesus. He said, “‘Remain in me, and I will remain in you’” (John 15:4, NIV). (Read verses 1–8.)

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 634.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

Are We Ready for Jesus?

EXPLORATION

Matthew 24

CONCLUDE

We are accountable for every moment of our lives and must strive to do the best that we can every day. Jesus equipped us with the knowledge to be able to recognize and prepare for His return. We have the promise that our Lord will return soon, and we must look to that in joyful anticipation. In the meantime we are called to study His Word, fellowship with others, treat each other as we would treat God, repent and walk closer with Him, remain on guard, allow Him to use us in spreading the gospel, and continue in steadfast faith.

CONSIDER

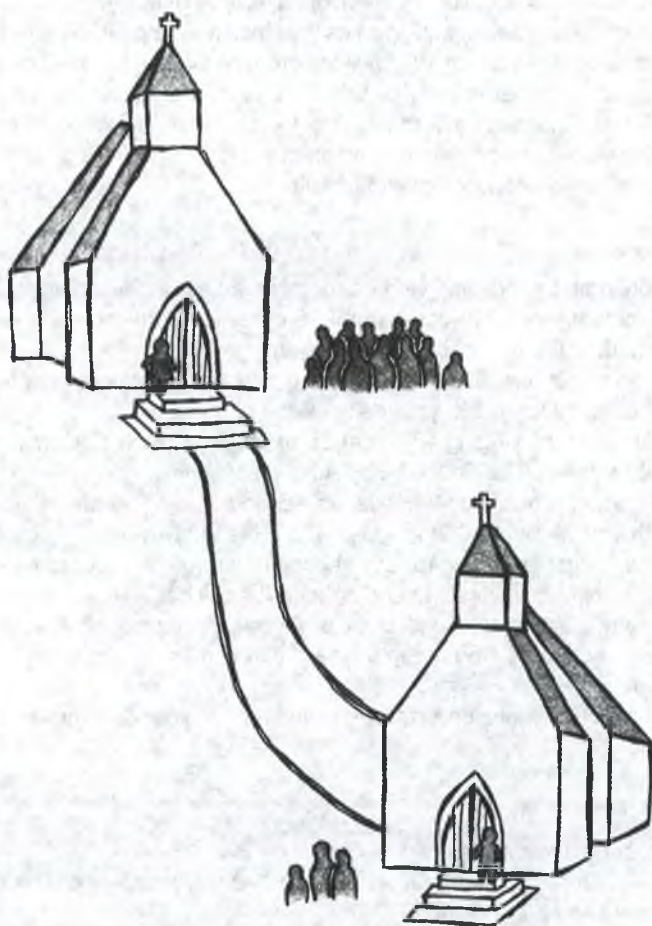
- Greeting and interacting with visitors who attend an evangelistic series or a community event in your church in order to share the good news with others that Jesus is coming again soon.
- Reading *The Great Controversy* in a group for discussion. Take notes that will be useful for you in your daily walk.
- Listening to or singing with friends or family, "Jesus Is Coming Again," number 213 in *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*.
- Composing a poem on what Jesus' second coming means to you. Share it with your Sabbath School class or a Bible study group.
- Learning sign language (or any second language) in order to reach out to more people in witnessing and sharing the gospel.
- Drawing a scene from the book of Revelation that depicts your view of Jesus' second coming. Keep it where you can see it every day to remind you of your goal.
- Memorizing Revelation 4:11 and including it in your daily prayers or Bible study.

CONNECT

The Great Controversy, chap. 28.

Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World*.

Betrayed and Arrested



" 'He said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will" ' " (Mark 14:36, NKJV).

That Christ May Be All

INTRODUCTION

Phil. 2:5

Dr. Durham, a Scottish preacher, was on his way to preach to his congregation when a popular young minister of a nearby church joined him. This young pastor was causing quite a revival in the town with his dynamic, powerful sermons, and he was drawing away members from Dr. Durham's church. Feeling concerned about the matter, the young minister said, "They are greatly to blame who leave you and come to me."

"Not so, brother," Dr. Durham replied, "For a minister can receive no such honor and success in his ministry except it be given him from heaven. I rejoice that Christ is preached . . . even though my estimation in people's hearts should decrease. I am content to be anything or nothing so that Christ may be all in all."*

**Are you willing to do
anything—or nothing—so
that Christ may be all in all?**

When I first began reading Mark 14, I spent my time looking at Mary as with love and humility she applied the precious ointment to her beloved Lord. Peter caught my attention as the scenes unfolded leading up to his predicted denial of Christ. Most of all, my attention was drawn to Judas as I tried to understand what led to his decision to betray Jesus.

After struggling with these people and unfolding events, the truth dawned on me. Mark 14 is really about Jesus Christ. It is a continuation of a portrait of the mind and heart of our Lord as He reveals the depths to which He would go to save us and glorify His heavenly Father.

As you journey through Mark 14 this week, sit with Him at Simon's feast and watch His reactions to Mary, the disciples, Simon, and Judas. Come to the upper room and take part in the Passover supper. Walk quietly in the Garden with Him. Feel His anguish and pain as He cries out for support and comfort. Struggle and agonize with Him as He battles and gains victory. Feel the betrayer's kiss upon His cheek and look deep into His eyes as friend and companion denies with swearing and anger that he ever knew Jesus.

Then decide what your attitude will be. Are you willing to do anything—or nothing—so that Christ may be all in all?

*Leo VanDolson, *The King Has Come* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1989), p. 119.

Sunday
June 5

When He Needed Us Most

LOGOS

Mark 14:1–51

The Supper Party at Simon's House (Mark 14:3–11)

At first it seems odd that just before a description of Jesus' great personal struggle and sacrifice, Mark would tell us the stories of two supper parties. But these parties give us an important picture of Jesus' social nature and how much He enjoyed and needed love and support.

The first party was at Simon the leper's house, where Mary Magdalene poured perfume on Jesus' feet. Simon secretly questioned Jesus' wisdom in allowing Mary to even touch Him, and others scolded Mary for squandering money on perfume. Mary shrank back from the accusations, and Jesus noticed her discomfort. He announced that Mary was doing a fine thing. She was anointing His body for burial.

Anointing a body for burial? What a strange thing to do at a supper party! Mary's eyes must have opened wide. That's what she had been planning to do with the

**What a strange thing to do
at a supper party!**

perfume after hearing Jesus foretell of His death, but recent events had made her think that Jesus was to be crowned King after all. She was so glad that she took the expensive perfume

and poured it all over Jesus' feet the first chance she had.

She wasn't trying to make a scene. The gesture was meant to be a very personal expression of gratitude and love. Jesus knew what was on her heart, and He let the whole world know how much He appreciated her gift. Through the long, tortuous hours ahead, He carried this precious memory with Him.

The Passover Party (Mark 14:12–25)

The disciples didn't know it, but the Passover was to be Jesus' last meal with them before He died. Jesus enjoyed social gatherings. His first miracle was at a wedding feast. He loved sharing quiet, intimate times with His dearest friends on earth. Yet, unlike the supper at Simon's, this meal was not marked with notes of appreciation and care. A traitor sat first at the table, as a bid toward being the first in importance in the kingdom he was sure Jesus would set up. The rest of the disciples were arguing among themselves over their relative political importance.

