

# 2017 JUNIOR YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER READINGS



## SHAPING & RESHAPING

*reformed from the inside out*

### 8 LESSONS

Eight lessons on shaping and reshaping young people to see the work of reformation in their own lives, churches, and communities.

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*Written by  
Debbonnaire Kovacs*

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Daily Small Group discussion questions included.

***What can we do to retain our inner identity and security in the love of God and those who love us, while also responding creatively to the new way things are?***

# SHAPING *and* RESHAPING

*reformed from the inside out*

2017 JUNIOR YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER

THEME: REFORMED FROM THE INSIDE OUT

The official date for the Week of Prayer is **March 18-25, 2017**

Global Youth Day: **March 18, 2017**

Homecoming Sabbath: **March 25, 2017**

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**DAY 1: THE BIBLE ONLY (16)**

**DAY 2: SALVATION COMES BY GRACE ALONE (22)**

**DAY 3: JESUS IS THE CENTER (28)**

**DAY 4: THE PRIESTHOOD OF-WAIT-ALL BELIEVERS? (38)**

**DAY 5: COMMUNION = COMMUNITY (43)**

**DAY 6: SIN AND GUILT—AND FREE FORGIVENESS (49)**

**DAY 7: BAPTISM INTO A NEW COVENANT (55)**

**DAY 8: JESUS COMES AGAIN (60)**

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## TABLE OF CONTENT

Translation Guideline	3
About the Writer	6
Editorial	7
Jesus and Me	8
Keeping it Real	11
Activities and notes	13-15
Sermons	16-65
Day 1	16
Day 2	22
Day 3	29
Day 4	38
Day 5	44
Day 6	49
Day 7	55
Day 8	60
Creating a Prayer Notebook	66
Small Group Covenant	68
Global Youth Day Poster	69
Homecoming Day Information	70
The GC Youth Ministries Team	71

## TRANSLATION GUIDELINES

To meet the needs of our youth, youth leaders, and those needing to use our resources, we are offering opportunities to translate from English into other languages. Below are some guidelines to help you produce culturally appropriate translations.

1. Be objective.
2. Please be faithful and accurate to the source text.
3. Translate for meaning (rather than word for word), in a culturally sensitive way. Translation should preserve the content and meaning of the original text, with cultural and linguistic adaptations as needed, so that the translated text sounds natural and is easy for the intended readers to understand and use.
4. Do not do literal, word-for-word translation; this can be confusing or misleading. Take into account the differences in linguistic structure and complex connections between culture and language.
5. Be culturally sensitive. Cultural adaptation may be needed where necessary.
6. Reproduce the precise contextual meaning of the text and message at all times without omission or distortion. Do not soften, strengthen or alter the messages being conveyed.
7. Do not alter, change, add, or omit texts. Only alter a text with the consent of the GC Youth Ministries Department.
8. Do not add to what is written or said, nor provide unsolicited explanation, comments, or make recommendations.
9. Do not show bias towards the intended readers of the translated document.

10. Do not do literal (word-for-word) translation of Bible verses. Use a Bible translation (version) that is closest to the one used in the original source document, and make sure to cite (reference) it.
11. Do not do literal (word-for-word) translation of Spirit of Prophecy quotations. Take the quote directly from the translated Spirit of Prophecy books referenced in the original document. When citing translated work, please remember to change the page number to the one in the book (in the language you are translating to).
12. On the credit page, please list the following names:
  - Editor: Jonatán Tejel
  - Writer: Debbonnaire Kovacs
  - Project Director: Gilbert Cangy
  - Project Coordinator: Maria Manderson
  - First Edit: Maria Manderson
  - Final Edit: Sophia Boswell
  - Translator: \_\_\_\_\_
  - If you are using a copy editor to copy edit the translated work, the person(s) name and contact information MUST also be listed.

