



HOMES OF **HOPE** AND HEALING

8 WEEKS OF BIBLE LESSONS FOR SMALL GROUPS



General
Conference
Women's
Ministries
Department



INTRODUCTION

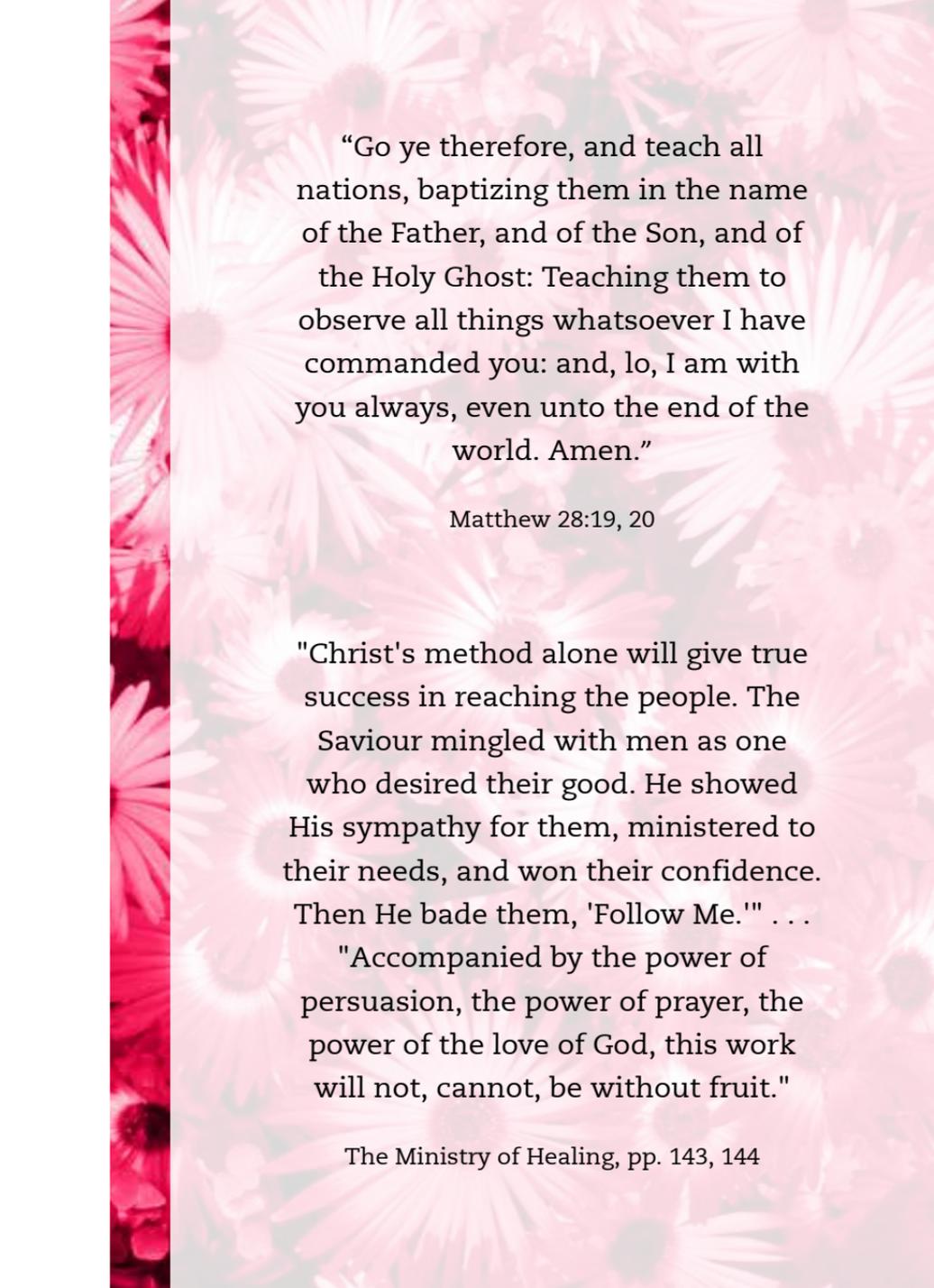
God longs for us to “prosper and be in health.” His desire for us is not merely physical health but also emotional health. Yet sin has impaired our emotional health. Often, instead of our being in control of our emotions, they control us, even impelling us to make wrong choices that cause great grief and sorrow. Fortunately, that need not be the case. The Lord has something better for us. And for us and those in our community whom we want to reach, this series of *Homes of Hope and Healing* Bible Study Lessons provides biblical principles of sound emotional health.

In these lessons, we will look at Bible characters, focusing on their emotional reactions to events in their lives. We will ask ourselves, “What can we learn from their experiences that will help us cultivate emotional health and strength founded on faith?”

Our prayer is that this eight week journey, by helping us understand our emotions, will help us reach out to the Lord, who has bestowed on us the greatest emotion of all: love. As a tool for outreach and service, may these lessons provide a bridge to the people around you, helping them to know the love of Jesus and then through God’s grace to reflect that love to others. May all who make the journey through these lessons together grow in His love and share His love, His healing love.

God Bless you in the journey,
General Conference Women’s Ministries Department



The background of the page is a dense pattern of pink and red flowers, likely gerberas, with some darker red flowers visible on the left side. The text is centered and overlaid on this floral background.

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

Matthew 28:19, 20

"Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'" . . .

"Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit."

The Ministry of Healing, pp. 143, 144

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WHAT IS HOMES OF HOPE AND HEALING?

The “Homes of Hope and Healing” program involves opening our homes to our neighbors for fellowship and learning. In these perplexing times, when hopelessness abounds, our homes can be places where neighbors, family, and friends gather in fellowship to share HOPE and HEALING for spiritual and emotional nurture. Here friendships are formed; hope, healing and encouragement are given; and needs are met.

WHO NEEDS HOPE?

- YOUR NEIGHBOR
- YOUR FRIEND
- THE SICK
- THE DISCOURAGED
- DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES
- THOSE IN PAIN
- THE HOMELESS
- A CO-WORKER
- THE JOBLESS
- And many others

GOD CALLS WOMEN

“Women as well as men can engage in the work of hiding the truth where it can work out and be made manifest. They can take their place in the work at this crisis, and the Lord will work through them. If they are imbued with a sense of their duty, and labor under the influence of the Spirit of God, they will have just the self-possession required for this time. The Saviour will reflect upon these self-sacrificing women the light of His countenance, and this will give them a power that will exceed that of men. They can do in families a work that men cannot do, a work that reaches the inner life. They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach. Their work is needed.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 128, 129.

HOW TO START?

1. In this ministry, we open our homes to women in our community. We work in small groups (between 3 and 15). The goal is to make lasting friendships for Jesus.
2. Invite friends to come to your home or other non-church location. However if it is not possible to use your home, then join with another sister who is willing to use her home and work together.
3. You may want to offer a lunch or a light supper (optional).
4. Share your personal testimony of what Jesus has done in your life.
5. Invite them to participate in an eight-week “Homes of Hope and Healing” journey.
6. Explain that this is an ongoing program with breaks every eight weeks. (The number of weeks is flexible. Keep it short to accommodate people’s schedules).

HOW DO I ORGANIZE THE PROGRAM?

1. Choose one topic to focus on for eight weeks. Involve the group in choosing a topic so it fits their needs. Possible topics might be: health, spiritual nurturing, family, parenting, communication, etc.
2. You may use DVDs, PowerPoint, printed lessons, or other media in your meetings.
3. Invite speakers to present topics as needed. You do not have to lead out each time you meet.
4. The presentation of the topic should be about 30 minutes.
5. Follow with a break out time or group discussion of about 30 minutes.
6. The total time for the small group meeting should be about one hour (The length is flexible, but remember, you may have working women or mothers of young children who cannot stay out too late).
7. End your time together with a short prayer.

TO KEEP YOUR GROUP GOING

1. When you finish the eight-week series, take a break of a few weeks. Then begin again, choosing another topic of interest to the group.
2. The number of times you do an eight-week series is flexible. It might be once every three or six months. Each small group leader is free to set her own schedule.

HELPFUL MATERIALS

- “The Bible and Human Emotions,” Sabbath School Bible Study Guide by Julian Melgosa (2011).
- “Finding Calm in the Chaos of Life” by Julian Melgosa – Pacific Press.
- “The Benefits of Belief” by Julian Melgosa – Pacific Press.
- “Ten Choices for a Full Life” by Katia Garcia Reinert – Pacific Press.
- “Women in the Bible and Me,” Bible Study Lessons by GC Women’s Ministries.
- “Bible Studies for Busy Women” by GC Women’s Ministries
- “Celebrations” by GC Health Ministries.
- “Journey of Joy” by NAD Women’s Ministries.
- Other materials may be available in your church.

THE BENEFITS OF “HOMES OF HOPE AND HEALING” MINISTRY

- You will build strong friendships with other women and help lead women to Jesus by meeting their varied needs.
- Your community will be strengthened as women’s concerns are addressed.
- Your faith will be strengthened as you share and witness.
- Your church will be strengthened as new friendships are formed.

Following are 8 Bible lessons that you can use to begin your Homes of Hope and Healing.

THE BIBLE AND HUMAN EMOTIONS*

LESSON 1 EMOTIONS

Read for This Week's Study:

2 Samuel 13; Gal. 5:22; Col. 3:12-14; Luke 19:41-44

“I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy” (*John 16:20, NIV*).

INTRODUCTION

Emotions are a vital part of the human personality. They can be powerful motivators, both for good and for evil. And, depending on the emotions, they make us happy, sad, fearful, or joyous.

“Positive” emotions can bring a feeling of satisfaction and well-being; “negative” emotions tend to cause pain and anguish. Though “positive” emotions can promote mental health, a prolonged exposure to “negative” emotions may bring about behavioral and relational problems. Emotions play an important part in our overall well-being.

God wants us to enjoy the effects of positive emotions. However, because of sin, we often face the adverse effects of negative emotional experiences. Bible characters were not

*Adapted from the Sabbath School Bible Study Guide by Julian Melgosa.

immune to emotional ups and downs either. Some succeeded in gaining control over them; others, losing control, allowed negative emotions to lead them into wrong actions.

The relationship between emotions and behavior is not clear and direct. At times painful emotions may drive us to our knees in order to seek God as the ultimate source of help and support. At other times, emotional struggles may cause people to give up faith entirely.

How crucial, then, that we learn more about our emotions and how they impact our lives.

NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

Read 2 Samuel 13, a story packed with adverse emotional experiences. In the midst of this turmoil, people ended up inflicting much physical and emotional pain on each other. The consequences of their behavior touched the entire royal family, impacting even future generations.

What emotional states can be identified in the following participants?

Amnon _____

Tamar _____

David _____

Absalom _____

Amnon's "love" for Tamar could not have been true love, but rather a strong sexual drive, because as soon as he achieved his goal he "hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her" (*vs. 15, NIV*). Amnon's experience illustrates emotional extremes: uncontrolled passion (in the context of an incestuous relationship) and hatred. Behaviors performed under such emotional states almost always will be unbalanced and cause serious consequences. Amnon's "love" turned almost instantly into hatred. He disdained his sister's final plea and drove her out of his quarters by force.

Tamar was truly the victim. She did not permit any of Amnon's advances, which frustrated him. She served her brother in obedience to the king. And when Amnon's intentions became clear, she did her best to dissuade him and to outline the devastating consequences of such a wicked act. Being determined to do what he wanted, Amnon was not ready to seek sound advice. So he proceeded with his plan.

As any woman who has suffered rape or abuse, Tamar must have felt angry, humiliated, and used; she surely suffered with significantly lowered self-esteem. Her brother Absalom did not offer much relief, but instead advised her to keep silent. However, Absalom devised a plan to kill Amnon in order to avenge her rape. (Besides, getting rid of Amnon increased his chances to sit on the throne of Israel.) David, father of all involved, experienced anger and grief over these events.

When have you experienced hatred, sadness, fear, rage, or jealousy? How did you deal with them? What do you wish you had done differently?

CONTRASTING EMOTIONS

Negative emotional states such as hatred, worry, fear, rage, and jealousy produce immediate physiological responses: a pounding heart, tense muscles, dryness of the mouth, cold sweat, butterflies in the stomach, and other physical manifestations. Longtime exposure to these symptoms has been associated with cardiac and digestive complications.