Jesus pointed to the cup and the bread as symbols of what was to happen very soon. And then, despite the gloom that was already gathering in His heart, He promised another party to come.

Take a moment to think about this. We drink the juice at Communion to remember Jesus' gift of Himself. But Jesus isn't drinking grape juice. He hasn't for 2,000 years. He's waiting for us all to get together at a supper table in heaven before He celebrates our deliverance. What a fine note of social sensitivity! How thoughtful He was to create a ritual of abstinence for Himself—significant by its very simplicity—as a sign to us of His anticipation of our celebration together in heaven!

In the Garden (Mark 14:26–41)

As Jesus and His disciples left the upper room and made their way to their familiar resting place in Gethsemane, Jesus still tried to prepare His friends for what was coming. But the closer they got to the Garden, the more troubled Jesus became. The disciples had never seen Him this burdened. Several times He stumbled and would have fallen, and they had to catch Him, half carrying Him as they walked. This wasn't like Jesus at all. He had always been the One to catch them.

Jesus begged them to stay awake with Him and pray. But they didn't. He begged them again, and yet again. He was in the midst of the greatest struggle anyone living has ever known. His tender, social nature longed for human support as He felt His Father pulling away from Him. It was something God had to do as part of Jesus' great sacrifice, but it broke Jesus' heart, and He came three times to the disciples needing their care. They were asleep every time.

What a time for the human race to fail Him! Never before in the history of the human race had our Creator needed us like this. Never afterward will we have that kind of call to serve Him.

Betrayed With a Kiss (Mark 14:41–51)

Then, on that dark night, already betrayed three times by His closest friends, Jesus went to meet Judas and a mob of His worst enemies. Jesus and Judas had just shared a special supper together. Judas had sat right next to Jesus. Jesus had washed his feet and fed him. Now, with a kiss, Judas betrayed Jesus into the hands of His enemies.

This mock token of love was offered just a few moments after Jesus, longing for support and care, had come to His disciples and found them sleeping. Soon afterward, even His best friends deserted Him. No wonder the memory of Mary's gift was so precious as Jesus faced a cruel crowd determined to kill Him.

It tortured Jesus that despite the immensity of the sacrifice He was making at such great personal risk, not one of the human race knew or cared about His great struggle. He needed us to care. He gave up all heaven even though we didn't care. But, oh, how He longed for us to be there for Him.

Our God is a social God. He still longs for our company, our tokens of love, our time. He's still waiting for that party of all parties when all His friends, even those who deserted Him when He needed them most, will be there.

Monday
June 6

Betrayed and Arrested

TESTIMONY

Mark 14:32–50

For three years, Jesus shared His life with His disciples. They had witnessed His loving humanity and the power of His divinity. Jesus waited until the last moments of His life before He fully revealed the awful story of His crucifixion to come. On the coast of Caesarea Philippi, He quietly shared the details of His death.

The last months of freedom went by quickly. Finally, the group shared their last supper together, and Jesus led them to the Garden of Gethsemane.

The Savior longed for compassion and encouragement from His friends.

**The Savior longed for
compassion and
encouragement.**

Leaving the larger group behind, Jesus asked Peter, James, and John to go further into the Garden with Him. Finding a secluded spot, He asked them to watch and pray. “He went a little distance from them—not so far but that they could both see and hear

Him—and fell prostrate upon the ground. He felt that by sin He was being separated from His Father.”¹

After a time, Jesus returned to His friends for comfort. “They did not intend to forsake their Lord, but they seemed paralyzed by a stupor which they might have shaken off if they had continued pleading with God.”² The disciples did not realize their betrayal. Even the sight of Christ’s pale and blood-stained face did not rouse them to intervene for Him. Three times the Savior came to them for reassurance, but was denied. His full physical and mental weight fell against His heavenly Father for strength. After three agonizing seasons of prayer, Christ’s final decision was made. (See Matthew 26:42–44.)

He went away a second time and prayed, “ ‘My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done’ ” (Matt. 26:42, NIV).

As the angry mob arrived in the Garden, the disciples watched as the Lord was bound and quietly accepted the betraying kiss of Judas. In anger, Peter swung his sword in defense and cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant. Jesus easily loosened His hands from captivity and with one gentle touch, the ear was healed. Again the disciples witnessed the divinity of Jesus. He would free His hands to help someone else. But He would not free Himself from the great task that lay before Him.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 686.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 688.

Language, Literature, and Symbols From Gethsemane

EVIDENCE

Mark 14:36

As an acorn contains a great tree, so Mark 14:36 encloses a trinity of symbols. Branching in three directions, it holds the core of legends and the heart-wrenching fruit of prophecy. Three kernels can be gleaned from this verse that echo through time. These elements are recognized in medieval legends and ancient myths as the "All Father," the "Holy Grail," and the "Seed."

In Gethesemane, Jesus prayed, "Abba, Father."

Abba is Aramaic for papa, the intimate name an infant calls his loving parent. The Greek word for father is *pater*. It is of ancient Indo-European origin and denotes the one who is responsible for the family, its source of life, its provider; he who makes provision for future needs. In His humanity, Jesus submitted to the authority of His heavenly Father, knowing that "everything is possible for you" (Mark 14:36, NIV).

The quest for the Holy Grail occupies a large portion of medieval literature. Arthurian knights spent much energy seeking this chalice that was supposed to be the cup from

**The quest for the Holy Grail
occupies a large portion of
medieval literature.**

Christ's last supper. The cup had become a cultural bridge between paganism and Christianity. This symbol found in folklore and the Bible can represent either light or dark manifestations, a vessel holding blessings or curses. (Compare Psalm 116:13; Revelation 14:10.)

The cup Christ speaks of has both aspects. As a curse, it caused Jesus to tremble. Filled with the wrath of God, it was to be poured out upon the sinful world, but it became the cup of blessing for all humanity as Christ's blood was poured out in blessing to rescue humankind.

A partial picture of the longed-for Messiah, the Anointed One, can be found among pagan cultures across the ancient world. Those who groped in darkness for a Redeemer saw Him as the Seed, or One who must die to save the people (Ezek. 8:14; Ps. 126:6).

Wednesday
June 8

Quality Control

HOW-TO

1 Cor. 9:24; Phil. 3:12

In business organizations, there is often an upper-management person who is labeled quality control coordinator. The label may vary somewhat, but essentially it entails monitoring and promoting maximum improvement and highest standards within the function of the organization. In this lesson, consider yourself to be the quality control coordinator for maximum spiritual growth and behavior. Not an easy job, to be sure.

Betrayal is an offensive word. In our study in the Bible and *The Desire of Ages*, a number of things become disturbingly clear. Did you find the red flags? We're dealing with the same sin issues today. If we don't get serious about implementing God's

formula for spiritual wellness, rest assured Satan will implement his.

**Why did those so close
to the Savior fail
so miserably?**

Why did those so close to the Savior fail so miserably? Look at just a few of these red flags: pride, impure thoughts, passing judgment, ingratitude, self-worship, lack of

humility, unfaithful stewardship, lack of commitment, giving weaker ones over to the care of Satan, and betrayal.