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#### **EDITORIAL CREDITS:**

- Editor: Jonatán Tejel
- Writer: Debonnaire Kovacs
- Project Director: Gilbert Cangy
- Project Coordinator: Maria Manderson
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#### **BIBLE VERSION USED:**

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## ABOUT THE WRITER



**Debbonnaire Kovacs** has been writing since she was a small child and sold her first story to *Guide* magazine (known in those days as *Junior Guide*) when she was eleven years old. When she was fourteen, she was “tricked” (when she missed Sabbath School because she was sick) into doing a mini sermon for a large youth convention, and thought she would die! But she didn’t, so she wrote a sermon herself for a youth Week of Prayer at Mount Vernon Academy when she was seventeen. She lived through that, too!

Today she is a full-time author and speaker who has published 19 books including the first, second, fifth, and sixth grade Bible textbooks used in Adventist schools in North America, and over 500 stories and articles, including lots of stories for Primary Treasure. She speaks at camp meetings, women’s retreats, and other events, and is hardly ever afraid anymore. Praise God!

Mrs. Kovacs strongly encourages young people to follow their dreams, and not wait until they are grown up to do something God is calling them to do. Her greatest prayer is that everyone who reads her words will deepen their own walk with Jesus. Her website is [www.debbonnaire.com](http://www.debbonnaire.com).

She lives on a mini farm in Berea, KY, with milk goats, chickens, gardens, and orchards, and is also a fiber artisan who does spinning, weaving, lacemaking, and many other textile arts. *Gaela’s Gardens*, which has a theme of forgiveness and reconciliation, is her first novel. It is available at [CreateSpace.com](http://CreateSpace.com), [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) and [barnesandnoble.com](http://barnesandnoble.com). Also available for Kindle, Nook, or Kobo.

## The Bible—the only rule of faith

We have all heard of the Reformation and the way it has drastically changed the way people view and approach the Bible.

We all, in one way or another, have heard about the Reformation. Somehow we've learned about Martin Luther and the Reformation that changed drastically the way normal people approached the Bible.

In the beginning of the 16th Century, different events occurred that led to what we know today as "The Protestant Reformation."

Let me mention a couple of them:

1. The church decided that for a person to be able to receive God's forgiveness, the individual should pay an amount of money to the church (this is called penance). As a result, the church was the entity giving forgiveness of sins for money.
2. The sermons were always in Latin, so many were unable to understand the message from the Priest.

The Reformation was the greatest religious movement for Christians since the early church. It was a revival of Biblical and New Testament theology. There was a doctrinal unity in the reformers:

- Bible Only
- Christ Only
- Grace Only
- Faith Only
- God's Glory Only

The reformers declared the Bible was the only rule of faith. And that salvation was not located in a church, but in the person of Jesus Christ. That this salvation was caused totally by the grace of God. Faith alone in Jesus Christ will bring Salvation. And the ultimate purpose of all things is to bring glory to God.

Sometimes we read about the reformation and we think that is something that happened in the past and we don't need to pay attention to it. And it is true, it happened in the past, but... read again the five doctrinal points that changed perception, that changed conception, that changed history: Bible, Christ, Grace, Faith, and God's Glory... and today, we find ourselves in the same situation as many were in the past. Some don't understand the sermons, and some people don't study the Bible for themselves, they just believe anything that is said in the pulpit.

We still need reformation today. Go back to study the Bible every day. Find joy in knowing Jesus Christ better every day. Remember that Faith in Jesus is what brings salvation by the Grace of God every day.

Make every day a day of reformation in your life.



## My Favorite Lucky-Pair of Jeans

When I think about the word *reform*, a potter and his clay are the first things that come to mind. But the next thing that comes to mind is my favorite, lucky-pair of jeans.

According to Merriam-Webster dictionary reform is a verb that means: to improve (someone or something) by removing or correcting faults, problems, etc. *Reform* –yes, that’s exactly what I had to do to my lucky pair of high-waist, acid-washed, vintage blue jeans. I had to completely reform them.