In contrast, positive emotional states such as compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience are associated with a sense of well-being, a positive outlook, and an optimal relationship with others and with God. Positive psychology, a newly developed and widely accepted branch of psychology, aims at the promotion of positive emotions in order to obtain happiness and to prevent mental illness.

In fact, there is evidence that harboring certain negative emotions will adversely affect health and longevity; in contrast, the promotion of a positive outlook can promote health and longevity. In other words, the more positive your outlook and emotions, the better overall health you can enjoy.

- **Read Galatians 5:22. How should the fruit of the Spirit make a difference in the way people experience life?**
- **Read Colossians 3:12–14. What is the most outstanding positive emotion according to Paul? What is the meaning of “clothe yourselves” (NIV) as expressed in this passage? What consequences follow when someone puts into practice Paul’s words in this passage?**

Though love is more than an emotion, it is still the supreme emotion. God is love, and it is His plan for His children to experience love for others and from others; He wants us to know what it means to love God and to be loved by Him. Love brings about an array of other positive feelings and emotions that can be translated into highly desirable behaviors.

What has been your own experience with how your emotional state impacts your actions? Why is it important not to make important decisions amid a flurry of emotions, be they positive or negative?

JESUS' EMOTIONS, PART I

In Mark 8:1–3, “compassion” was the motivator that led Jesus to devise a plan for feeding the multitude. Nobody else had thought of the practical needs of these people, who had eaten little or nothing in three days. Jesus observed that some had traveled far; thus, He knew that they could collapse if sent home without anything to eat.

Other than feeding the crowds, what other acts of Jesus were performed out of compassion? *Mark 1:40, 41; 6:34.*

Lepers often were treated with disdain. There was no other illness or condition that would produce more terror and pity than would leprosy. Individuals with this visible malady were banned from any social interaction and often were forced to live in a designated camp. Whenever others came near, they were obligated to shout “Unclean! Unclean!” in order to warn people to move away and avoid infection. Because Jesus felt compassion for this man, He cured him instantly and

then sent him away with instructions not to tell anyone. But the cured man could not keep this wonderful act of love to himself, and he started to tell everyone.

Jesus felt compassion, not only when people lacked the basic physical necessities but also when they were without leadership, direction, or aims. Thus, before providing food for them, He felt their deep spiritual needs and proceeded to teach them about the kingdom of God.

Christ's compassion can be seen, too, in Mark 9:36, where Jesus emphasized physical touch. He held children and showed love and affection for them. He also reached out and touched diseased people in order to demonstrate divine healing power.

In the encounter with the rich young ruler (*Mark 10:21, 22*), Jesus loved him even though the young man did not follow the Master's directions. In an instant, both men experienced strong emotions—love (Jesus), sadness (the rich young ruler).

What are ways that you express compassion? That is, it's one thing to feel compassion (most folk do that), but it's another to express it by concrete deeds. How might you through words and deeds better reveal the compassion you feel for those who are hurting?

JESUS' EMOTIONS, PART II

Read Luke 19:41–44. What led Jesus to shed tears over Jerusalem? No doubt it was over the sorrow He felt as He looked into the future and viewed Jerusalem's fate.

But even more, He felt sorrow for the many inhabitants of the city who had rejected Him. “The tears of Jesus upon the mount, when he overlooked the city of his love and care, while in the midst of the rejoicing and hosannas of thousands, were the last pleadings of rejected love and compassion.”—Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, p. 20.

The Gospel writers record two occasions when Jesus wept. People usually cry for themselves, but on these occasions Jesus’ sorrow came from a deep feeling for others.

What were some of the painful emotions Jesus experienced in the following stories? *Matt. 26:37, 38; Mark 3:5; 8:12; John 11:32–38; Mark 11:15, 16.* What caused the emotions He experienced?

The first few verses of Isaiah 53 confirm that Jesus was a man of sorrows. Even though He experienced many moments of joy, He also felt severe emotional pain. Much of Jesus’ suffering had to do with feelings of frustration when His followers did not grasp His message. In spite of the abounding love of Jesus and His supernatural signs, many did not understand that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus also suffered greatly as He observed the results of sin upon humankind.

Lazarus’ death also caused Him great sorrow. John tells us that Jesus groaned in the spirit (*John 11:33*). This is a translation of the Greek word that indicates a very strong display of emotional turmoil, accompanied by an audible sound from the throat and nose. Greek playwright Aeschylus (525–456 B.C.) uses the same word to describe the snorting of

horses. The word is used five times in the New Testament, four of them to describe Jesus' emotion.

Contemplating the emotional experiences of Jesus can help us understand how much He can relate to our own emotional turmoil. Look at this text: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses” (Heb. 4:15, NIV).

GOD'S PLAN FOR PAINFUL EMOTIONS

Read John 16:20–24. What is Jesus' promise in regard to pain and grief?

The passage offers great hope to anyone going through physical or psychological pain. Here are a few things that can be learned from this text:

- **The world seems to be full of joy.** Often the believer looks around and is reminded of the unfairness of life. Wicked people seem to enjoy themselves, while many committed to God are in pain. But Jesus assures us that this will not go on forever. Besides, appearances often are deceiving. We naturally tend to view others as being happier and more successful than we are.
- **Grief, sorrow and anguish will turn to joy.** This is the core of Jesus' promise. Believers must treasure the idea that sorrow will not only pass away but give way to joy.

- **Past pain will be forgotten.** Memories of the unpleasant past often cause much distress. Many psychotherapists work painstakingly to remove the effects of the past in their client's present life. Jesus assures us that, just as a woman gives birth and forgets about the pains at the sight of the newborn, His followers will one day move beyond the pain of the past.
- **No one will take away our joy.** The type of joy Jesus offered is not the same as we now understand it. Jesus is offering us total happiness, an eternal condition that no enemy can take away from the saved.
- **There will be no needs.** Jesus affirms that the righteous will no longer ask anything. They will not need to make requests and supplications to Jesus, because all their needs will have been met.

How can you hold fast to the promise that your sorrow will turn to joy? How can this assurance help you pass through the adversities of life? How could you use Jesus' promises to encourage someone in grief?

FURTHER STUDY:

Consider the story of Jesus' visit to the temple. "As the piercing look of Jesus swept the desecrated court of the temple, all eyes were instinctively turned toward him. The voices of the people and the noise of the cattle were hushed. Priest, ruler, Pharisee and Gentile all looked with mute astonishment and indefinable

awe upon the Son of God, who stood before them with the majesty of Heaven's King, divinity flashing through humanity and investing him with a dignity and glory he had never before displayed. A strange fear fell upon the people. Those nearest Jesus instinctively drew as far from him as the crowd would permit. With the exception of a few of his disciples the Saviour stood alone. All sound was hushed; the deep silence seemed unbearable, and when the firm, compressed lips of Jesus parted, and his voice rang out in clarion tones, there was an involuntary groan or sigh of relief from all present.

“He spoke in clear accents and with a power that caused the people to sway as if moved by a mighty tempest: ‘It is written, My house is the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.’ He descended the steps, and, with greater authority than he had there manifested three years before, with indignation that quenched all opposition, in tones that rang like a trumpet through the whole temple, commanded, ‘Take these things hence.’”—Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, pp. 23, 24.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- **How would you describe the emotions of Jesus as expressed in the above passage? What lessons can we learn from this about how many emotions, if properly channeled, can be a source of good?**
- **How can negative emotions be replaced with positive ones? Consider the experience of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, who went to look at Jesus' tomb, and were “afraid yet filled with joy” (*Matt. 28:8, NIV*).**

- **Jewish communities celebrate Purim to remember the time that “their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration” (*Esther 9:22, NIV*). Discuss ways to make sure we do not forget the many times our sorrow has turned into joy. Share times you have experienced this emotional change.**
- **How can we learn to cling to God’s promises when, for now, they seem so distant and unattainable?**

LESSON 2

DIVINE PROVISION FOR ANXIETY

Read for This Week's Study:

Gen. 3:6-10; John 14:1, 2; Matt. 6:25-34; 18:3; Phil. 4:11, 12

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7, NIV).

INTRODUCTION

Scripture is filled with verses containing words such as *afraid*, *anxiety*, *anxious*, *fret*, *frightened*, and *terrified*. Many references have to do with what people are anxious and fearful about; others with the promises of divine reassurance to those who are fearful or anxious. The message “Do not be afraid” runs through the Scripture with strength and persistence. And why not? After all, fear and anxiety have been part of human existence since sin entered this earth. Anxiety, or fear about what *may* happen, is one of the most dangerous emotions for mental and physical health. A medieval legend tells of the traveler who one night met Fear and Plague on their way to London, where they expected to kill 10,000 people. The traveler asked Plague if he would do all the killing. “Oh no,” Plague answered. “I shall kill only a few hundred. My friend Fear will kill the rest.”

This week's lesson is about how, through divine power, we can have relief from fear and anxiety. Trust in God and contentment are key factors in looking at the future with confidence.

THE FIRST FEARFUL EXPERIENCE

Read Genesis 3:6–10. It is difficult to relate to Adam and Eve’s first encounter with *fear*, because none of us can remember the first time we experienced this emotion. Developmental psychologists have confirmed that infants from early life face definite fears, mostly of going hungry and of sharp noises. Growing children and adolescents go through a variety of fears, as well: fear of animals, of darkness, of being alone; of school-related situations, of separation from parents, fear of not growing up, or of being rejected by peers. Adults also are subject to common apprehensions associated with their particular life circumstances: fear of not finding a suitable life partner, of not finding the right job, of terrorist attacks, of contracting a chronic or fatal disease, of being assaulted, of dying, etc.

Ellen G. White says that after Adam ate the forbidden fruit, “the thought of his sin filled him with terror” and that the mild temperature of Eden chilled the guilty couple. They were left with “a sense of sin, a dread of the future, a nakedness of soul.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 57.

Consider the following sample of promises against fear and anxiety. Identify the distinctive component of each of them.

Ps. 23:4 _____

Prov. 1:33 _____

Hag. 2:5 _____

1 Pet. 3:14 _____

1 John 4:18, 19 _____

Fear and anxiety are very common. They also are frequent, destructive, and painful. Common anxiety symptoms include apprehension, worry, insomnia, jitters, tension, headaches, fatigue, dizziness, palpitations, breathlessness, sweating, difficulty in concentrating, and hypervigilance. Anxiety also may produce panic attacks. God is interested in freeing us from such undesirable experiences and invites us to trust in Him.

What things make you especially afraid, and why? How rational is your fear? What practical steps can you take either to remove the thing that makes you afraid or to alleviate the fear itself?

DO NOT BE AFRAID

Read Genesis 15:1-3. What was Abram's source of fear? What valid reasons did he have to fear?

God called Abram and promised to make him into a great nation. Seeing that years passed by and he had no heir, Abram dwelt on this issue, and it became his favorite worry. Verses 2 and 3 (*NIV*) reveal the core of Abram's fear: "Who will inherit my estate? . . . A servant in my household will be my heir!" The attitude seems a generalized reaction inherent to human nature, which is to perpetuate something of ourselves, something to carry on our influence even after we die.

God's response to Abram's concerns was, " 'Do not be afraid. . . I am your shield, your very great reward' " (*Gen. 15:1, NIV*). The future of our lives, and even our future after

our death, is in the hands of our heavenly Father. He knows that freedom from anxiety is one of our greatest needs, and He wants us to be content today and confident about tomorrow.

Look up the following texts. What were the circumstances into which the Lord's reassuring message "Do not be afraid" (NIV) is introduced?

Deut. 31:8 _____

2 Chron. 20:17 _____

Luke 21:9 _____

John 14:27 _____

Anxiety is manifested through distress about uncertainties. Such uncertainties may be near or far in the future, and they may not even happen; for the time being, they exist only in the mind. Yet, the symptoms of anxiety are quite real, both emotionally and physically, and can be painful. No wonder the Lord wishes to free us from them.

How can you best use God's assurance—"Do not fear"—in whatever situation you are in? How can you remember that no matter what you are facing, God is stronger and bigger than that challenge and that He loves you with a love greater than the fears you have?

TRUST AGAINST ANXIETY

Reflect on the comforting words of Jesus to His disciples in John 14:1, 2. What happened immediately before? Where does He direct their thoughts?