A dictionary definition for *betrayal* includes "give away to the enemy; to expose to the power of the enemy; to be unfaithful to; to give away (a secret); disclose unintentionally."* If we're dealing with the same issues today, betrayal is surely a given as well. That's not acceptable to me. My Savior is worth more to me than the price of a slave. He deserves more than that from me. We've traveled too many miles down the road together. So, enemy spotted. How do I control the quality of my relationship with God?

Quality Control. To remain under God's wings, we need to study and search, to become like our Savior by spending regular, quality time with Him in His Word. We need to learn to love the truth. That truth is your weapon against ingratitude and evil tendencies.

Did you know Christ gave us the service of foot washing for spiritual strength? Each time we participate in this service it will keep a connecting thread passing from us to Christ and from Christ to the Father. Are you sure you want to absent yourself on those Sabbaths?

Pray! Pray for the filling of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit transforms. Constantly involve yourself in willing service. This is our response to His love and sacrifice for each of us. Remembering Calvary will give us victory. Build and exercise trust. He deserves it.

**World Book Encyclopedia Dictionary*, (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1965), p. 184.

Perfect Love

OPINION

Mark 6:35-51

Jesus has shown incredible patience and fortitude. He served in a country that wouldn't even acknowledge His leadership, and whose hypocritical hierarchy constantly plotted to murder Him! He never got a salary or a fancy house or even loyal friends. He just tended to the needs of vast multitudes flocking to Him daily.

By the end of His three-year ministry on earth, Jesus was tired and concerned for His followers. Soon He would be leaving. He knew that they would be persecuted beyond belief in the coming months and years, and He wanted to be sure they had a solid foundation for their faith. He warned them of false teachers (Mark 13:22), and He comforted them by saying, "I will come again" (John 14:3, KJV).

Jesus knew that the Jews were trying to kill Him. He knew that Judas Iscariot would betray Him. He understood that Peter would deny Him. He knew He would soon die. Though He could see the painful events ahead, He remained kind and caring for those around Him.

At the Last Supper, Jesus tried again to prepare His disciples for His death. As He washed their feet, He told them that one of them would betray Him. He was afraid the disciples wouldn't be able to take the blast of stormy trials that was coming. Even in the Garden of Gethsemane, He warned them repeatedly to be on their guard against the enemy. He said, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation" (Mark 14:38, NKJV).

**Jesus knew that the Jews
were trying to kill Him.**

Jesus was ever a caring, loving friend to His disloyal disciples. You never hear Him saying, "Peter, I don't know why I have to be here to deal with your enormous ego," or "James, your temper is just so uncontrollable that I am giving up on you." Only when He was alone with His Father did He pour out His cup of sorrow. There were so many people, so many needs. And now at the end of His life's work, everything seemed to come tumbling down on Him at once. He had the care of His flock, the concern for sinners, and the weight of a whole world's history on His shoulders. Yet in His Father's arms, He found strength to be the Man He had to be in order to complete His mission as a caring, loving, and selfless Savior.

The mob came to carry Him to Caiaphas and He went willingly. He didn't curse or struggle to escape. He didn't call the angels to His rescue. "As a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth" (Isa. 53:7, NKJV).

I cannot keep this amazing story to myself when I think about how He, at such great personal cost, died to save us. And now He is alive!

Friday
June 10

A Symbol That Still Shouts

EXPLORATION

Mark 14:36

CONCLUDE

In a world consumed with cleverly devised symbols and bold marketing tactics, we grow up learning and responding to certain symbols that connote emotional, spiritual, and even physical responses. A great example of such is the peace sign, both with the two fingers and the dove. It is a powerful image that represents so much to so many people. In Christianity, however, there is no greater symbol that encompasses passion, loyalty, love, and selflessness than the Cross. On the Cross, Christ took the weight of the world and walked away victorious.

CONSIDER

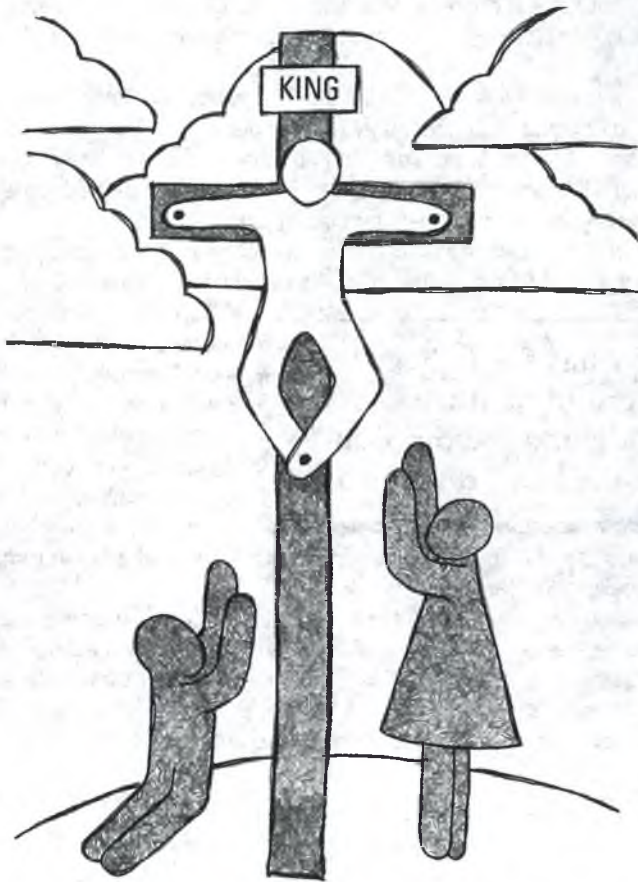
- Searching online for images of Christ in His last 12 hours and compare their use of color and shading. Discuss with a friend Christ's emotional, spiritual, and physical state at this point.
- Comparing and then graphing a timeline of Christ's last hours based on the Gospels and the Spirit of Prophecy's accounts.
- Producing a PowerPoint program that couples a song depicting Christ's suffering and death on the cross with photos or pictures of Christ's death and resurrection. Share the program with a local church group.
- Conducting an agape feast with a construction of a wooden cross with as many nails as people in attendance. Make the highlight of the meeting a time for individuals to walk up and take a nail off the cross in return for their names or sin(s) on the cross. Maybe sing hymns and/or Christian gospel songs as people move toward the cross.
- Brainstorming ways in which to distribute "Try Jesus" flyers in your community and have a group ready to answer calls, visit these people, and leave with them a free video of *Jesus*.
- Reading biographies of men and women who have suffered and endured hardship for their belief in Christ. Invite someone in your local community to visit your group or church and share their personal story.

CONNECT

The Desire of Ages, pp. 685, 686.

The Passion of the Christ DVD; *Jesus Freaks dc Talk and the Voice of the Martyrs*; Jack Sequeira, *Beyond Belief: The Promise, the Power, and the Reality of the Everlasting Gospel*, pp. 67–85.

Tried and Crucified



“At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ which is translated, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’ ”
(Mark 15:34, NKJV).

“To Conquer Death You Only Have to Die”

INTRODUCTION

Mark 15:31–34

“At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani’—which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Mark 15:33, 34, NIV).