Something interesting happens as you age from girl to woman (or boy to man). “What happens?” you ask. Well, you grow. In fact, you grow a lot. Not just physically on the outside, but also inwardly: spiritually, emotionally and mentally. It’s a good thing to grow and evolve as we age; as well as it is to grow in our daily walk with Jesus. It would be a bit alarming if one didn’t grow at all.

In this case I had grown physically. Your metabolism doesn’t quite work as well in your 20s as it does in your teens. However, I wasn’t going to let that stop me from sporting my favorite high-waist, acid-washed, vintage blue jeans. Nope –not one bit! For months I squeezed into my jeans. Holding my breath, (*inhale*), tucking in my tummy, wiggling in my legs and (*exhale*) tada! I was in. It was much more difficult than it sounds. Honestly, it was quite the workout, but it was worth it just so that I could wear my favorite, lucky-pair of jeans.

One day, while touring the capital with a friend I came to the hard realization that this wasn’t going to work anymore. I could no longer wear my favorite, lucky-pair of jeans. It was uncomfortable to walk a mile in these pants, and if I had to bend down and tie my shoe laces, forget it, I would have probably fainted from oxygen deprivation (luckily I wore sandals that day). While walking somewhere between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial, I just knew that was the last day I’d wear those jeans. They didn’t fit who I was anymore. So I stopped wearing them.

Almost, two years after that day, I decided to reform my favorite, lucky-pair of jeans. I was going to the Caribbean for a family vacation and I didn’t have any jean shorts. So I thought what better time than this to have a Do It Yourself (DIY) project. Immediately, I knew what jeans I would remake—my

favorite, lucky-pair of jeans of course. I got my sewing kit and sat down and began to *re-cut*, *re-create*, and *re-sew* those jeans. I began by taking my new measurements, guaranteeing that the shorts would indeed fit my new stature.

I labored over those jeans for days. Cutting off the fabric from the knees down, ripping the fabric at the waist. Then piecing them back together to expand the width of the new shorts. I sewed the pre-stitch by hand first and later went over those stitches with a sewing machine. But that wasn't all. The next step was to frill the ends of the shorts to give it that summertime style. Making the frill involves pulling at each individual strand of fabric. This was very challenging, so challenging that my boyfriend kindly lent me his hands to complete the task, so that mine could rest.

Reminiscing on that moment, I can understand how David must have felt when he wrote,

"For You formed my inward parts;  
You covered me in my mother's womb.  
I will praise You, for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made; [a]  
Marvelous are Your works,  
And *that* my soul knows very well." (Psalm 139:13-16)

Can you imagine God knitting and sewing you together before you were even born? It's an amazing sight to imagine the Lord of the universe slowly, carefully, and intentionally piecing the fabric of our being together. And I believe God never stops knitting us together.

As we grow spiritually, God *re-forms* our character like I *re-formed* my favorite, lucky-pair of jeans turned my favorite, lucky-pair of shorts. As we gain a better understanding of God's love and eternal grace for us our understanding grows, and things that use to fit us no longer do. Simply, put we outgrow old characteristics, old behaviors, and old ways of thinking just like we often outgrow our clothes.

Our character is very important and is one of few things we can always wear on us everywhere, including in heaven. Mrs. White says, "The traits of character you cherish in life will not be changed by death or by the resurrection. You will come up from the grave with the same disposition you manifested in your home and in society. Jesus does not change the character at His coming. The work of transformation must be done now. Our daily lives

are determining our destiny...character must be *formed* while in this probationary state, that we may be *fitted* for the mansions above” (White, E.G. *Character Development*).<sup>1</sup>

I'm so glad that God continues to *reform and transform* us long after we have left our mother's womb. He never throws us away when we seemingly no longer fit where we belong, but He keeps us. He takes us through different trials and learning phases of our life, which can sometimes feel like He's ripping the fabric of our lives apart. But He's not! He's making us, shaping and reshaping us into His marvelous masterpiece. He labors over us with His unfailing love, and God the Father works together with Jesus and the Holy Spirit as one, until the work is done.