These loving words encourage trust. Trust in the Father, trust in Jesus, because this is a trust that can free the troubled heart from gazing at the future in distress. Jesus immediately takes the disciples' attention to the kingdom that He is preparing for them. In other words, no matter what happens to you here, no matter how bad things are, this is what you have waiting for you. *Thus, trust in Me and My promises.* This is what Jesus said to them then and is saying to us now.

In some counseling sessions clients act out roles relevant to real-life situations that lead to increased self-confidence and enhanced self-esteem. In addition, they learn how to manage their thoughts when anxiety is near, so that the mind may be focused on safe themes. They also are taught relaxation and breathing techniques to be used in critical situations.

Although those strategies enjoy a relatively high level of success, they focus on gaining trust in oneself in order to reduce the chances of feeling anxious. This is acceptable but incomplete, because trust in ourselves is but a small step. We need, in the end, to learn to trust in God.

How does the psalmist compare trust in God with trust in humanity? *Ps. 118:8, 9.*

Humans can be fickle and moody, whereas God and His promises never change. For example, during the Reformation,

the king of Italy and the king of Bohemia promised reformer Jan Hus safe transport and safe custody. They broke their promises, and Hus was martyred.

What is Jesus saying to us in Matthew 18:3?

The first task of infants is to develop trust in their mother or caregiver. Once this has been accomplished, little ones will feel content and confident about the world and the future that awaits them. This is the beginning of trust. Jesus asked us to relate to Him as a child to his or her mother, allowing ourselves to be soothed and comforted by His tender care. We, though, have to make a conscious choice to do just that.

Spend a few moments remembering the times when God has answered your prayers or provided the best for you. How can previous experiences such as these help you to enhance your trust in your heavenly Father today for whatever difficult situation you are facing and for whatever is making you feel anxious and worried?

OF BIRDS AND LILIES

Aside from Jesus' kind advice to avoid worry, what lessons can we obtain from this segment of the Sermon on the Mount? *Matt. 6:25-33*.

Through this powerful text Jesus teaches a number of principles that, if seriously followed, can protect the believer from much distress.

Keep things in perspective (vs. 25). A hectic schedule may make us lose sight of the truly important things.

Daily routines may distract us from what we believe to be fundamental. God gave us life. God created our bodies. If He has the power and the willingness to do that, will He not provide food to maintain His creation? Will He not arrange for the necessary garments to dress our bodies?

Become inspired by simple things from nature (vss. 26, 28–30). Sparrows and lilies are among the most common things in nature. Jesus chose them as a contrast to the immense complexity of human beings. It is obvious that sparrows do not worry about tomorrow and that lilies do not toil to obtain the latest fashion, yet they are well taken care of. “Will he not much more clothe you?” (*vs. 30, NIV*).

Worry is useless and pointless (vs. 27). Examining problems in order to find possible solutions may be productive, but worrying for the sake of worrying not only does nothing to solve the issue but magnifies the negative side of things.

Straighten out your priorities (vs. 33). Christians sometimes may be caught in the whirl of materialism or other things that can distract them from what really matters in life; thus Jesus reminds them: “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (*NKJV*).

Winston Churchill said: “I remember the story of the old man who said on his deathbed that he had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which had never happened.”—[http://www.saidwhat.co.uk/quotes/political/winston_churchill].

Take a look at the things that worry you, and then kneel down and pray, asking God to take charge of all your

worries. What are the concerns that you can have a part in fixing? What are things that are absolutely beyond your control? Do what you can to fix what you can, and then ask the Lord to help you learn to trust in Him for the rest.

ONE DAY AT A TIME

Read Matthew 6:34. What is Jesus telling us here? How can we learn to do what He says? Why is it so important?

Putting into practice the message of Matthew 6:34 would bring peace to people today. Jesus is not asking us to ignore planning or to be careless. He simply is telling us not to worry about what *may* happen, not to use the typical “What if” thoughts: “What if I get sick?” “What if I lose my job?” “What if I have an accident?” “What if my child dies?” “What if someone attacks me?”

Anxious individuals focus on:

- Fifty percent of events that will never happen
- Twenty-five percent of occurrences of the past that cannot be changed
- Ten percent about unconfirmed criticism by others
- Ten percent about health (much of it apprehensive)
- Five percent about real problems that will be faced

How can you gain inspiration from Paul’s experience of contentment? *Phil. 4:11, 12.*

One of the keys for living one day at a time is contentment, an effective antidote for worry. Contentment is not an inheritable attitude but an acquired characteristic. Paul said that “I have *learned* the secret of being content in any and every situation” (*vs. 12, NIV*). In this day and age, in which we face so many problems, there is a need to develop a sense of contentment for what we presently have and not to worry about what might come tomorrow.

“Jesus said: ‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid’ ” (*John 14:27, NIV*).

In practical terms, how do you benefit from Jesus’ assurance of peace of mind? What can you learn from each other?

FURTHER STUDY:

“It is not work that kills; it is worry. The only way to avoid worry is to take every trouble to Christ. Let us not look on the dark side. Let us cultivate cheerfulness of spirit.”—Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, p. 466.

“If we educated our souls to have more faith, more love, greater patience, a more perfect trust in our heavenly Father, we would have more peace and happiness as we pass through the conflicts of this life. The Lord is not pleased to have us fret and worry ourselves out of the arms of Jesus. He is the only source of every grace, the fulfillment of every promise, the realization of every blessing. . . . Our pilgrimage would indeed be lonely were it not for Jesus. ‘I will not leave you comfortless’ (John 14:18), He says to us. Let us cherish His

words, believe His promises, repeat them by day and meditate upon them in the night season, and be happy.”—Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, p. 468.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- **Some, without any real immediate reason for concern, are afraid of dying; others actually are experiencing a debilitating or terminal disease that will likely kill them. Others perhaps truly are facing another life-threatening situation. How can people in those circumstances be comforted?**

DISCUSS

Think about all the things you have worried about that never came to pass. What lessons can you learn from these experiences that should, ideally, help you worry less about the future?

LESSON 3

STRESS

Read for This Week's Study:

1 Kings 17:2-4, 15, 16; 19:1, 2; Mark 6:31-34; Gal. 6:2

**“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest”** (*Matthew 11:28, NIV*).

INTRODUCTION

Stress touches everyone. Demands at work, family crises, guilt, uncertainty about the future, dissatisfaction with the past—these all cause stress. All this, along with the general events of life, can put enough pressure on people that it affects their physical and mental health. Researchers Thomas H. Holmes and Richard H. Rahe developed the social readjustment rating scale, which lists life events with corresponding stress values for each: the death of spouse—100; personal injury or illness—53; change in residence—20; etc. A person accumulating 200 or more points at any given time runs a 50 percent chance of becoming ill; someone accruing 300 or more will reach a point of crisis. Moderate amounts of stress are necessary to increase performance, but beyond a point stress becomes a health hazard.

Jesus shows by precept and example that seeking God at a quiet time and place is the best remedy for life's stresses (*Mark 6:31*). If we will allow Him to, the Lord will help us deal with the pressures that are an inevitable part of life here.

EXCITING LIFE EVENTS

How did God provide for Elijah's survival during the long drought in Israel? *1 Kings 17:2–6, 15, 16.*

In the midst of a long famine, Elijah must have felt very close to the Lord, who took such personal care of him. First, he had the opportunity to witness ravens (normally nasty birds) come twice a day to feed him. Talk about a miracle! Then he saw endless rations of bread coming from a little oil and meal—enough food to feed three persons for two years. How much more evidence of God's providential care would anyone need?

Ellen G. White applied the lessons of this story to God's faithful people in the last days:

“I saw that our bread and water will be sure at that time, and that we shall not lack or suffer hunger; for God is able to spread a table for us in the wilderness. If necessary He would send ravens to feed us, as He did to feed Elijah.”—*Early Writings*, p. 56.

What were some of the other things that happened to Elijah, and what lessons can we draw from them for ourselves?

1 Kings 17:17–22; 18:23–39, 45.

God used Elijah to resurrect the widow's son. What a test of faith, and what a vindication of God's power over life and death! Next, the test at Mount Carmel was an irrefutable and spectacular demonstration of God's power. Finally, heavy rain after a three-year drought was another manifestation of God's involvement in human affairs. Elijah's life was full of direct and divine intervention. It's hard to imagine how anyone,

after all that, could not fully trust in the Lord; yet, not long after all that, Elijah was overcome by discouragement.

Are success and achievement bringing you stress? A long series of exhilarating events (even positive ones) may add much weight to your load. At the same time, why must we be careful not to be too self-satisfied during good times?

BITTER LIFE EVENTS

Read 1 Kings 18:40. Whether or not Elijah took part himself in the killing of hundreds of people, he was clearly in charge of the operation, and that must have been an emotionally devastating experience. This act was permitted by God as the only way to eradicate the idolatry, which included the sacrifice of children (*Jer. 19:5*). Nevertheless, it surely must have taken an emotional toll on the prophet.

On top of the stress of that ordeal, what else did Elijah face?

1 Kings 19:1, 2.

From the beginning of Ahab's reign, the wicked queen had been adamant that her husband should "serve Baal and worship him" (*1 Kings 16:31, NIV*). As a result, all of Israel had fallen into idolatrous practices. Jezebel was instrumental in restoring the worship of Ashtoreth, one of the vilest and most degrading forms of Canaanite idolatry. Now, with the death of all the priests, Jezebel felt impatient and enraged.

How did Elijah react to the message brought from Jezebel?

1 Kings 19:3, 4.

How could this man of God, after having witnessed a series of wonderful miracles, be in such a state of despair? How did he reach the point of asking God to take his life? After all, look at the miracles he had seen and even had been involved in!

“Satan has taken advantage of the weakness of humanity. And he will still work in the same way. Whenever one is encompassed with clouds, perplexed by circumstances, or afflicted by poverty or distress, Satan is at hand to tempt and annoy. He attacks our weak points of character. He seeks to shake our confidence in God, who suffers such a condition of things to exist.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 120.

How often have you done the same thing: forgetting the incredible way the Lord has worked for you in the past? Why is it so important, especially during times of despair and stress, to cling to the memories of how God has worked in your life in the past? Why do we so easily forget what the Lord has done for us? How can praise and worship help you through difficult times?

GOD'S THERAPY

Read 1 Kings 19:5–9. What were the simple remedies provided for Elijah during this stressful time in his life? What can we take from this for ourselves? How are our physical actions impacting, either for good or for bad, our mental attitude?

Proper sleep, exercise, and a healthy diet often are prescribed to combat psychological stress.

A common treatment for mood disorders is called activity scheduling. It consists of developing a rigid timetable that contains pleasant and purposeful activities that will force a depressed person to organize, anticipate, and carry out events. Such a regimen helps the person fill time positively and avoid self-pity. Physical exercise often is included in the activities, because it helps produce endorphins, morphinelike natural chemicals that enhance mood and at least temporarily relieve depression.

With heavenly guidance Elijah was led into the steps that would restore his normal mental health. As with Elijah, we need to be open to divine leading. As soon as Elijah sat down under the broom tree, he prayed. Yes, it was the wrong kind of prayer (asking God to take his life), but at least it was a prayer, a desire for God to take charge.

Over time Elijah overcame his terrible discouragement, and God still was able to use him (*see 1 Kings 19:15, 16; 2 Kings 2:7-11*). Before being taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah was given the great privilege of anointing his successor, and of witnessing the waters of the Jordan River separate, thus permitting him and Elisha to cross the river on dry ground.

Finally, Elijah was taken to heaven, without dying. Kind of an ironic “end” for a man who, not much earlier, was asking God to take his life!

What are we missing out on if we pray only in times of discouragement and despair? How can you learn to live more consistently in an attitude of constant prayer?

JESUS' METHOD TO MANAGE STRESS

With the blossoming of cell phones in the mid-1990s, a veteran Adventist minister said: “I will never have one! As I visit churches and listen to people’s problems, I get weary and distressed. But when I return to my car, I find refuge. If I had a cell phone, I wouldn’t find rest even in my car.” Every follower of Christ needs a quiet hiding place to find calm, to pray, and to listen to God through His Written Word.

Read Mark 6:31. What lesson can we take from this for ourselves? How often do you do this for yourself, or do you always have an excuse?