In the rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar*, the song “Poor Jerusalem” has a line that says, “To conquer death, you only have to die, you only have to die.” Isn’t it a paradox? The Son of the living God had to die on the cross in order for all of us to conquer death. It is also a paradox that the Son of the Almighty God, the Judge of all judges, was going through trials and being judged.

Crucifixion was the worst kind of death—a horrible death, but many artists have painted the scene of Christ on the cross. Titian painted the picture *Christ Crowned*

Why has the ugly instrument of death, a cross, become a symbol of respect and reverence?

With Thorns. Masaccio painted the crucified Christ in a picture titled *The Holy Trinity*. Artwork of Rembrandt van Rijn titled *The Three Crosses* is in the British Museum, London, England. Even in architecture, the building in the form of a cross was

employed as a symbol in cathedrals such as Charles’ Cathedral in England, and Filippo Brunelleschi’s Santo Spirito in Florence, Italy.

Why has such an ugly instrument of death, a cross, become a symbol of respect and reverence? This week we will learn about Mark’s account of Christ’s trial and crucifixion. It was the most important event in the history of humankind—and in the Christian’s life.

“To conquer death, you only have to die, you only have to die.”

Truly, He Is the Son of God

EVIDENCE

Mark 14:53–65; 15:1–41

The Fulfillment of Scripture

We know that the priest and those people who were against Jesus knew Him personally. They knew where He came from, they knew His parents, they knew His background, and they knew His family.

Why did Judas have to kiss Jesus in order to arrest Him? Judas thought that even though he would betray Jesus, the Savior would display His power and escape crucifixion. But in the end, Judas witnessed Jesus restraining His power. He went out and threw the money away because of his shame and guilt. Judas had to kiss Jesus in order for the Scriptures to be fulfilled as it was prophesied. The Scriptures must be fulfilled as a living testimony to future generations so that people won't have any excuse. They cannot deny that whatever God prophesies will come true.

Why did Judas
have to kiss Him?

Jesus, the Anointed One

Since Jesus did not fight back or react to them, the crowd asked Him, "Are You the Son of God?" (Luke 22:70, NASB). He said to them, "Yes, I am" (verse 70, NASB). Then the high priest asked Him "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" (Mark 14:61, NKJV), and He answered, "I am" (verse 62, NKJV).

Because Jesus claimed that He was the Son of God, they said that He was blasphemous, and they began to spit on Him and slap His face. During that time, before a priest could serve, he was anointed. They considered Jesus blasphemous because they did not recognize His anointing. Jesus' anointing was not visible to humanity; whereas, the anointing of the priest was visible. People don't believe things that they do not see. This was the difference of the priest's anointing and Jesus' anointing. They would not recognize that Jesus was the Anointed One because they had not seen it.

When the centurion (who crucified Jesus Christ and did not believe in God) witnessed the actual crucifixion of Jesus, he could say that "truly this was the Son of God!" (Matt. 27:54, NKJV). Upon witnessing the events, the centurion secretly believed in his heart that the things that Jesus had done could not be accomplished by human power unless Divine power was with Him.

Monday
June 13

Sinners versus Sinless

LOGOS

Mark 14:53–65; 15:1–41

The Sinners Versus the Sinless (Mark 14:53, 55–59)

The Jewish religious leaders were not in one accord in their theology. Their brittle relationship caused confrontation among them. But when Jesus appeared in the picture, all of these leaders focused on Him and considered a Man who claimed to be the Messiah as their one enemy. They even put Jesus on trial during the night, which was against their own law.¹

Mark gives details of how these people united in one accord regardless their different class and theology in order to find fault with Jesus. Whatever the cost, their aim was to put Jesus to death.

“In all ages the wicked have hated those who were better than themselves.”

“The chief priests, elders and teachers of the law came together” (Mark 14:53, NIV). But their accusation was not systematical-ly planned. “The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were look-

ing for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any. Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree” (verses 55, 56, NIV).

If this case were being argued in our juridical system today, Jesus’ accusers would have less of a chance to win. These people have proved that Jesus is sinless, that He is the true Messiah, the Savior of humankind.

“So in all ages the wicked have hated those who were better than themselves.”²

We someday may have to stand like Daniel’s friends before the court to witness because of our faith, to testify of our convictions about what we believe. Let no one find fault in our conduct, our words, or our thoughts. Ask God to strengthen us to be firm in Him and show to others that we live in Jesus and He lives in us.

The Old Trick and the Righteous (Mark 14:57, 58, 60, 61)

After they failed to find fault with Jesus, the religious leaders used the most sensitive and powerful issue to win the heart of the people so they would agree with the accusations. One person who used the method successfully was Jezebel when she planned to kill Naboth (see 1 Kings 21). She accused Naboth of cursing God and the king. He was stoned to death. King Ahab wanted the land of Naboth the Jezreelite for his own pleasure, but the religious leaders also wanted to maintain their position and possession. As the high priest said, “It is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish” (John 11:50, NIV).

The old trick was used again to accuse Jesus and put Him to death. It was suc-

cessfully accomplished and even Pilate could not escape from the trap that he chose.

One of these days, true Christians will be asked about their faith, just as Abel was murdered for his faithfulness to God. "The brighter the heavenly light that is reflected from the character of God's faithful servants, the more clearly the sins of the ungodly are revealed, and the more determined will be their efforts to destroy those who disturb their peace."³

The Courageous Aim and the Sinners' Claim (Mark 14:61–65; 15:1–5)

"'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?'" (Mark 14:61, NIV) the high priest asked with authority to entrap Jesus. Jesus had made this claim when He was almost stoned to death after saying, "'Before Abraham was born, I am!'" (John 8:58, NIV). He who claims to live before Abraham is claiming that He is God, the Eternal One. Jesus is faithful to His Father and His divinity, so nothing can move Him from saying, "I am" (Mark 14:62, NIV). He knew that this saying would only stir up anger and jeopardize His life. But being "I am" is His nature; He cannot be anyone else. He refused to take wine to ease the pain. He is firm in physical and spiritual principle.

As a result Jesus was treated worse than any other criminal (15:17–20); even the lowest officer slapped Him (14:65). "Christ suffered keenly under abuse and insult. At the hands of the beings whom He had created . . . He received every indignity."⁴

The Lifegiver and the Executioner (Mark 15:1–41)

"Pilate . . . had had to deal with all kinds of criminals; but never before had a man bearing marks of such goodness and nobility been brought before him. On Jesus' face Pilate saw no sign of guilt, no expression of fear, no boldness or defiance. He saw a man of calm and dignified bearing, whose countenance bore not the marks of a criminal, but the signature of heaven."⁵ Pilate persisted to diminish the life of this Man. "Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified" (15:15, NIV). Yet the Lifegiver boldly accepted the life executioner for our sake and walked through the darkest path for us all. Jesus has illustrated "God is love" by His own life!

REACT

In everyday terms, how are we like Pilate standing before the screaming crowd?

1. William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: the Gospel of Mark* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 350.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 74.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 700.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 724.

Tuesday
June 14

He Bore the Iniquity for Us

TESTIMONY

Isa. 53:12

"Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12, NKJV).

"My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:1, 2, NKJV).

"Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was

**"God and His holy angels
were beside the cross."**

counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. The wrath of God against sin, the terrible

manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation."¹

"In coming to the world in human form, in becoming subject to the law, in revealing to men that He bore their sickness, their sorrow, their guilt, Christ did not become a sinner. He was pure and uncontaminated by any disease. Not one stain of sin was found upon Him. . . . He stood before the world the spotless Lamb of God. When suffering humanity pressed about Him, He who was in the health of perfect manhood was as one afflicted with them."²

"God and His holy angels were beside the cross. The Father was with His Son. Yet His presence was not revealed. Had His glory flashed forth from the cloud, every human beholder would have been destroyed. And in that dreadful hour Christ was not to be comforted with the Father's presence. He trod the wine press alone, and of the people there was none with Him."³

REACT

1. How does the thought of Jesus bearing our iniquity impact our attitude toward sins?
2. What assurance do we have when we face temptation?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 753.

2. *That I May Know Him*, p. 67.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 753, 754.

How to Look at Christ's Trial

HOW-TO

Eph. 1:18

The high priest asked Jesus bluntly if He was the Messiah. Clearly Jesus felt that it was time and, without hesitation, He answered in the affirmative. The Sanhedrin was savagely content and had what it wanted, a charge that merited the death penalty.

Here we see two of Jesus' characteristics:

● His confidence. Even with the Cross now a certainty, He still continued to speak with complete confidence of His ultimate triumph.

● His courage. He knew that to make that answer was to die, yet unhesitatingly He made it. He chose it since He could bear our sins more easily than He could bear the thought of our hopelessness.

The sense of being chosen is one of the very best gifts love bestows on the beloved. There is no gift like being chosen by God, who wants to be on our side, and no pain like being rejected by the chosen. Being chosen involves three factors.

The sense of being chosen is one of the very best gifts love bestows on the beloved.

1. When you are chosen, you are seen as unique. It means someone has seen you as a unique person, and that someone desires to come closer to you, to be on the same side as you're on. You are unique and special to him or her.

2. When you are chosen, you are recognized as someone who has something to contribute. It means someone believes your uniqueness is positive. You have significant gifts that will make a difference (Col. 3:12).

3. When you are chosen, it means somebody wants you. It means you are not isolated, unconnected. You are desired and you belong.

In looking upon our Redeemer and Savior, we catch a glimpse of what he was intended to be and would then see the reason and purpose of His death. God rewards those who settle for nothing less than Jesus Himself as the Spirit of the Lord will work within them to become more and more like Him (2 Cor. 3:18).

1. William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark* (New Delhi: Rekha Pvt. Ltd., 1992), p. 351.

2. Max Lucado, *God Came Near* (Singapore: Campus Crusade Asia Limited, 1998), p. 52.

3. John Ortberg, *Love Beyond Reason* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), p. 149.

4. Max Lucado, *Just Like Jesus* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1991), p. 172.

Thursday
June 16

Why the Silence?

OPINION

Mark 14:60, 61

When the high priest was questioning Jesus, why did Jesus not speak up? He was on trial and this was His chance. In every fair trial the accused have a chance to defend themselves. So why did Jesus not defend Himself? Why did He allow Himself to go through the humiliation of being called a blasphemer? Why?

“He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him” (Isa. 53:3, 5, NKJV).

There are so many times that Jesus could have just defended Himself and nothing would have happened. But then the question comes to mind: What if He had? What if Jesus did defend Himself? What if He was found innocent, which He most certainly was? What if He was not crucified? Then the plan of salvation would not have been accomplished. Death would not have been overcome. Then Satan would not have been defeated.

So why did He do it? Because He loved you and me above all. He went through pain, suffering, and humiliation to show just how much He loved you and me. He did it because of love. He did it so that we might believe and be saved (John 3:16).

Above all powers above all kings
Above all nature and all created things
Above all wisdom and all the ways of man
You were here before the world began.

Above all kingdoms above all thrones
Above all wonders the world has ever known
Above all wealth and treasures of the earth
There's no way to measure what You're worth.

Crucified, laid behind the stone
You lived to die rejected and alone
Like a rose trampled on the ground
You took the fall and thought of me
Above all.*

*Michael W. Smith

Uncommon Criminal

EXPLORATION

Mark 14:53–65; 15

CONCLUDE

Ellen White told us that it would be well for us to spend an hour each day contemplating the life of Christ, especially the closing scenes. (See *The Desire of Ages*, p. 83.) It is painful to read about the quiet suffering Christ endured at His unfair trial and horrible execution. He had not only the right but the power to fight back. But He didn't. He took on the incredible burden of the sins of the world: He paid the price for all human beings. He wants only our love in return.

CONSIDER

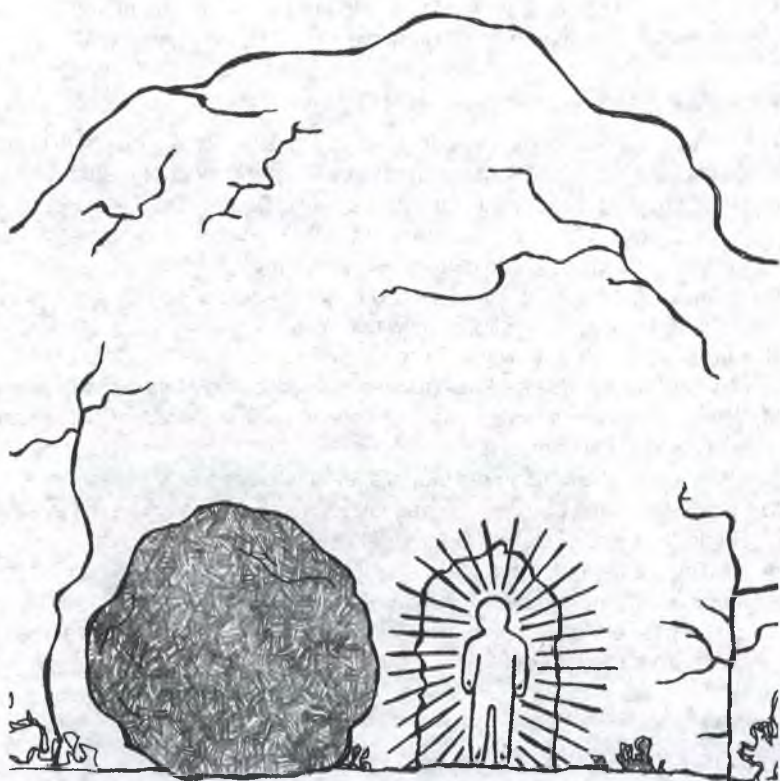
- Interviewing someone who displays a Christian cross on their jewelry, clothing, or vehicle. Ask them to tell you what the symbol means to them.
- Reading and meditating on the poem "Death, Be Not Proud" by John Donne. This is available on many Web sites. Here is one: <http://eir.library.utoronto.ca/rpo/display/poem658.html>.
- Performing a role-play. Have someone accuse you of something while you resist defending yourself. Then switch roles.
- Watching a video depiction of the trial and execution of Christ, such as *Jesus of Nazareth*, *The Passion of the Christ*, or the *Matthew* video series.
- Going outside to a park or natural setting. Look for signs of sin in nature and also for signs of restoration.
- Listening to a recording of Handel's *Messiah*, especially the last half.
- Reading about a person who was falsely accused of a crime (for example, Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, Joan of Arc).
- Finding a spot that is completely dark (a closet, a bathroom, etc.). Sit there for at least ten minutes, thinking about what it must have been like for Jesus to experience complete darkness from the weight of sin and separation from His Father.