When I finally finished reforming my favorite, lucky-pair of jeans, I washed them, making them seemingly brand new. God too washes us, and we become new creations through baptism. So now when you think of *reform* or the process of *reformation*, I want you not only to think of a potter and his clay, but also imagine a designer and his fabric. Shaping and reshaping his garment until it is a finished wonderful creation. Just like our Heavenly Designer knits us together over and over again.

As you go throughout your life's journey, I encourage you to embrace those moments when God is *reforming* you. It may not always feel comfortable and you may not always understand the transformative process. But always remember our daily lives are determining our destiny. And we must be fitted for our heavenly home with Christ. Let the Amazing Designer of the universe reshape you right now. *Will you choose Jesus today?* I pray the answer is *yes*.

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<sup>1</sup>White, E.G. *Character Development*. (n.d.). Retrieved November 09, 2016, from <http://www.ellenwhitedefend.com/subjects/char-dev.htm>

## Here We Go Again...

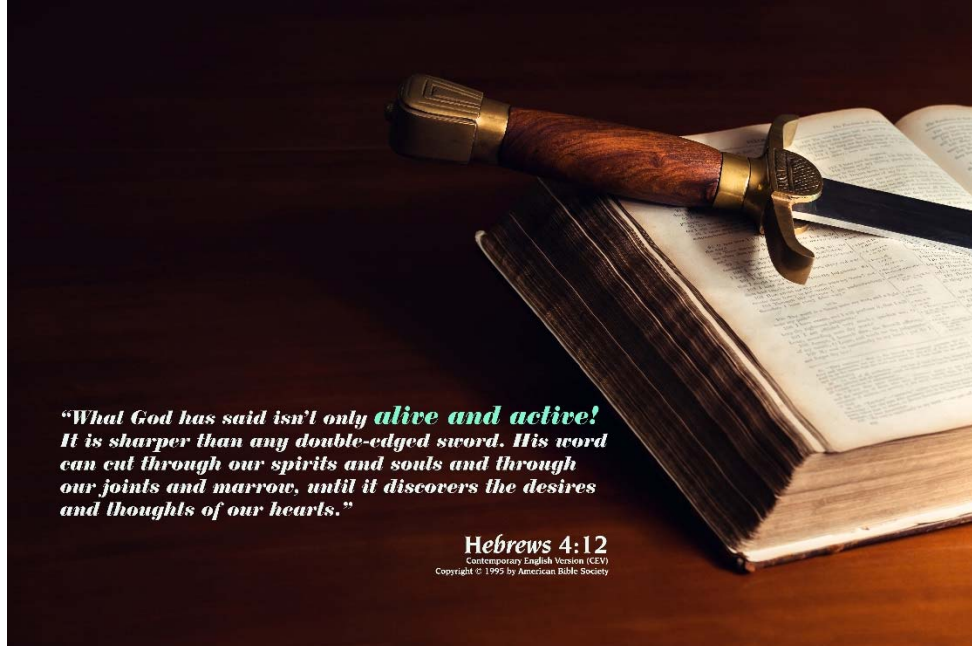
In the United States, the ongoing sex education battle over teaching abstinence versus “safe-sex” methods in schools continues, with no end in sight. On one side you have many Christians who are totally convinced that abstinence is the only way to go in preventing sexually transmitted diseases and (unwanted) pregnancies among unmarried teenagers. On the other hand, we have those who think that type of thinking is what causes problems. They think burying your head in the sand and pretending that unmarried people will not have sex is naïve and irresponsible, and is the reason for the rise in the number of unplanned pregnancies among youth.