Speaking of Jesus, Ellen G. White wrote: “His hours of happiness were found when alone with nature and with God. Whenever it was His privilege, He turned aside from the scene of His labor, to go into the fields, to meditate in the green valleys, to hold communion with God on the mountainside or amid the trees of the forest. The early morning often found Him in some secluded place, meditating, searching the Scriptures, or in prayer. From these quiet hours He would return to His home to take up His duties again, and to give an example of patient toil.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 90

What other sanctuary did Jesus have? *Matt. 21:17; Mark 11:11.*

People may be a source either of distress or of peace. Jesus found peace with friends who brought comfort and affection to His life. This He found at the house of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. “His heart was knit by a strong bond of affection to the family at Bethany. . . . Often, when weary, thirsting for human fellowship, He had been glad to escape to this peaceful

household. . . . Our Saviour appreciated a quiet home and interested listeners. He longed for human tenderness, courtesy, and affection.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 524.

How can you apply Jesus’ stress management method to your life?

BRINGING RELIEF TO OTHERS

What are the specific features about Jesus’ behavior that Peter used to describe his Master? *Acts 10:38*.

Jesus’ style fundamentally was selfless. He utilized all His energy to serve others, to bring them relief through His kind words and healing power. Jesus never used His divine powers to benefit Himself. This must have made such an impression on Peter that his description of the Savior was of someone who “went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil” (*vs. 38, NIV*).

In the majority of cases, the pressure brought about by work, relationships, money, etc., is self-centered. Focusing on others (rather than oneself) is a good way to remove personal pressure. People who engage in volunteer work, community projects, etc., report greater feelings of well-being and satisfaction than people who do not.

Read Galatians 6:2, Philippians 2:4, and John 15:13. What message is there for us?

John D. Rockefeller (1839–1937) provided an example of how to survive stress by moving the focus from oneself to others. By

1879 his company, Standard Oil, handled about 90 percent of the refining in the United States. By the age of 50 he was the richest man alive. But in 1891 he had a nervous breakdown and was near death. However, he recovered from his illness in just a few months. How?

Along with practicing habits of a simple diet, rest, and exercise, he decided to give away his fortune and spent the remaining 40 years of his life as a philanthropist. Early in the twentieth century his personal fortune peaked at nearly \$900 million. At the time of his death his estate was valued at \$26 million. His donations did a lot of good in the world. And, he had extended his own life by nearly another 50 years, living in contentment to the age of 97.

What has been your own experience with the blessings that come from serving others? Why not make a concentrated and prayerful effort to do more?

FURTHER STUDY:

“Utterly wearied, he [Elijah] sat down to rest under a juniper tree. And sitting there, he requested for himself that he might die. . . . A fugitive, far from the dwelling places of men, his spirits crushed by bitter disappointment, he desired never again to look upon the face of man. . . . Into the experience of all there come times of keen disappointment and utter discouragement—days when sorrow is the portion, and it is hard to believe that God is still the kind benefactor of His earthborn children; days when troubles harass the soul, till death seems preferable to life. It is then that many lose their hold on God and are brought into the slavery of doubt, the

bondage of unbelief. Could we at such times discern with spiritual insight the meaning of God's providences we should see angels seeking to save us from ourselves, striving to plant our feet upon a foundation more firm than the everlasting hills, and new faith, new life, would spring into being."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 162.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- **What is it about helping others that makes us feel better? Why is that so often the case? At the same time, why is it so hard to give of ourselves to others? How can we learn to be more willing to die to self in order to serve the needs of those around us?**
- **Take a good look at your own health habits. What are you eating and drinking? What kind of exercise program are you on? How much leisure time do you have? What changes can you make that could help you feel better emotionally as well as physically? Though in some cases people have very serious psychological needs that must be professionally addressed, many times a change in lifestyle habits can make a big difference in how we feel.**
- **How much “spare” time do you have? What do you do with that time? How could you better utilize that time to enhance your relationship with God?**

LESSON 4

RELATIONSHIPS

Read for This Week's Study:

1 Samuel 25; Eph. 4:1-3; 1 Pet. 3:9-12; Luke 17:3, 4; 23:34

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (*Matthew 7:12, NIV*).

INTRODUCTION

An experienced urban evangelist used to organize stress management seminars as an introduction to evangelistic meetings in cities. He had devised a simple survey in which he asked the audience to list four or five things that caused them the most stress. Workers grouped the answers in general categories (health, money, work, relationships, etc.). Before the count was completed, one worker saw that the speaker already had a prepared set of transparencies to discuss “relationships” as the number one source. When questioned, the pastor explained that the results had always been the same: bad relationships always came up as the primary cause of stress.

Whether the problems are with spouse, children, boss, work associate, neighbor, friend, or enemy, our relationships with people tend to be our principal stressor. In contrast, when relationships are positive, they are a powerful source of satisfaction. This seems consistent across geography and culture. People make us happy or people make us miserable.

That's why this week we'll spend some time focusing on the important topic of relationships and what the Bible teaches us about them.

COMPLETELY HUMBLE AND GENTLE

Read Ephesians 4:1–3. Why do you think Paul connects humility, gentleness, and patience with good relationships and unity? Recall examples of your own experience in which the above attitudes have made a positive impact on relationships.

Read 1 Samuel 25. What can we learn from the actions of Abigail and David regarding proper behavior in difficult and tense situations?

The story of David, Nabal, and Abigail provides an excellent example of successful social interaction. Results vary significantly depending on how individuals present themselves—as superiors, as equals, or as humble friends or associates.

David sent his soldiers to Nabal with a fair request. “We have protected your men and your property; give us whatever you can find” (*1 Sam. 25:7, 8, author’s paraphrase*). But Nabal didn’t demonstrate kindness or diplomacy. We are told that he was a harsh and evil man. Other translations use terms such as *surlly, mean, brutish, rough, dishonest, churlish, and rude*. And he surely displayed these traits before David’s warriors.

In contrast, notice David’s initial attitude. Even though he held the military power, his message was full of care and humility, wishing Nabal and his household long life and good health, introducing himself as “your son David” (*vs. 8, NIV*).

As for Abigail, the Bible tells us that she was intelligent and beautiful. Notice her behavior: she provided an abundant amount of choice food; she ran to appease David, bowed down before him, addressed herself as “your servant” and David as “my master,” and asked for forgiveness. She also reminded David that as a man of God, he needed to avoid needless bloodshed.

The result of Abigail’s tactful and humble action brought about a complete turn in David’s intentions. He praised the Lord for sending her and praised her for her good judgment. This effective mediation, full of godly spirit, saved the lives of many innocent men. As for Nabal, David did not need to shed blood, because the man died—probably of heart failure—a victim of his own fear.

It’s easy (usually) to be kind to those we like. But what about those we don’t? Think of those you find very disagreeable. How would they react if you displayed a humble and gentle attitude toward them? Through God’s grace, give it a try (remembering, too, that you might not always be the most likable and lovable soul either).

REPAYING EVIL WITH BLESSINGS

What is the true intent of 1 Peter 3:8–12? What are some of the immediate ways you can apply these principles to your own life?

Jesus upgraded the “eye for an eye” approach to turning the other cheek (*Matt. 5:38, 39*). This was a revolutionary concept then and still is today for many cultures and traditions. Unfortunately, even Christians rarely return good for evil.

But Jesus keeps saying: “ ‘Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart’ ” (*Matt. 11:29, NIV*). A couple with small children was experiencing serious problems with their neighbors. On several occasions, and in nasty tones, these neighbors told the young parents how disagreeable it was to see play equipment installed in the yard and to hear the children playing on it. They complained about certain sections of the young family’s yard and how they were bothered by this and that. The young couple did not appreciate being talked to in such a harsh and unkind tone. After all, they were not doing anything against the neighborhood rules. One day, when the family was harvesting apples from the backyard apple trees, the mother decided to give the neighbors two freshly baked apple pies. The neighbors accepted the pies gladly. That simple act made a difference in their relationship, probably because they never would have expected anything like that from people whom they had been constantly harassing.

How did David pay back Saul’s constant attacks on his life? 1 Sam. 24:4–6. What does this tell us about David’s character? How might we need to apply the same attitude in our own experience, especially when we might be having problems with someone who, in his or her own way, also could be “anointed of the Lord”?

The first book of Samuel records four times when David expressed the immorality of lifting his hand against “the Lord’s anointed.” Even though he had opportunities to take revenge, he repeatedly tried to approach and forgive the king. David chose a humble and godly manner in his dealings with someone who wasn’t kind to him. Shouldn’t we all, in whatever situation we are facing, seek to do the same?

FORGIVENESS

It is possible to appear to live a rich and meaningful religious life, yet have serious relational problems. It's a fact of life that as human beings we often cross each other and cause each other pain, even—and sometimes *especially*—in the church. Hence, how important we learn the art of forgiveness.

Read Ephesians 4:32. How well have you been applying this biblical truth in your life? Whom do you need to forgive, and why is it important for your own good to forgive them?

Only in recent years has the counseling profession started to look more positively at the importance of spiritual principles for mental health. For decades religion and spirituality were seen by many psychologists and counselors as an underlying source of guilt and fear. Not so much any more. Today many utilize the protective effects of a committed Christian viewpoint. “Therapies” such as prayer, spiritual journaling, memorization of key biblical texts, and forgiveness protocols are now recognized as helping many people overcome a variety of emotional disturbances. Forgiveness counts among the most soothing strategies, even if the ability to truly forgive and be forgiven comes only from God through a God-transformed heart. (*Ezek. 36:26*).

Read Matthew 5:23–25; Luke 17:3, 4; 23:34. What do they teach us about forgiveness?

Sometimes one may think that forgiveness is virtually impossible to grant. But no human being will ever reach the extent of what Jesus bore in the way of pain and humiliation: the King and Creator of the universe was unjustly degraded

and crucified by His creatures. Yet Jesus, in complete humility, cared for them enough to implore the Father to forgive them.

At times people wrong others without a full understanding of the pain they are causing. Other times people offend because they are insecure or have personal problems, and so they try to obtain relief by hurting others. How can the awareness of others' problems help you offer forgiveness? How can you learn to forgive those who are purposely trying to hurt you?

CONFESS YOUR SINS TO EACH OTHER

How do you interpret James's recommendation to confess sins to one another? *James 5:16*. Dwell on this verse and ask yourself how you need to apply its teaching to your own situation.

Sins against my neighbor require my confession to him/her in order to secure forgiveness and to restore the relationship. It also shows that I am willing to take the responsibility for what I have done and that I trust and hope for acceptance and forgiveness. By God's grace, a noble soul will grant forgiveness, regardless of the size of the offense.

There is an additional interpretation of James' text, which offers great healing possibilities. Confessing sins, errors, and transgressions to someone you trust brings about emotional healing. Opening up one's own imperfection to a godly Christian friend will help alleviate the burden of guilt. In addition, mutual confession deepens interpersonal relationships. Trusting and being trusted provide the

bonding that will make a friendship genuine and lasting. In fact, the entire counseling profession is founded upon the principle that talking is good for the soul. Although there are mental disorders that necessitate professional treatment, many feelings of distress can be relieved at the church and community levels. This is especially true for problems created by the deterioration of interpersonal relationships—misunderstandings, slander, jealousy, etc. Following James’s advice not only will alleviate psychological burden but also bring renewed strength to change destructive behaviors.

A word of caution though. Although disclosure of sins to a close friend may bring much relief, it makes the person vulnerable. There is always the risk that our friend will reveal the confidence to others, and this is destructive to those involved.

Most important, we always can confess our trespasses to the Lord in full confidence and with the assured certainty of forgiveness. Read 1 Peter 5:7. Defective relationships may bring uncertainty and even fear and anxiety. Other people may be able to help, but the surest aid comes from God, who is willing to take all our cares at any time, leaving us with a genuine sense of relief for having left our burdens in His hands.

BUILDING OTHERS UP

Read the following texts, and ask yourself how you can apply the teaching to your own life. Why is this so important, not only for yourself but for others? *Eph. 4:29, 1 Thess. 5:11, Rom. 14:19.*

Paul admonishes the early church communities to avoid the deterioration of personal relationships in the “body of Christ.” Many interpersonal difficulties come from tearing each other down and, in the process, hurting the entire community. People who engage in gossip and backbiting tend to have problems themselves—feelings of inferiority, the need to be noticed, a desire for control or power, or other insecurities. These people need help to abandon this hurtful way of dealing with their inner conflicts.