CONNECT

The Desire of Ages, chaps. 77; 78.

Kim Allen Johnson, *The Gift*; Max Lucado, *Six Hours One Friday*; John Piper, *The Passion of Jesus Christ*.

Buried—but Risen!



“Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him’ ” (Mark 16:6, NKJV).

Share the News!

INTRODUCTION

Matt. 28:18–20

Can you imagine what it would have been like to stand there helpless while Jesus was tortured and crucified before your very own eyes? Can you imagine the guilt and despair you would feel as He took His last breath? You would have lost your Best Friend, your Mentor, and your Leader. What would you have done then? What could you accomplish without His love and wisdom to guide you? What a horrible feeling this would have been.

Then, what a wonderful joy it would be for you to discover that Jesus was alive! It would bring back the hope and joy that you once felt when in His presence. Only now, your eyes are opened to fully understand His love and sacrifice. What an awesome experience to hear Him speak once again.

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

Hearing Jesus' words gave the disciples a passion and a burden for sharing His teachings with those who had never known Him. It was up to them to finish spreading His word. They were to go and share the gospel with everyone they could find. They knew they weren't alone but that Jesus would follow them everywhere, showing mercy to His children. So off they went to spread the news that Jesus was their Savior.

As Christians, we are disciples of Christ. We have been given the same mission that Jesus gave the disciples when He rose from the tomb. We are to spread the gospel to everyone—whether he or she be in some far off place or in our own backyards. Our work isn't finished until every last child of God has heard His message. So go! Go and tell the whole world that Jesus is waiting for them!

**You would have lost your
Best Friend.**

Sunday
June 19

The End and the Beginning

LOGOS

Matt. 27:57–28:20; Mark 15:42–16:20; Luke 23:50–24:52; John 19:38–21:25

The End in Despair (Matt. 27:62–66; Mark 15:42–47)

Mark, along with the other Gospels, records one of the saddest Sabbaths in history. Jesus Christ, the hope of the world, was dead. The Son of God, the Creator of life gave His own life, and was buried by human beings.

Mark's Gospel shows the reader the strangeness of Jesus' death. Most people

The Gospel writers climax their accounts of Jesus' life with His resurrection.

who were crucified suffered for days before their bodies finally gave out. Jesus died after a few hours. Pilate made certain that Christ was dead before entrusting the body to Joseph. The timing of Jesus' death reveals that

no one took His life. He chose to lay it down.

The Scriptures provide many eyewitnesses to the burial. Mark writes about Joseph of Arimathea, "a prominent member of the Council" (Mark 15:43, NASB) as a witness. Several women saw the Lord's burial. Pilate and the centurion testify of Christ's death. Even Jesus' enemies state in Matthew 27 that He died. Few people argue that Jesus of Nazareth lived on planet Earth. No one argues the fact that He died. The controversy comes to life when we discuss what happened to Christ's body.

With heavy hearts Joseph and the women buried Jesus as the Sabbath approached. Even though it appeared to human eyes that hope had been buried with the Son of Man's body, hope still lived.

The Beginning of Hope (Mark 16:3–6; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4, 12–14)

If Mark 15 is the end in despair, then chapter 16 is the end of despair. This amazing change, this renewing of hope, rings out in the angel's words, "He has risen; He is not here" (Mark 16:6, NASB). The angel announced the good news of a risen Savior. It is the truth of a resurrected Lord that brings hope to Christianity—and controversy as well. What happened to Jesus' body? The Romans and Jews would not have taken Christ's body out of the tomb. The disciples could not have stolen the body. Yet there stands an empty tomb. The probable answer is that Jesus was what He said He was. He did what He said He would do. He died and rose again. The evidence of the empty tomb and of the eyewitnesses lead to this conclusion.

Jesus Christ died on the cross in our place, but if He did not rise again we would

have no hope. The Gospel writers climax their accounts of Jesus' life with His resurrection. Jesus Christ paid for our sins on the cross, but we do not have a dead Savior. Death could not hold the Son of God. "Mountains piled upon mountains over His sepulcher could not have prevented Him from coming forth."*

The apostle Paul also emphasizes the importance of Christ's resurrection. He writes that the death and resurrection of Jesus is of first importance. Then in unmistakable language Paul tells the Corinthians that if Christ has not been resurrected, then the message and faith of Christianity is in vain. The Scriptures resound with confidence in a risen Lord who frees us from slavery to sin, fear, and death and grants us peace, confidence, and life.

How to End the Greatest Story (Matt. 28:1–20; Mark 16:8–20; Luke 24:1–53; John 20; 21)

How do you end the greatest story ever told? The Gospel writers chose different ways to close their accounts of Christ's life. Notice how quickly Mark covers the events after the Resurrection as compared to Matthew, Luke, and John. The swiftness of Mark's ending does not negate the powerful message he imparts to the reader as he ends with a beginning.

Ending With a Beginning (Mark 1:1; 16:7–20)

Mark's Gospel ends with a focus on spreading the good news of the Resurrection. The angel at the tomb instructs the women to go and tell. Women come to the forefront during the Resurrection story. All four Gospels agree that women were the first to hear the good news. We discover that females play an important role in Christ's church. In John's Gospel, Jesus chooses the woman at the well as the first missionary (John 4:28–30). Here we find the Lord using women as the first witnesses to His resurrection.

Mark closes his Gospel by giving us an example of what to do when we realize the truth of a risen Lord. Believe it and tell others. Mary Magdalene saw Jesus and told others. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus saw Christ and reported to others. Jesus wants His followers to share the news that He is risen, and He wants people to believe the testimony of His followers. Christ rebuked the unbelief of the disciples when they would not believe "those who had seen Him after He had risen" (Mark 16:14, NASB).

Jesus gives believers a command in verse 15: Go and preach to the whole world. Verse 20 reports the disciples' response. They went out and preached. Mark starts his book by saying, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1, NASB). The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is only the beginning. As the story ends, the commission of the believers to share the good news has begun. We remain to help finish the story.

* *The Desire of Ages*, p. 781.

Monday
June 20

Oh Death, You Are Defeated!

TESTIMONY

1 Cor. 15:55

For one complete day, Satan thought he owned all of humanity. Jesus lay dead in Joseph's tomb. However, his hopes were forever dashed as he witnessed the glorious resurrection of Jesus. "When Jesus was laid in the grave, Satan triumphed. He dared to hope that the Saviour would not take up His life again. He claimed the Lord's body, and set his guard about the tomb, seeking to hold Christ a prisoner. He was bitterly angry when his angels fled at the approach of the heavenly messenger. When he saw Christ come forth in triumph, he knew that his kingdom would have an end, and that he must finally die."