This week we will get a history lesson that will remind us, in part, of the Christian church’s journey and our need for personal reformation in our lives. However, I want to spend a little time looking at an often overlooked step on the individual reformation ladder, the need to dig deep inside and rid ourselves of self-delusions. Maybe, even acknowledge the emptiness of the spiritual water we have been drinking and allow ourselves to confront the moral dilemma facing today’s youth. No, not just the youth, facing all of us.

Historically, the Christian church has always taught that abstinence—chastity until marriage—is God’s plan and is necessary for individual human dignity and a healthy continuance of the human family. But this is not what the world is teaching, youth are bombarded with information on how to get by “safely.” This topic might be rough, but the truth is that many of our young people are learning the art of getting by and not getting caught. For them it is not about purity and integrity, instead it’s about how smart can you be and how far can you go without going too far (to get caught). And in case you think this is just about sex, it is not. This is a dangerous trap, it is a lifestyle behavior that when fostered, shows up in many other areas of our lives—smoking, cheating, stealing, dishonesty in many different shapes and forms.

So, in this type of culture how can we help our youth avoid these deadly ideologies and practices and engage a lifestyle that foster purity and integrity?

I think this is the problem that Jesus had also—people avoiding the real issues and being superficial. Putting a bandage on the problem instead of going to the doctor to get it taken care of. Deluding themselves. Deluding ourselves.



As a preacher or teacher Jesus took clear stands. There was no middle ground, His sword was indeed two-edged. For example, when we look at His interaction with the Samaritan Woman at the well, we did not see Him embarrassing or degrading her, nor telling the disciples how morally corrupt she was. Neither did we see Him avoiding the issue or encouraging her to continue doing what she was doing. Instead, He went straight to the problem, He pointed out what she already knew, yes, deep down she knew what she was doing was wrong, she knew the man she was living with was not her husband. He gently reached deeper into her conscience, and He treated her with dignity. The disciples were not allowed to pat themselves on the back for being free from adultery, instead His teaching cut through their consciences and exposed the kind of internal lustful sins that are much harder to come to grip with.

This week is another opportunity to lead like Jesus did. These lessons are written to reach youth 10-15 years old. This is the age where they are most open to new ideas and new experiences. They are risk-takers. Let us capitalize on this period of their growth positively by providing a secure environment, where new experiences that can lead to spiritual growth can be guided and tried. Just like Jesus did with the Samaritan Woman, let us love them enough to tell them the truth. Encourage them to search deep within to make a change. Help them look beyond the superficial and get to the heart of the problem. We are dealing with salvation issues—issues of life and death (see 2 Cor. 2:14-17). Provide them with a safe and secure environment to discuss issues that are on their minds. At the end of each lesson are discussion questions, use them wisely. Make this Week of Prayer a week of deep commitment for your group.

Visit our website for more information on planning for, and getting the most out of your small groups.

## Shaping and Reshaping

### Activity Suggestions, etc.

**Note: The leader should make the interactive sessions exciting and natural. Feel free to adjust each exercise to the size of the group. Familiarize yourself with the “interaction” segments before the session and make sure to infuse excitement into each illustration.**

The theme of this Week of Prayer is Reformation. We will use the framework of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant Reformation, especially Martin Luther’s work in it, but our greatest interest is in helping young people to see the work of reformation in their own lives, churches, and communities. We do not want them to think reformation is only the change from not following God to following God. That, naturally, is the foundation of all reformation, but it can take many different forms.

When we make new beginnings, such as moving, going to a new school, taking a new job (or our first job), or beginning to date, our lives are re-formed, that is reshaped, into different configurations. Sometimes this configuration is not of our own doing; our parents may divorce or remarry, or we may become ill or lose a loved one.

When this reshaping happens in our lives, how do we respond? Who are we now, in this new situation? What can we do to retain our inner identity and security in the love of God and those who love us, while also responding creatively to the new way things are?

The following lessons do not actively address these issues, but they will lay the foundation for facing *all* vicissitudes of life—the foundation of an enduring faith in God and His provision for us.