Indeed, feeling good about oneself helps to prevent being involved in gossip and slander. Members of the body of Christ need to consider themselves privileged for having received the gift of salvation (*Ps. 17:8, 1 Pet. 2:9*). With this understanding, the emphasis is placed on building others up and working toward mutual edification. Words of encouragement and approval, emphasis on the positive, humility, and a joyful attitude are ways of supporting those with personal problems. Another way to help is to serve as relational mediators. Jesus calls peacemakers “blessed” and “children of God” (*Matt. 5:9*), and James says that peacemakers will reap “a harvest of righteousness” (*James 3:18, NIV*).

Read Matthew 7:12. Why is this so key to all relationships?

This principle can be considered as a priceless jewel for social relationships. It is positive, it is based on love, it is universal, and it stretches above and beyond human law. The “Golden Rule” also brings about practical benefits to everyone involved.

A Chinese farmer was tending his rice paddy up in the mountain terraces overlooking the valley and the sea. One day he saw the beginning of a tidal wave—the sea retreated, leaving a wide portion of the bay exposed, and he knew that the water would return with force, destroying everything in the valley. He thought of his friends working in the valley and decided to set his rice field on fire. His friends immediately ran up the mountain to put the fire out and thus avoided being killed in the tidal wave. As a result of this spirit of helping one another, their lives were saved. The lesson is clear.

FURTHER STUDY:

Read Ephesians 4:25–32 and underline the words that touch your heart. Reflect on all the things you can do, with God’s help, to improve your relationships with other people.

These are portions of a letter that Ellen White wrote in 1908 to an evangelist: “I have this message for you from the Lord: Be kind in speech, gentle in action. Guard yourself carefully, for you are inclined to be severe and dictatorial, and to say rash things. . . . Harsh expressions grieve the Lord; unwise words do harm. I am charged to say to you, Be gentle in your speech; watch well your words; let no harshness come into your utterances or into your gestures. . . .

“When the daily experience is one of looking unto Jesus and learning of Him, you will reveal a wholesome, harmonious character. Soften your representations, and let not condemnatory words be spoken. Learn of the great Teacher. Words of kindness and sympathy will do good as a medicine, and will heal souls that are in despair. The knowledge of the

Word of God brought into the practical life will have a healing, soothing power. Harshness of speech will never bring blessing to yourself or to any other soul.”—*Gospel Workers*, pp. 163, 164.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- **How much do you like to gossip? Even if you don't do it yourself, how eager and open are you to hear gossip from others? Why, in a sense, is that just as bad as spreading gossip yourself? How can you stop being part of what can cause other people a great deal of pain?**
- **Forgiveness can be difficult, especially when we have been very badly hurt. How do you learn to forgive those who don't ask for forgiveness, who don't care about your forgiveness, and who might even scorn it? What is your responsibility in such cases?**
- **Verbal and physical abuse within families is a reality that brings much pain to individuals and groups. What should be the Christian attitude to help prevent this problem? What should be recommended when forgiveness does not cause any change in abusive behavior?**
- **Think over your life right now. What steps can you take to bring about an improvement in your relationships? Why is humility, trust in God, and a desire to do right so important in such a process?**

LESSON 5

GUILT

Read for This Week's Study:

Gen. 3:8–13; 1 John 1:9; Psalm 32; 1 Tim. 4:1, 2; Matt. 26:75

"If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared" (Psalm 130:3, 4, NIV).

INTRODUCTION

A sense of guilt is one of the most painful and incapacitating emotional experiences. It may cause shame, fear, sorrow, anger, distress, and even physical illness. Although often unpleasant, these feelings can be used by God to lead sinners to repentance and to the foot of the cross, where they can find the forgiveness they've been longing for. Sometimes, however, the guilt mechanism makes people feel guilty about something for which they are not responsible, as in the case of some accident survivors or children of divorce.

But when the sense of guilt is justified, it serves as a good conscience. Guilt produces enough discomfort to make the person do something about it. Depending on personal choices, guilt may be highly destructive, as in the case of Judas, or highly positive, as in the case of Peter.

This week we will study four biblical accounts of guilt in order to understand this process better and to see what we can learn about it. We can see how, if properly channeled, guilt

can be used by the Lord to our advantage. So much depends, really, on our attitude toward the guilt we feel and what we choose to do with it.

SHAME

Read Genesis 3:8–13. How did Adam and Eve manifest the guilt they experienced? What especially was bad about Adam’s reaction?

Guilt was the first adverse emotion felt by the human race. Soon after Adam and Eve sinned, their behavior changed. They “hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden” (*vs. 8, NIV*). This unprecedented reaction indicated fear of their Father and Friend and, at the same time, their shame to face Him. Up until their fall, they had found joy in God’s presence, but now they hid before His approach. A beautiful bond was broken. In addition to fear and shame, they felt sorrow, especially as they were made aware of the terrible consequences of having disobeyed God.

Notice Adam’s words: “The woman you put here with me. . . ,” and Eve’s, “The serpent deceived me” (*NIV*). Guilt brings about a seemingly automatic reaction to place the blame on somebody else or to justify one’s own behavior. Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, called this reaction “projection” and argued that people project their guilt on others or on circumstances in order to lighten the burden of guilt. “Projection” is considered a defense mechanism. But blaming others does not work well for interpersonal relationships and poses a barrier to God’s forgiveness. The true solution consists of accepting full responsibility for

one's own actions and seeking the only One who can provide freedom from guilt: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (*Rom. 8:1, NIV*).

Sometimes people suffer from guilt for the wrong reasons. Close relatives to those who commit suicide, survivors of a massive accident or calamity, and children of a recently divorced couple are typical examples of what is, in most instances, unfounded guilt. People in these situations need to be assured that they cannot be held responsible for the behavior of others or for unforeseeable events. And if in certain cases they do have some blame, they must take responsibility for their actions, seek forgiveness from those whom they have hurt, and then hold fast to such Bible promises as: "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (*Ps. 103:12, NIV*).

How do you find yourself reacting to guilt? Are you quick, as Adam was, to blame others for your wrong actions? How can you learn to face up to the things you have done wrong and then, through the grace of God, move on?

JOSEPH'S BROTHERS' DISTRESS

What particular remorse-eliciting memory lingered in the minds of Joseph's brothers? *Gen. 42:21*. What does that tell us about them?

Guilt is associated with a particular occurrence of the past, sometimes an image or a brief event that tends to be replayed mentally. At other times it takes the form of a flashback image that invades one's mind or appears in dreams or

nightmares. The image of the adolescent Joseph pleading with his older brothers for his life must have come to Jacob's sons again and again.

How else did guilt affect Joseph's brothers? *Gen.45:3*

People affected by guilt think about it repeatedly, lamenting the fact that they did what they did, showing fear for the consequence, and entering into self-blame. Such rumination produces much distress, frustration, and anger at oneself for not having done differently. Unfortunately, no matter how much time is devoted to recalling those thoughts, the past will remain unchanged. Repentance and forgiveness are required. Joseph's noble character emerges, and he offers forgiveness and encourages his brothers to stop being angry at themselves. He assures them that their deed had to do with God's design to save many lives. The fact that God was able to use their evil action for good doesn't, however, change the fact that they were guilty of a horrible crime.

How would obeying what's in these verses help us deal with guilt? *James 5:16; 1 John 1:9.*

All sins bring pain to the sinner and to God. Many sins also involve other people. Each corner of the triangle (God—Others—Me) needs to be worked out in order to bring a resolution to past wrongdoings. John tells us that God is prepared to forgive and to purify us from unrighteousness. In addition, James tells us to confess sins to each other; we should do this, especially to those whom we've wronged.

Humble confession is the only way to free oneself from guilt.

“Your sins may be as mountains before you; but if you humble your heart and confess your sins, trusting in the merits of a crucified and risen Saviour, He will forgive and will cleanse you from all unrighteousness. . . . [The work of His righteousness] is peace, and its effect quietness and assurance forever.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 566.

What do you need to confess in order to experience the promises here?

SAPPED STRENGTH

Read Psalm 32. What does this teach us about guilt and confession? What does David mean by “keeping silent”? What happens when one remains silent? What was David’s solution to his guilt?

Honest confession is good for the soul, and seemingly also for the body. David’s language clearly suggests that his mental state of guilt was causing physical pain as well: bones wasted away (*vs. 3, NIV*) and strength sapped (*vs. 4, NIV*). Health professionals today recognize the close link between psychological stress and physical maladies. The expression “psychosomatic disease” has been part of the health professionals’ language for decades, and it refers to physical symptoms caused largely by psychological processes. More recently the field of psychoneuroimmunology has identified the key role that mental states play in protecting our bodies from or exposing them to diseases.

Guilt, as does any other strong adverse emotion, causes immediate deterioration in behavior and can, in the long run,

destroy physical health. But for those who know the Lord, there is no need of putting themselves at risk. David's testimony reveals the antidote for guilt: "Then I acknowledged my sin to you. . . . And you forgave the guilt of my sin" (*vs. 5, NIV*).

Thus, shame, remorse, sadness, and hopelessness caused by guilt can vanish through the Lord's wonderful forgiveness, and joy and happiness can come instead (*vs. 11*).

Read 1 Timothy 4:1, 2. What does he mean by "seared consciences"?

Paul forewarned Timothy of individuals who would teach strange doctrines to believers. They would do this because their consciences had been "seared as with a hot iron" (*vs. 2, NIV*). As fire may burn nerve endings and make certain parts of the body insensible, a conscience also may become seared by: (a) repeated violation of correct principles until no sense of wrongness remains, (b) strong environmental influences that cause one to view something wrong with indifference or even as good.

What things that once bothered you now don't? If so, might that be a seared conscience at work? Try to step back and take a good look at things you do that don't bother your conscience but perhaps should.

BITTER WEeping

One of the greatest manifestations of guilt appears in Matthew 26:75. What made Peter's sense of guilt so great? Have you ever had a similar experience? If so, what did you learn from it that could keep you from making a similar mistake again?

On two occasions Peter stated his intention to be firm and never to deny the Master. His second affirmation came even after the Lord had predicted that Peter would deny Him three times that very night. Hours later two women identified Peter as one of Jesus' disciples, and he denied the Lord each time. Then a group of servants of the high priest's household identified him, and he exclaimed: "I am not" (*John 18:25, NIV*). Notice that the accusers (minors, females, servants) were considered of low social rank in the context. This must have added to Peter's shame and guilt later on.

The crucial point, however, is that Peter's weeping led to repentance, to a change of heart and to a true conversion, no matter how painful the process itself. Sometimes that's what it takes: we need to see ourselves as we really are, to see what's really in our hearts, and what treachery we are capable of—and then we will fall, broken like Peter, before the Lord.

"With blinding tears he [Peter] makes his way to the solitudes of the Garden of Gethsemane and there prostrates himself where he saw his Saviour's prostrate form when the bloody sweat was forced from His pores by His great agony. Peter remembers with remorse that he was asleep when Jesus prayed during those fearful hours. His proud heart breaks, and penitential tears moisten the sods so recently stained with the bloody sweat drops of God's dear Son. He left that garden a converted man. He was ready then to pity the tempted. He was humbled and could sympathize with the weak and erring."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 416.

The first half of the book of Acts provides an unquestionable testimony of Peter's transformation. His preaching and

leadership and miracle workings were extraordinary and led to the salvation of many. His work also led to the foundation of the church as the body of Christ. His death, anticipated by Jesus in John 21:18, was received as an honor, for he died in the same manner as his Master.

In what ways have your falls and failures made you more sensitive to the falls and failures of others? How can you learn to minister, out of your pain, to others in theirs?

TOTAL FORGIVENESS

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1, NKJV). What does this text promise us? How can we make this promise our own?

God’s forgiveness is so great, so deep, and so wide that it is impossible to understand fully. Even the best quality of human forgiveness cannot compare with that of God. He is so perfect, and we are so flawed; and yet, through the provision God Himself provided in Jesus, we all can have full and complete pardon the moment we claim the promises for ourselves in full faith and surrender to the Lord.

Read the three texts below. How do they shed light to help you understand God’s forgiveness?