"Over the rent sepulcher of Joseph, Christ had proclaimed in triumph, 'I am the resurrection, and the life.' These words could be spoken only by the Deity. All created beings live by the will and power of God. They are dependent recipients of the life of God. From the high-

**Satan thought he owned
all of humanity.**

est seraph to the humblest animate being, all are replenished from the Source of life. Only He who is one with God could say, I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again. In His divinity, Christ possessed the power to break the bonds of death."²

And like 2,000 years ago, Christ will again show the universe His triumph over death by His gathering of the saints. "Amid the reeling of the earth, the flash of lightning, and the roar of thunder, the voice of the Son of God calls forth the sleeping saints. He looks upon the graves of the righteous, then raising His hands to heaven he cries, 'Awake, awake, awake, ye that sleep in the dust, and arise!' Throughout the length and breadth of the earth, the dead shall hear that voice; and they that hear shall live. And the whole earth shall ring with the tread of the exceeding great army of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. From the prison-house of death they come, clothed with immortal glory, crying, 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?' 1 Cor. 15:55. And the living righteous and the risen saints unite their voices in a long, glad shout of victory."³

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 782.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 785.

3. *The Great Controversy*, p. 644.

An Empty Tomb Not Enough?

EVIDENCE

Mark 16:5, 6

Mark's writing style takes us on a whirlwind tour of Jesus' life on earth. The abruptness of his writing pushes us to see Jesus as the Messiah. The last section of the Gospel of Mark is no different. It lays out the evidence.

Using phrases like "It was Preparation Day" and "When the Sabbath was over" Mark establishes time. Mentioning specific people such as Joseph of Arimathea and the Marys also give clarity to the account. Yet it is his use of quotes that is intriguing. Especially of the young man dressed in a white robe.

The evidence of an empty tomb may not be enough for some to believe that Christ rose from the dead. Is it possible the women went to the wrong tomb? Did the disciples take the body of Jesus? Mark's reference to a young man dressed in a white robe seems to be one of an angel (Matt. 28:5). This angel's statement brings more evidence than just an empty tomb. The angel's recognition of the women's purpose for visit-

Did the disciples take the body of Jesus?

ing as well as directing their attention to "see the place where the Lord lay" (verse 6, NKJV) gives clue that the angel was there for a purpose and that the women were at the right place. Much more important and exciting, however, is the angel's proclamation that Jesus is alive! The women were not having a bad dream. Yes, they had come to the right place. They are invited to take a look at the tomb where they buried Jesus and see that it is empty. It is empty because Jesus is alive!

This Jesus the angel testifies about is the same Jesus that hung on a cross and had a spear shoved into His side to be sure He was dead. This is the same Jesus a Roman centurion testified about saying, "'Truly this was the Son of God!'" (Matt. 27:54, NKJV).

"The sun had known Him, and at the sight of His dying anguish, had hidden its face of light. The rocks had known Him, and had shivered into fragments at His cry. Inanimate nature had known Christ, and had borne witness to His divinity."* This was the same Jesus who would appear to the disciples after the Crucifixion and show them His hands and side.

An empty tomb may not be enough. Yet, when we look into that tomb and recognize why it is empty, can we begin to see evidence of a loving Savior?

**The Desire of Ages*, p. 771.

Wednesday
June 22

Saying Goodbye Is Not Forever

HOW-TO

Mark 16:6; John 6:40; 1 Cor. 15:12-31; Phil. 3:10

I hate to say goodbye. When you say goodbye, you hope that you will see that person again as soon as possible. It might be a matter of hours before you see them again or it may be the last time you ever see them. When Christ died on the cross, many of His disciples and other believers thought they had said their final goodbyes to their beloved Leader. It had to be the saddest day of their lives. This awful day was followed by maybe the most memorable day they ever experienced: the day Christ was resurrected from the grave.

As twenty-first-century Christians, we did not see the death and Resurrection

firsthand. We only have the faith that what the Bible says is true.

Christ's resurrection gives us the assurance that we have eternal life.

His resurrection gives us the assurance that we have eternal life in Christ because He rose on the third day. In 1 Corinthians 15:14 Paul writes that if Christ

did not rise from the dead then our testimonies and preaching are useless.

How do we make the Resurrection just as real in the twenty-first century as it was in the first century?

1. Believe. We need to accept Christ. Christ is a personal Savior and He wants nothing more than to become your Best Friend. Trust in Him and He will guide your life.

2. Speak truth. Read the Bible so that our minds are filled with the truth. If we study and learn the truth, then speaking the truth of Christ's love will be second nature to us.

3. Share your testimony. As Christians we have the best news to share with others. Knowledge is useless unless we share it with others. We need to utilize every opportunity Christ gives us to share His love with others. It may be the only chance they have to hear the gospel. You don't want your goodbye to be eternal.

4. Don't lose hope. In a world filled with disappointments, it is easy to lose hope. We need to remember that we know how it all ends. Christ wins! Victory is ours! Christ will return and we will live forever with Him.

REACT

1. What can you tell people about the Resurrection that applies to us living in the twenty-first century?

2. What role does the Resurrection play in your faith?

Accidental Spirituality?

OPINION

Mark 15:42, 43; Exod. 3:2; Prov. 19:21; Jon. 1:17; Acts 8:26, 27

The Bible is full of stories that describe situations in which it seems accidental that God's purpose is completed. For instance, a large fish swallowed Jonah. A burning bush sprung out of the desert and spoke to Moses. A high-ranking Ethiopian happened to be on the road between Jerusalem and Gaza to speak with Philip. A "prominent member of the council" (Mark 15:43, NIV) made his tomb available for Jesus' body.

This prominent member of the council, Joseph of Arimathea, probably didn't expect that his gracious offer of a tomb would become the setting for one of the most amazing stories in galactic history—the resurrection of Jesus. But it shouldn't surprise us. We observe in the Bible that God often uses common people in seemingly accidental circumstances to achieve His will.

Over and over we observe that these common people have uncommon spirituality. Like Joseph of Arimathea, they had a personal, vibrant relationship with God. They were connected to Him. Then they acted.

We don't know much about Joseph of Arimathea. We know that he was a member of the Jewish High Council. We can deduce that he was part of a minority of people who were supportive of Jesus at the time of the Crucifixion. The kind of maturity and spiritual commitment he exhibited, in the face of severe hate, probably wasn't achieved easily. We are stunned that a man as prominent as Joseph of Arimathea acted so selflessly and risked his own stature to provide his tomb. Joseph of Arimathea had to be a man of deep spiritual understanding. Otherwise he could not have risked everything for a penniless, traveling Jewish preacher. With everything you know about Jesus, what are you willing to risk for Him?

The Christian struggle includes the search for and discovery of what God has in mind for us. Most of us will not become as famous as Jonah, Moses, Philip, or Joseph of Arimathea. But from reading their stories, we realize that God's will is always completed. His work is being completed every day by men and women who have a relationship with Him that is not accidental.

In Mark's presentation of Joseph of Arimathea, and throughout his Gospel, Mark conveys a sense of immediacy. He portrays the story of Jesus as high drama. He compels the reader to react. He almost calls out to the reader to consider, "Hey, Joseph of Arimathea risked everything to provide a tomb for Jesus. That was no accident. Are you willing to risk everything for Him?"