## Activities

to help reinforce the Week of Prayer message

1. You need any form of construction materials that will be reusable. This could be clay or play dough, so long as it will remain soft all week, some form of building bricks, tinker toys, or other kind of construction material, or even found items.
  - a. After the first presentation, have the youth create something that reminds them of a main idea they received from the lesson.
  - b. They must **not** glue it or permanently fasten it in any way.
  - c. After each presentation, have them take apart what they made the night before and create something new that makes them think of what they are learning on that day.
  - d. They can begin to see that the same materials may take many forms, some better than others.
  - e. On the final night have them choose their favorite idea from the week and make something to keep.
2. Other ideas would include roleplaying, team-building games, creating posters and collages, or making cards to take to hospitals, nursing homes, and orphanages.
3. Choose songs and prayers that will drive home the timeless truths conveyed in the lessons.
4. Perhaps some of your youth would like to write poetry or songs to use. They could create a skit or other short program to share at church after the week is over.

## A note to the leader:

1. A word you will see used often is *purgatory*. According to *Wikipedia*, the free encyclopedia, in Christian theology, and especially in Catholic theology, Purgatory is an intermediate state after physical death in which those destined for heaven "undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven". Only those who die in the state of grace but have not yet fulfilled the temporal punishment due to their sin can be in Purgatory, and therefore no one in Purgatory will remain forever in that state or go to Hell.
2. Another word you will see is *indulgence*. According to *Wikipedia*, the free encyclopedia, Indulgency (in the Roman Catholic Church) is a grant by the pope of remission of the temporal punishment in purgatory still due for sins after absolution. The unrestricted sale of indulgences by pardoners was a widespread abuse during the later Middle Ages.

Please find an age-appropriate way to explain the correct meaning of the words, in context, to your audience.

**PRAYER NOTEBOOK AND SMALL GROUP COVENANT** information can be found on our website, [gcyouthministries.org](http://gcyouthministries.org). A copy of the covenant is included on page 67, and the notebook guide on page 65. But please download the complete guide from our website for more detailed information.

Please print and have copies of the covenant for the members of your small groups. Discuss the rules and have them sign a copy on the first day of your small group meeting.



DAY 1  
**BIBLE ONLY**

In the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the great Protestant Reformation was going on, we think of reformers such as Martin Luther, Jan Hus, Huldreich Zwingli, and Jerome of Prague. But they didn't start that reformation.

God did!

From the day that God created this earth and its people, the Holy Spirit has been active. You can see it in Genesis 1:2: "And the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." (Did you know the Hebrew word translated "hovering" is the one used when mother birds sit on their eggs? Isn't that a heart-warming picture, the Holy Spirit hovering over us and raising us as carefully as a mother bird raises her chicks?)

You can see the Spirit throughout the Old Testament, giving messages through prophets, pleading with the people to follow God.

The Holy Spirit filled Jesus throughout His life, and Jesus' last promises to His disciples the night before He died included this promise: "The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26).

So, during the Dark Ages, when religion that was *not* based on God's Word had a strangle-hold on much of the world, the Holy Spirit was still active. It was the Spirit who encouraged Luther and Hus and all the other reformers to read the Bible for themselves, and even in some cases to translate it into their own languages. Luther translated the Bible into German, and John Wycliffe into English. It was that same Spirit, "teaching all things and reminding us of what Jesus taught," who pointed out that all faith should be based on the word of God, not on the invented or twisted teachings of human beings.

It was the Holy Spirit who began to cause more and more people all over the world to realize that they could read and understand the Bible for themselves, and that when they did, reformation would be the result.

Reformation. What was that again? Re-forming? Taking something apart and making it differently?

Today we will discover some ways in which being closely familiar with God's Word will help our own lives. We will look at three stories of reformation from the Bible, and we will try to see what those stories mean to our personal and community lives.