Ps. 103:12 _____

Isa. 1:18 _____

Mic. 7:19 _____

The Bible uses allegories from the concrete and familiar in order to help us understand the meaning of difficult concepts. Snow and wool are good examples of whiteness; the depths of the sea are among the deepest places we can imagine; and nothing can be geographically farther apart than east from west. Yet, these are limited allegories of God's forgiveness. In the Abbey of Elstow, a stained-glass window portrays an image inspired by Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Christian, the central character, can be seen kneeling at the foot of the cross. His heavy burden of guilt is rolling away from his shoulders, bringing ineffable relief to his soul.

Christian says: "I saw it no more." The burden was gone. Its pain, sting, anxiety, and shame disappeared forever. Because of our imperfection, selfishness, and defective relationships, it is very hard for us to understand the perfect and total forgiveness of God. We can simply accept it by faith and pray: "Lord, I humbly confess my sins to You and accept Your pardon and cleansing. Amen."

How can we be sure our sins are forgiven if we don't feel that they are forgiven? What reasons do we have to believe we're forgiven, despite our feelings?

FURTHER STUDY:

"When sin struggles for the mastery in the human heart, when guilt seems to oppress the soul and burden the conscience, when unbelief clouds the mind, who lets in the beams of light? Whose grace is sufficient to subdue sin, and who gives the precious forgiveness and pardons all our sins, expelling the darkness, and making us hopeful and joyful

in God?—Jesus, the sin-pardoning Saviour. He is still our Advocate in the courts of heaven; and those whose lives are hid with Christ in God must arise and shine, because the glory of the Lord has risen upon them.”—Ellen G. White, *Bible Training School*, May 1915.

“If you have given offense to your friend or neighbor, you are to acknowledge your wrong, and it is his duty freely to forgive you. Then you are to seek the forgiveness of God, because the brother you have wounded is the property of God, and in injuring him you have sinned against his Creator.”—Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 128.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- **Madame Mao, the wife of the former leader of Communist China Mao Tse-Tung, lived in constant fear and guilt, all because of many of the bad things she had done. She was so paranoid, in fact, so full of guilt, that any sudden noises, any unexpected sounds, would send her into cold sweats or into a fury. It got so bad that she demanded that her staff keep birds away from her compound so she didn't have to hear them singing. Though an extreme case, what does this tell us about the power of guilt to ruin our lives?**
- **What advice would you give to someone who is struggling with guilt over past sins, who claims to have accepted Christ and yet still can't get rid of the feelings of guilt? How can you help them?**

- **Think of your own metaphors to describe the depth of the forgiveness that is found in Jesus for those who will accept it.**
- **In a world in which no God existed, could guilt exist? Discuss your answer.**
- **God can use guilt to bring us to faith and repentance. Are there any other “benefits” to guilt? If so, what might they be?**

LESSON 6

GOOD THINKING

Read for This Week's Study:

Mark 7:21–23; Luke 6:45; Acts 14:2; 15:24; Gal. 3:1; Ps. 19:14

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things”
(Philippians 4:8, NIV).

INTRODUCTION

As one of the most utilized forms of mental health intervention today, cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) is based on the assumption that most psychological problems are improved by identifying and changing inaccurate and dysfunctional perceptions, thoughts, and behaviors.

People with depression tend to interpret facts negatively; people with anxiety tend to look at the future with apprehension; and those with low self-esteem maximize others' success and minimize their own. CBT, therefore, trains people to identify and change their unhealthy thinking habits into better alternatives that promote desirable behavior and eliminate unwanted ones.

The Bible teaches us about the connection between thoughts and actions (*Luke 6:45*). Good thought patterns not only are healthy but also provide a way toward integrity: “Do not those

who plot evil go astray? But those who plan what is good find love and faithfulness” (*Prov. 14:22, NIV*).

We’ll look at some biblical truths that can help us gain control over our mental activity by allowing Christ to take charge of our mind.

THOUGHTS: THE ROOT OF BEHAVIOR

Read Mark 7:21–23 and Luke 6:45. What do these texts tell us about the importance of controlling not just our actions, not just our deeds, not just our words but our thoughts, as well?

People who suffer from impulse-control disorders fail to resist the impulse to steal, to attack someone, or to gamble. Mental health clinicians know that these impulses often are preceded by a certain thought (or chain of thoughts), which leads to the undesirable behavior. Consequently, patients are trained to identify those thought triggers, dispel them immediately, and occupy their minds with something else. In this way, they gain control of their thoughts and avoid the actions that these wrong thoughts often lead to. Indeed, sinful acts are often preceded by thoughts. (Isn’t this what temptation is all about?) It is the duty of every Christian to learn to identify, with God’s help, the first steps in this process, because dwelling on wrong thoughts almost inevitably leads to sin.

What alternative is proposed by Paul to deal with immoral behavior? *Rom. 8:5–8*.

Mind and behavior are shown by Paul as intimately linked. The Spirit-filled mind will seek good deeds, and the sin-

dominated mind will bring about sinful deeds. It is not enough to change the behavior for the sake of convenience or to present a righteous face to the world. The heart (mind) needs to be transformed, or else the eventual fruits will show the true nature of that heart. “We need a constant sense of the ennobling power of pure thoughts and the damaging influence of evil thoughts. Let us place our thoughts upon holy things. Let them be pure and true; for the only security for any soul is right-thinking.”—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, August 23, 1905.

Suppose you had to express, verbally, to others the thoughts you have had during the past 24 hours. What would you say? How embarrassed would you be? What does your answer say to you about the changes you need to make?

THOUGHTS AS A SOURCE OF DISTRESS

What are the things that really frighten you? What are ways that you can learn to trust the Lord, despite that fear? After all, isn't the Lord's power greater than whatever threats you face?

Much suffering can occur through thinking. Psychologist Philip Zimbardo, in his book *Psychology and Life*, reports the case of a young woman taken to a hospital because she was terrified of dying. Apparently there was nothing wrong with her, but she was admitted overnight for observation. Hours later she died. Further investigation showed that years before, a psychic had predicted her death on her twenty-third birthday. This woman died, victim of her own panic, the day before she would have become 23. No question, people can

suffer seriously from their negative thoughts; hence the need of wholesome thinking. Also, just as important to remember: we can also adversely affect others' thinking by expressing our negativity. Words are very powerful tools, either for good or for evil. Our words either build up or tear down. There is life and death in the words we speak. How careful we need to be with the thoughts and sentiments that come out of our mouths.

Read Acts 14:2, 15:24, and Galatians 3:1. What do they tell us about the power to impact people negatively?

“If you do not feel lighthearted and joyous, do not talk of your feelings. Cast no shadow upon the lives of others. A cold, sunless religion never draws souls to Christ. It drives them away from Him into the nets that Satan has spread for the feet of the straying.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 488.

Think about times someone's “mere” words tore you down in a big way. How can you be sure you never do that to anyone else?

WHOLESOME THINKING

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Phil. 4:8, NIV).

What is the essence of Paul's words to us here? What is the key to doing what he says? See also 2 Pet. 3:1, 2.

Remembering, repeating, thinking about, and meditating on the words in the Bible is one of the greatest spiritual blessings available to us, and it is a sure way to cultivate what Peter called “wholesome thinking” (*2 Pet. 3:1, NIV*). Many people have obtained invaluable blessings by committing to memory treasured Bible texts. When confronted with moments of worry, doubt, fear, frustration, or temptation, they have repeated such thoughts in their minds and have obtained relief and peace through the power of the Holy Spirit.

With so many alluring competitors (TV, computer, etc.), this generation of believers is being tempted to put the Bible aside. It is necessary therefore to make a committed decision to read and reflect upon the Word every day. The Word of God is the only true fortification we have against the mental onslaught of unspiritual distractions that come from the world.

Look again at the text above. Make a list of what things you encounter that are true, pure, lovely, and so forth. What does that list consist of? What do these things have in common?

Prayer is another way to keep the mind out of trouble. While we talk to God, there is little chance for lustful or other forms of selfish thoughts. Acquiring prayerful habits is a sure protection from sinful thoughts and, consequently, from sinful actions.

The Bible is clear: God cares about our thoughts, because our thoughts impact our words, our actions, and our overall well-being. God wants us to have good thoughts because good thoughts, “wholesome thinking,” is good for us, both physically and mentally. The good news is that through meditating on the Bible, through prayer, and through Spirit-

inspired choices on our part, we can keep our minds and hearts on things that will uplift ourselves and others as well.

THE THOUGHTS OF OUR HEARTS

Read 1 Kings 8:39, Psalm 19:14, 1 Chronicles 28:9, and 1 Samuel 16:7. What crucial point are these texts making? More important, how should this truth impact us and how we think? Does this idea make you nervous and fearful, or does it give you hope? Or both? Analyze the reason for your answer.

“For you alone know the hearts of all men” (*1 Kings 8:39, NIV*). The word *heart* often is used in the Bible as the seat of thoughts and emotions (*see Matt. 9:4*). Only God has access to the intimacy of our mental activity, to our true intentions, and to our secret yearnings. Nothing, even in the form of a fleeting thought, can be hidden from the Creator.

God’s knowledge of our soul is to our advantage. When people are too discouraged to utter a sensible word of prayer, God knows their need. Humans can look only at the outer appearance and behaviors, and then try to imagine what someone else is thinking; God knows the thoughts in ways others never can.

Likewise, Satan and his angels can only observe, listen, and estimate what goes on inside. “Satan cannot read our thoughts, but he can see our actions, hear our words; and from his long knowledge of the human family, he can shape his temptations to take advantage of our weak points of character.”—Ellen G. White, *The Review and Herald*, May 19, 1891.

As you make everyday decisions (personal or work-related) or think of other people, pause for a moment and send a quiet prayer to God. Enjoy the understanding of an intimate dialogue that is for you and God alone. Nobody else in the universe is privy to this communication. Allowing Christ into your thinking process will safeguard you from temptation and bring spiritual blessings. This process will, beyond doubt, help you build a closer walk with the Lord.

How does the day's lesson help you better understand the biblical admonition not to judge others? How many times have your motives been misjudged by those who don't know your heart? Why, then, is it important not to judge others in return?

THE PEACE OF CHRIST IN OUR HEARTS

Read Colossians 3:1–17. What are the specific actions that we are called upon to do in order to live the kind of life in Christ we are promised?

This passage takes us to the root of moral and immoral behaviors, the heart and mind. It also points to the only One who can work goodness in us by governing our thoughts, Jesus Christ: “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts” (*Col. 3:15, NIV*). Note expressions such as “set your hearts,” “set your minds,” “put on love,” “let the peace of Christ,” “let the word of Christ.” They indicate that avoiding sin and acquiring virtue is a matter of choice and preparation, not improvisation. Sin can be overcome only by setting hearts and minds on things from above. Christ is the source of virtue and goodness. Christ, when allowed by us, is the only one capable of bringing true peace to our minds.

Our minds, then, being the core of our existence, need to be put under the care of Jesus. It is central to the development of character, and it cannot be left to the mercy of circumstances. Sinful tendencies and corrupt environments both work against purity in thought. Yet, the Lord does not leave us abandoned; He extends His help and protection to all who want it. “Our thoughts, if stayed upon God, will be guided by divine love and power.” Thus, we must “live on the words that proceed from the lips of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 669. In the middle of spiritual warfare, a person may be tempted and find it very difficult to dispel certain adverse thoughts. In those moments, it may be easier to distract oneself by changing place or activity or seeking good company. This may permit a change that facilitates prayer and assurance.

Thought is a very mysterious human process. We really don't know for sure even what it is or how exactly it works. In most cases, though, in the inner recesses of our consciousness, we alone make the choice regarding what we are going to think about. A thought can be changed in an instant. We simply have to make the choice to change it. (In some cases, though, mental illness can affect a person's ability to change their thoughts easily, and so professional treatment may be required.) What about your thoughts? Next time the wrong ones come, what are you going to do?