**Mark conveys a sense
of immediacy.**

Friday
June 24

Reversing the Irreversible

EXPLORATION

1 Cor. 15:14

CONCLUDE

The resurrection of Jesus brought great gladness and transformation among the disciples. The Gospel writers portray the cross and resurrection of Jesus as belonging together. The Resurrection gave meaning to the Cross. It energized His disciples to turn the world upside down. We must see the same meaning in the resurrection of Jesus as His disciples then saw. By reversing the irreversible—death—God confirmed once and for all that Jesus is the Son of God. His resurrection gives us the assurance that Jesus successfully completed the divine mission on earth. At the same time, it confirms God's promise of eternal life for all those who believe in Him. The ones who have experienced this assurance cannot keep the good news to themselves. This is when the gospel commission becomes active in our lives.

CONSIDER

- Journaling for a week about your own reflections on Jesus' resurrection; writing about how your belief in salvation has been strengthened, God's divine power over death is revealed, and so on.
- Emailing a close friend, sharing insights you gained this week on Jesus' resurrection.
- Memorizing the gospel commission given in Matthew 28:19, 20 in a version of your choice.
- Viewing the video *Amistad* (1997). Consider the importance of faith in the resurrection to Yamba as he relates it to his personal experience.
- Whistling or humming a familiar song such as "I Serve a Risen Savior" or "Because He lives," contemplating the words.
- Interviewing a pastor on his or her vision of how the gospel commission can be fulfilled these days. Ask how this vision is becoming a reality in the local church and worldwide.
- Observing a growing seedling to experience the meaning of death and renewal.

CONNECT

Mark 16.

The Desire of Ages, chap. 81.

The Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, pp. 183–185.

Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, chap. 11.

Next Quarter's Lessons

Experiencing Jesus Christ as Lord: The Spiritual Life

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for third quarter 2005, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: Crisis of Identity

Logos: Matt. 18:21, 22; Luke 5:18–20; Rom. 3:26; 5:20; 1 John 1:9

What was the spiritual state of Judah at the time Isaiah was written? Can we truly worship the Lord if our hearts are not right with Him? How did the choices the Judeans faced parallel the choices we face today?

Lesson 2: Crisis of Leadership

Logos: Isa. 6:1–13

When asked by one of his disciples about the ingredients of good government, Confucius answered: "Sufficient food, sufficient weapons, and the confidence of the common people." People do, indeed, want strong, trustworthy leadership. When a soldier was signing up for a second tour of duty, the army recruiter asked why he wanted to re-enlist. "I tried civilian life," he said, "but nobody is in charge out there."

This week we'll look at Judah's crisis of leadership and the sad results that followed.

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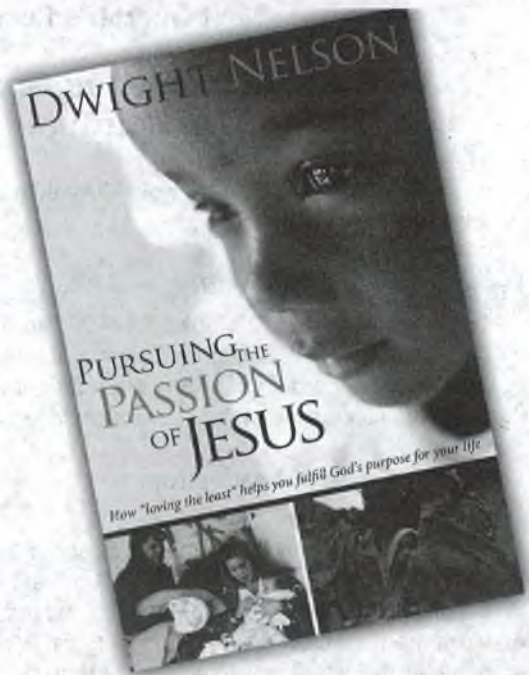
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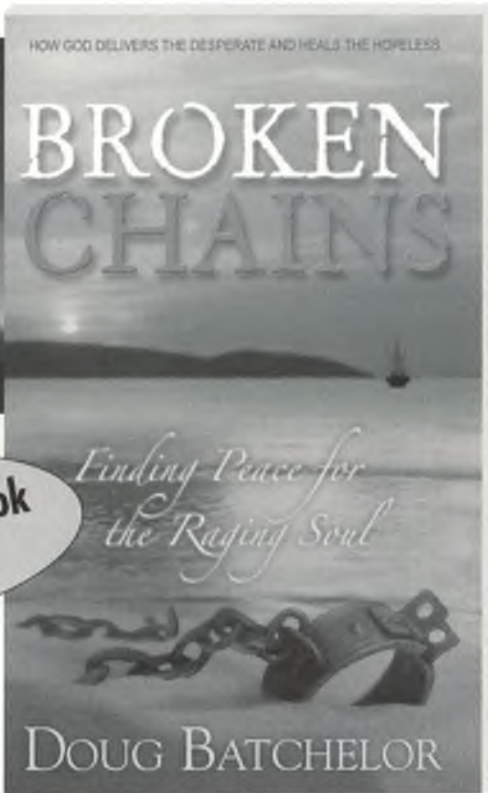
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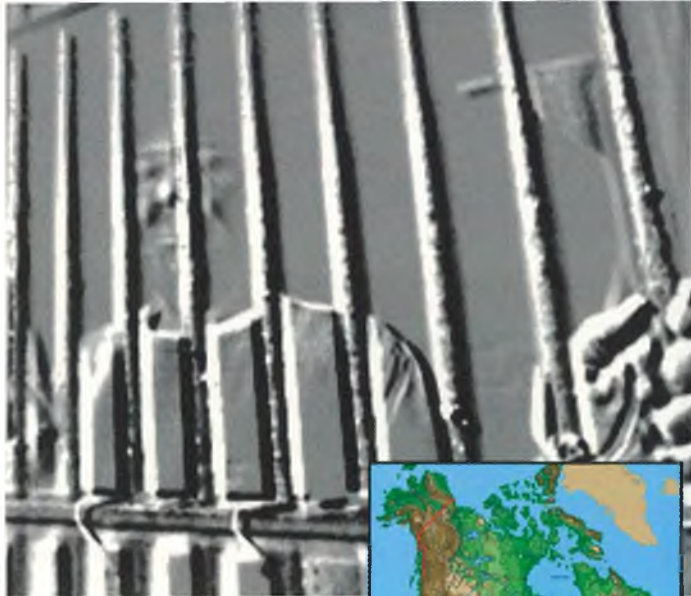
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Michael Matthews answered the knock on his door to find two police officers with guns drawn. He knew why they were there and gave up without a fight.

Michael had been a drug addict and a drug pusher for nine years. He thought he was using drugs to “find God,” but God was not in his drug-induced stupors. In prison he did not want to think of God, but everywhere he went he encountered God. In time he realized that he must choose between a path that would lead to death or God’s path to life and light. Late one night he knelt with a fellow inmate on the hard cement floor and gave his life to Jesus.

The craving for drugs that had driven him for nine years vanished. But he still faced a sentence of up to 20 years for drug trafficking. Read how God led this former addict out of darkness and into the light of faith in this quarter’s *Mission*.

This quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will go to North American Division.



North American Division

Where legally possible, offerings will go to these projects; otherwise special arrangement will be made with the General Conference for distribution of funds based on the laws of the countries where these offerings are collected.



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