FURTHER STUDY:

“More precious than the golden wedge of Ophir is the power of right thought. We need to place a high value upon the right control of our thoughts. . . . Every impure thought defiles the

soul, impairs the moral sense, and tends to obliterate the impressions of the Holy Spirit. It dims the spiritual vision, so that men cannot behold God. The Lord may and does forgive the repenting sinner; but though forgiven, the soul is marred. All impurity of speech and thought must be shunned by him who would have clear discernment of spiritual truth. . . . We are to use every means that God has placed within our reach for the government and cultivation of our thoughts. We are to bring our minds into harmony with Christ's mind. His truth will sanctify us, body, soul, and spirit, and we shall be enabled to rise above temptation.”—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, August 23, 1905.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- **What is the meaning of “bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”? 2 Cor. 10:5. How can we learn to do that?**
- **How do the Internet, TV programs, recreational reading, advertisement, etc, work in your mind? How much of your thinking and doing may be affected by these sources? Why do we fool ourselves if we believe that what we read or watch doesn't impact our thinking?**
- **What are ways in which our actions, even subconsciously, reveal the thoughts in our minds? How does body language show what's going on inside?**
- **How careful are you with your words, which simply reflect your thoughts? How can you be sure your words always are working for good and not for evil?**

LESSON 7

HOPE AGAINST DEPRESSION

Read for This Week's Study:

Psalm 42; 31:10; 32:1-5; 1 John 1:9; Mic. 7:1-7; Rev. 21:2-4

“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (*Psalm 34:18, NIV*).

INTRODUCTION

Depression, or extreme discouragement to the point of becoming disabled, has been experienced since the inception of sin. A number of Bible characters displayed symptoms that probably would meet today's diagnostic criteria for depression.

Hopelessness is a symptom of depression, and the biblical message of hope can offer us so much in contrast to a world that offers so little. All people, at times, face moments of extreme discouragement for any variety of reasons. No wonder, then, that the Word of God is filled with promises that can give all of us, no matter our situation, reasons to hope for a better future, if not in this world then certainly in the next.

When depression is severe, it's important to get professional help. Regardless of your relationship with God, were you physically ill you would seek the help of a doctor or health professional. It's the same with those who are suffering from severe clinical depression, which is often caused by a genetic predisposition and chemical imbalance in the brain. Even Christians, at times, might need the help of professionals.

THE DOWNCAST SOUL

Read Psalm 42. How can you relate to what's being expressed there? What hope is offered?

David experienced serious mood swings on many occasions because of unfair persecution (for instance, Saul and Israel's adversaries). In addition, his violation of God's commandments brought about a deep sense of guilt (*Ps. 51:4*), and guilt often is associated with depression.

When one sees oneself negatively ("I am dumb"), looks at the world pessimistically ("life is always unfair"), and contemplates the future hopelessly ("it will never improve"), chances of depression become high. This attitude is called "catastrophic thinking." Christians may opt for alternative ways to interpret things, a way that incorporates God's plan and messages into the equation.

Consider the following alternatives:

- **How to look at yourself.** You were created in God's image, to rule over creation (*Gen. 1:26, 27*). God's traits, albeit marred, are still in you. Jesus Christ, through His sacrifice, rescued you from eternal death and granted you privileges—chosen people, royal priesthood, holy nation (*1 Pet. 2:9, NIV*). In God's eyes you have infinite worth.
- **The world.** It is true that the world is rotten and full of evil. At the same time, there also are many right, noble, and admirable things (*Phil. 4:8*) to ponder. Furthermore, Christians can understand the existence of evil without despair, as they know its origin and ultimate fate.

- **The future.** What a wonderful future is reserved for God's children! The Bible is full of promises with the assurance of salvation (*Ps. 37:39*).

Sadness is not a sin. After all, look at how often Jesus felt sad. We mustn't feel guilty because of sadness or depression. After all, in some cases we have good reasons to be hurting. How can you use the biblical truths stated above to help you cope with whatever struggles you are facing now?

THE CONSEQUENCES OF DISCOURAGEMENT

"I cried like a swift or thrush, I moaned like a mourning dove. My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens. I am troubled; O Lord, come to my aid!" (*Isa. 38:14, NIV*).

The biblical description above leaves no doubt about the strong pain manifested by Hezekiah's crying out loud. There are cultural differences in manifesting emotional distress. People in certain contexts suffer in silence, avoiding any obvious or visible complaint. Others (like Hezekiah) use moaning and wailing when going through sorrow. There also are personal differences; some people are able to approach death with more tranquility than others can.

Depressive symptoms are commonly found in individuals with a prolonged or terminal disease. Hezekiah was suffering from illness, and its gravity announced death. Thus, he experienced a spell of depression as described in Isaiah 38. Depressive symptoms are so painful that many will attempt suicide to end this horrible experience. In fact, more than 10 percent of clinically depressed patients kill themselves.

Clearly, clinical depression is a serious matter and must be treated that way.

What symptoms are expressed in the following texts?

Ps. 31:10 _____

Ps. 77:4 _____

Ps. 102:4, 5 _____

1 Kings 19:4 _____

Depression causes a variety of painful manifestations: (a) a deep sense of sadness (sorrow), (b) a lack of motivation to do anything, even enjoyable activities, (c) a change in appetite and either weight loss or gain, (d) sleep disturbances, sleeping either not enough or too much, (e) feelings of low self-esteem, (f) poor reasoning and memory, and (g) thoughts of death and suicide. Some people experience just one or two symptoms, while others manifest several and suffer for months until the episode ends. In any case, the burden of depression is enormous and must be relieved by medical and spiritual intervention.

We all suffer sadness and discouragement in one form or another for one reason or another at one time or another. What things bring you down and why? Recall incidents of God's past guidance in your life. What hope and encouragement can you draw from remembering the Lord's leading? Why is it important to keep those memories alive?

RELIEF FROM DEPRESSION

Read Psalm 39:2–7. What happened when David remained silent? And what was the result of his speaking up?

Like most emotional disorders, depression necessitates that the sufferer speak about his or her struggles. This act alone can begin to initiate healing. Approaching the Lord in fervent and sincere prayer is a safe way to release tension and psychological pain. Often more is needed, but it can be a good start.

A basic coping strategy for depression consists of talking to a friend (or a therapist) who knows how to listen and, even better, who knows how to help access more intensive resources, if needed. There is a healing effect in verbalizing thoughts and feelings. The church community can provide an excellent context to help the discouraged, but often this is insufficient, especially when professional care is required. Nevertheless, it is important for anyone going through hard times who feels discouraged or even depressed to have someone they trust to talk to. Sometimes merely talking to someone can go a long way in helping a person feel better.

Read Psalm 55:17. What promise is there? Why should this promise mean so much to us?

The counselor's appointment, if possible at all, may not be available until next week, but like David—who learned how to get help any hour of the day or any day of the week—we, too, can turn to the Lord at any time. David knew that the Lord heard his voice, and that greatly encouraged him.

Even secular psychologists are recommending that clients who believe in prayer, pray. All of us, even when not suffering with something such as clinical depression, can experience the impact of how praying to the Lord does help make us feel better. No matter who we are or the depths of our discouragement, having a relationship with God can go a long way in bringing us hope and encouragement and healing.

Ellen G. White once described prayer as “the opening of the heart to God as to a friend.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 533. **Though prayer doesn’t always solve all our problems, how does it help us deal with them?**

THE NEED FOR FORGIVENESS

How did David find relief in his agony? *Ps. 32:1-5*; see also *1 John 1:9*. **How can we find this same thing for ourselves?**

The guilt produced by unconfessed sins may become extremely painful. The expressions used by David are a clear indication of intense, inward pain. Psalm 32 and other passages in Psalms show the severity of David’s emotional distress.

When we meet sufferers of depression, we must be extremely careful not to blame them for not having confessed their sins! Nor should we simply conclude that they are wicked people, and that’s why they are in distress. It is unfortunate that many people seem to be able to offer concern and understanding to those suffering from an organic malady, true clinical depression, but tend to be quite judgmental in dealing with mental or emotional turmoil brought about by their own wrong actions.

Edgar Allen Poe in his story “Tell-Tale Heart” tells of a man who committed murder and hid the victim’s body under the floorboards of the room in which the murder had been committed. He hoped to leave his guilt hidden with the body, but a strong sense of remorse grew within him. One day he heard the victim’s heart beat; and the beat grew louder and louder. Later it became clear that the pounding was coming not from the grave below but rather from his own heart.

At times, those who have confessed their sins still suffer greatly from a sense of guilt. They often feel unworthy of forgiveness and lament the horrible suffering that they have brought through their sins, even though they have been confessed and are, by faith, forgiven by God. This, too, can be a great source of emotional distress. In such cases, it’s important to focus on God’s promises of healing and of acceptance, even for the worst of sins. We can’t undo the past; what we can do, by God’s grace, is seek to learn from our past mistakes and, to whatever degree possible, make restitution for whatever wrong we have done.

Many, having confessed their sins, still struggle with guilt over them. Why is it so important that we acknowledge our sins, take responsibility for them, and learn to move on and get past whatever wrongs we have done?

HOPE AGAINST DISTRESS

What was the prophet’s way out of the surrounding social and interpersonal problems? *Mic. 7:1–7.*

In just the first six verses of his story, Micah describes a complete smorgasbord of immoral, unethical, and aggressive

acts present in his time. Oppression and abuse of various kinds, lack of respect and consideration, corruption, and deceit have all been present since the inception of sin. We all face it even today. Just take today's newspaper, and you can find a direct correlation with Israel's misery at that time. This sociological chaos becomes especially hurtful when touching close to home—neighbor, friend, spouse, child, parent (*Mic. 7:5, 6*).

Highly defective interpersonal relationships cause much stress and are associated with depression. Clearly stated by Micah (*vs. 7*), the vital element to survive in the middle of a crisis is hope.

Hope is essential if we are to live our lives with a reasonable amount of mental health. Hope must be alive even for the unbeliever—youth in search of employment must hope that they'll find a job, a lost traveler will hope to find his way, and investors who have lost their money must believe that there will be better times. Living with no hope leads to meaninglessness and death.

When Italian philosopher and poet Dante Alighieri (A.D. 1265–1321) attempted to describe hell in his *Divine Comedy*, he envisioned a big sign at the entrance saying: "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here!" The worst possible punishment is to deprive someone of hope.

The kind of hope presented in the Bible goes beyond positive anticipation. It encompasses an eventual perfect solution and salvation based on redemption through Jesus Christ. The historic "blessed hope" of Seventh-day Adventists must become the focal point of our lives. Hoping for Jesus' return helps us to gain perspective over the many unpleasant things

that surround us and allows us to look in confidence toward eternity.

Look at these promises. What hope is offered there for us? Isa. 65:17, 2 Pet. 3:13, Rev. 21:2-4. Why, in one sense, is this the only hope for any of us?

A vision of faith in the new creation can reassure the suffering soul. In the same way that a woman in childbirth contemplates the final result of her child being born and soon “forgets the anguish” (*John 16:21, NIV*), the troubled soul can, by God’s grace, gain hope with the vision of a caring God who promises us a new world without any of the things that bring so much sadness to us in this one.

FURTHER STUDY:

Read and reflect on Matthew 26:36–43. Jesus was overwhelmed with sorrow “to the point of death” (*vs. 38, NIV*). Visualize the agony of Jesus, with lack of social support and betrayal from His disciples, seeming separation from God, and the load of guilt from humanity. His suffering exceeds any depressive episode experienced by mortals.

“As He neared Gethsemane, He became strangely silent. He had often visited this spot for meditation and prayer; but never with a heart so full of sorrow as upon this night of His last agony. Throughout His life on earth He had walked in the light of God’s presence. When in conflict with men who were inspired by the very spirit of Satan, He could say, ‘He that sent Me is with Me: the Father hath not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him.’ John 8:29. But now He seemed to be shut

out from the light of God's sustaining presence. Now He was numbered with the transgressors. The guilt of fallen humanity He must bear. Upon Him who knew no sin must be laid the iniquity of us all. So dreadful does sin appear to Him, so great is the weight of guilt which He must bear, that He is tempted to fear it will shut Him out forever from His Father's love. Feeling how terrible is the wrath of God against transgression, He exclaims, 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.' ”
—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 685.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- **What great role can your local church community play in helping those who are suffering depression or emotional distress for any reason at all? Whatever your resources are, no matter how limited, what more can be done to help those in need?**
- **How can you help someone who prays, who counsels, who loves the Lord and who trusts in Him, and yet still feels overwhelmed with sadness, even if they don't understand why? How can you help them not give up their faith but cling to the hope and promises given in the Word?**
- **One of the greatest mistakes a person can make is to believe that because they feel so down, so depressed, so hopeless, it means that God has abandoned them. Why is that, first of all, not true? What Bible characters (such as Elijah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist in jail, Jesus in Gethsemane) can you point them to in order to show them that sadness and discouragement do not mean God has forsaken them? How can you help them learn that feelings are not a good barometer of faith?**

LESSON 8

RESILIENCE

Read for This Week's Study:

Job 19:25; James 5:10, 11; Esther 2; 2 Cor. 11:23-28; Phil. 4:11-13.

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging” (*Psalm 46:1-3, NIV*).

INTRODUCTION

Resilience is the process of facing adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or extreme stress and “bouncing back” successfully without becoming too negatively affected by the experience. The concept has received growing attention because of the usefulness of possessing a reasonable amount of resilience in the face of life’s difficulties. After all, who among us doesn’t face major stressors, in one form or another? The question is how can we have the resilience to deal with what happens and not be destroyed emotionally in the process?

In the 1960s, Victor and Mildred Goertzel wrote *Cradles of Eminence*, which presented biographical analyses of more than 700 subjects who went through great childhood adversity (broken homes, financial struggles, physical and/or psychological handicaps, etc.) and yet achieved great success. One common trait was their resilience.

The Bible also tells us of individuals who had to face adversity but who, through God's grace, bounced back and overcame their problems. Despite difficult circumstances and even flaws in their characters, they were able to be used by God because they had the resilience to press on ahead, even amid adverse circumstances.

THE PATIENCE OF JOB

Read James 5:10, 11. What is it about Job that makes him an example to be emulated? *See also Job 1-3.*

A woman who underwent counseling to recover from a serious crisis told her friends that one idea transmitted by the counselor was key to her successful recovery. "What helped me most," she said, "was the counselor insisting that my painful circumstances would come to an end. 'It looks dark and unending now,' the counselor used to say, 'but it will not last too much longer.' This thought helped me gain resilience." In other words, the counselor kept the woman's hope alive.

How to grow in patience? George Goodman of England once received a young man who needed to be prayed for. He expressed his need directly: "Mr. Goodman, I wish you would pray for me that I might have patience."

The elderly man responded: "Yes, I will pray for you that you may have tribulation."

"Oh, no, sir," the young man replied, "it is patience that I want."

“I understand,” said Goodman, “and I will pray for you that you may have tribulation.” The Bible teacher opened his Bible and read Romans 5:3 to the amazed young man: “ ‘And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience.’ ”

The story of Job offers a supreme example of resilience. Earlier in his life, Job had understood that God is merciful and righteous. He did not understand the reasons for his suffering; he did not find support from his wife; his property and children were destroyed, and then he contracted a horrible disease. And yet, somehow amid it all, he never lost his faith in God and endured until the tragedy ended.

Read Job 19:25. What hope did Job cling to here? How can we better learn to cling to this hope in our own adversity, as well?

- **Think about times you were going through something terrible. What hope sustained you? What words spoken to you were helpful? Which ones were not so helpful, or even harmful? What did you learn that would enable you to better help someone who is going through great adversity now?**

JOSEPH IN CAPTIVITY

Read Genesis 37:19–28 and Genesis 39:12–20 and try to put yourself in Joseph’s sandals. Think how discouraged he must have been. Think of the potential for anger and bitterness that could have, even justifiably, been his. Though the Bible doesn’t tell us in detail what his emotions were, it’s not hard to imagine the pain he suffered from such betrayal and treachery.

Nevertheless, Joseph turned to the Lord at these junctures, and in the end, good things came out of the events. After having been sold by his brothers, Joseph actually experienced his conversion and a much closer relationship with God. “He had been told of the Lord’s promises to Jacob, and how they had been fulfilled—how, in the hour of need, the angels of God had come to instruct, comfort, and protect him. And he had learned of the love of God in providing for men a Redeemer. Now all these precious lessons came vividly before him. Joseph believed that the God of his fathers would be his God. He then and there gave himself fully to the Lord.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 213, 214.

When he was thrown in prison unjustly, the experience opened the path to the court of Pharaoh to accomplish the mission to save many souls and his own people.

What do the following texts tell us about how bad situations can be turned to good?

Rom. 5:3–5 _____

2 Cor. 1:3, 4 _____

2 Cor. 1:8, 9 _____

2 Tim. 1:11, 12 _____

God does not want us to suffer needlessly. In fact, the environment Jesus has prepared for us in heaven is tearless and painless (*Rev. 21:4*). But as we wait for that promise to be fulfilled, it seems certain that pain is the path to learn

certain lessons. Character development, empathy, humility, discipleship, understanding of good and evil—these are some of the lessons we can learn. Although it is difficult to think of the benefits of suffering, especially in the midst of trial, we can ask God for the necessary strength to pass through difficulties.

Have you ever had a terrible experience that in the end brought some good, some benefit? How can this help you learn to trust the Lord in any adversity, even when nothing good seems likely to result?

NAOMI

What are some of the misfortunes experienced by Naomi?

Ruth 1.

Leaving one's country to settle somewhere else is always scary, especially when the departure is motivated by the need to survive. The famine in Judah forced Elimelech, Naomi, and their two sons to emigrate to the country of Moab, an agricultural area where they could obtain food. The Moabites were an idolatrous people (*Judg. 10:6*) whose practices clashed with Jewish beliefs. This in itself must have produced significant turmoil to the newcomers. Sometime after having settled, Naomi's husband died. Mother and sons found themselves in a foreign land, degraded to the condition of widow and orphans, without protection and subject to additional disgrace. Then Naomi's sons, Mahlon and Kilion, married local women. This fact may have brought conflict to the family, at least in the beginning, because of significant religious differences. Although the law did not specifically

prohibit marriages between Jews and Moabites, it was stipulated that Moabites or their descendants could not enter the assembly of the Lord until after ten generations (*Deut. 23:3*).

Later on, Mahlon and Killion, whose names meant “sickness” and “wasting,” respectively, also died. It is hard to imagine a more tragic situation in the life of Naomi—no one alive from her close family, and the remaining kin far away in Bethlehem.

What was the turning point in Naomi’s life? How did God repair the severe adversities suffered by Naomi? *Ruth 1:16–18, 4:13–17.*

At the deepest moment of trouble Naomi’s daughter-in-law Ruth served as God-sent emotional support. Naomi must have been a remarkable woman to have inspired the devotion of her two daughters-in-law, especially Ruth, who accepted the God of Israel and made the firm decision to care for her mother-in-law in a land whose inhabitants were, historically, her enemies.

Chapters 2 through 4 convey a beautiful succession of events that ended up in a happy family arrangement. Naomi left behind untold suffering and lived to witness the marriage of Ruth to Boaz and the birth of her grandson Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David.

However much we ultimately need to trust the Lord and surrender everything to Him, at times we do need human help, as well. When was the last time you really needed someone’s help? What did you gain from that experience?

ESTHER'S DAYS OF STRESS

What were some of the adversities, struggles, and pressures Esther faced?

Esther 2:6, 7 _____

Esther 2:10 _____

Esther 2:21, 22 _____

Esther 4:4–17 _____

Esther 7:3, 4; 8:3 _____

Since early life Esther had been an orphan. Although she was adopted by her older cousin Mordecai, the stigma of parentless childhood was most surely difficult. In spite of this, Esther grew up as a balanced, determined, and capable young woman.

After she became queen, Esther did not reveal her nationality or family background. This was a particularly heavy challenge. Surrounded by food, luxuries, and practices of life in the court, Esther had to somehow try to maintain her Jewish faith and identity. In addition, the risk of being identified as a member of the Jewish people was real, and the consequences of hiding her identity were uncertain.

Esther also had to take to the king the bad news that officers were conspiring to kill him. This was not an easy task because, if the plot could not be substantiated, Esther and her cousin could be blamed for starting rumors, and who knew the results?

But the greatest responsibility placed on Esther was serving as the only one in a position to save her nation. Mordecai asked her to mediate on behalf of the Jews, which meant risking her life. When she hesitated, her cousin put still more pressure on her: “If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish” (*Esther 4:14, NIV*).

Finally she appeared before the king, knowing that this could mean her death. Ultimately her bravery saved her people.

All of us, like Esther, are born into situations not of our own making. What is your background? What things were handed you, good and bad, that you didn’t ask for? How can you learn to appreciate more the good that you have been given and to overcome the bad?

THE SECRET OF BEING CONTENT

Paul was born and grew up in Tarsus, into a Hebrew family from the tribe of Benjamin. He obtained his Roman nationality through his father, a citizen of the Roman Empire. He became a Pharisee, a devout group who adhered to the law (Torah) plus the oral tradition (Mishnah). With this background, he must have enjoyed the privileges of his social and religious status.

However, when Paul responded to the call of Jesus, everything changed. Instead of persecutor, he became the target of radical persecution from some of his own nation and eventually from Romans. He suffered tribulations for three decades and was executed after having been imprisoned at Rome.

- **Read 2 Corinthians 11:23–28, which lists some of the adversities Paul had to face. Then read Philippians 4:11–13. After so much suffering, what is the assessment Paul makes of his own life? What lessons are here for us amid whatever struggles we’re going through?**

Contentment is a crucial component of happiness and psychological well-being. Being content comes to those with a positive outlook, those who look at the past with acceptance and at the future with hope. Interestingly enough, having “everything” doesn’t guarantee contentment and happiness. For some, no matter how much they have, it’s never enough. Others, having little, are nevertheless satisfied. What do you think makes the difference?

One of the many current definitions of “intelligence” is the ability to adapt to new situations. This may have to do with living in new places, relating to new people, or experiencing new socioeconomic conditions. Paul’s ability is not a hereditary trait, because he specifically says: “I have learned to be content” (*Phil. 4:12, NIV*). This is not a capacity that some possess and others do not. Adaptation and contentment amid a wide range of circumstances are learned processes that come over time and with practice.

Verse 13 gives the ultimate key to Paul’s resilience. Not only could he feel contentment with little or much material resources, he could do anything and everything in Jesus Christ.

How content are you? How much are you tossed around and victimized by your circumstances? What are ways in which you can learn better to be “content in any and every situation”? (*vs. 1 I, NIV*).

FURTHER STUDY:

“The powers of darkness gather about the soul and shut Jesus from our sight, and at times we can only wait in sorrow and amazement until the cloud passes over. These seasons are sometimes terrible. Hope seems to fail, and despair seizes upon us. In these dreadful hours we must learn to trust, to depend solely upon the merits of the atonement, and in all our helpless unworthiness cast ourselves upon the merits of the crucified and risen Saviour. We shall never perish while we do this—*never!* When light shines on our pathway, it is no great thing to be strong in the strength of grace. But to wait patiently in hope when clouds envelop us and all is dark requires faith and submission which causes our will to be swallowed up in the will of God. We are too quickly discouraged, and earnestly cry for the trial to be removed from us, when we should plead for patience to endure and grace to overcome.”—Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 114.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- **Some people overcome hardships that others are crushed under. What do you think makes the difference?**
- **What about the trials and tragedy that don’t seem to have any kind of happy ending? What are we to make of**

them? How do we reconcile them with our faith and the promises of God?

- **How can you apply Peter's counsel in 1 Peter 4:12, 13? It's one thing to remain resilient and faithful amid trial, but how is it possible to do what Peter says?**
- **Suppose you were dealing with someone in a very dire situation, one in which there seemed no way out, humanly speaking. Suppose, too, that you had only five minutes with that person. In those few minutes, what would you say to give the person hope?**

HOPE is essential for HEALTH—both physical and mental. There is ample evidence that ill people who have faith that they will get better experience a faster and better recovery than those who have little or no hope. In the Spiritual realm, hope is even more powerful:

“Life will be brighter than noonday, and darkness will become like morning. You will be secure, because there is hope; You will look about you and take your rest in safety” (Job 11:17, 18).

If you aim for a joyful and balanced life, if you wish to have total health, even in the imperfection of this world, follow Jesus’ loving invitation, “Remain in me, and I will remain in you” (John 15:4).

MY DECISION FOR HOPE AND HEALING

Knowing that a joyful and balanced life is possible only through Jesus, I decide now to choose His offer of Hope and Healing in order to have a full life. I will focus on whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy. I want to think about such things, and to seek God’s will in all areas of my daily life.

Signature

/ /
Date

“Remain in me, and I will remain in you.” (John 15:4)



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Job 11:17,18



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