## **The Potter**

Read (or ask someone to read) Jeremiah 18:1-6.

In this story, God is speaking to the whole nation of Israel. He is reminding the people, through the prophets, that He has the power and the right to reshape their nation in any way He sees fit. However, although He has the prerogative He does not act in an arbitrary way. When He sees His people going astray He always calls them to repentance and offer them the opportunity to obey. This is still true, of course. The church today can be heading the wrong way, away from God's Word and away from love, and God can use circumstances or do things outright to try to get their attention as a group and reform them.

But when it comes down to it, reformation always begins with an individual.

Martin Luther, Jan Hus, John Wycliffe: each of them was only one man. Each studied his Bible and tried to allow God to re-shape (another word for reform) his life to better please God. Each would no doubt have been shocked to know how his personal attempts to better follow God would spread to thousands, and still be talked about today.

Let's look again at our story. What is the potter using? This story is especially good as an example, because the potter is making something out of exactly what God made us out of—the dirt of the ground. Clay today can be bought in stores, so some people might not even know it comes straight from the ground, often from riverbanks. In Jeremiah's day, there were more steps to making a pottery vessel.

1. First, the potters or their assistants went out and found clay deposits and dug it up for themselves.
2. Then they had to pick out stones and debris, and knead the clay until it was soft and able to be formed into something. This sometimes take more work than making the vessel!
3. The potter creates the vessel. If he is not satisfied with the first one, he can mash it down and remake it until he is satisfied.
4. The vessel is set to dry.

5. The vessel may be glazed or not, but eventually it must be fired in a very, very hot oven called a kiln, to make it strong and unbreakable. Some vessels will break in the kiln, despite the potter's best efforts, and are unusable.

What do you think each of these steps means in the Christian life? Does God go out and find us? What are some ways He picks out impurities and debris? How does He form, and sometimes re-form us? What is like fire in life that makes us strong?

As you can see in Jeremiah's story, unlike clay, we have a choice. We can fight God, and argue, and even refuse to be formed or reformed by Him. (Please don't do that!) But the important thing is, it's *God* doing the forming, not us. If we try to change our lives by ourselves, we can sometimes actually do more damage than if we refuse to be reformed.

Like all parables, there are details that don't exactly fit human experience. God does not mash us up and start over! He uses what we have already become and redirects us. Maybe it's more like pruning—our second story.

## **The Vinedresser or Gardener**

*Read or have someone read John 15:1-8.*

In this case, someone is working with a living thing. Grape vines are fed, watered, nurtured, and tied up to posts and wires so they will be supported. When grapes come, the bunches are cut off and eaten or used to make various foods. Every year, some of the branches the vine works hard to grow are cut off and burned. If the grape vine had feelings, it might be pretty upset by this! But if it had feelings, the gardener could explain that he does it so that the vine will produce even more grapes. The vine is literally re-formed each year as it grows older and bigger.

Are there grape vines (or other kinds of food vines) where you live? What can you share about their care and production?

Again there are steps. Again, we have a choice. But this story makes it a little easier to see how the great Master Gardener of our souls uses our own personal growth patterns to help us be the best we can be. Loss, even though it doesn't feel like it at the time, can be gain.

Let's look at a story that shows God doing this work with a real person.

## Peter: From Big Mouth to Big Heart

John 1 shows Peter immediately following Jesus when his brother Andrew tells him, “We have found the Messiah!” Luke 5 shows him, with his brother and friends, choosing to follow Jesus full-time. From that point, there are many stories that show that Peter tended to speak first and think later. Yet he was one of the inner circle of three disciples that Jesus took with Him sometimes when He left the others. Peter was there when Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5). He was there when Jesus was transfigured (Matt. 17; Mark 9).

Perhaps the story that shows the best and worst of Peter is this one. Read or have someone read Matt. 14:25-33.

What was the best thing about Peter in this story? What was the worst?

Do you think Jesus is already forming and reforming Peter?

Sometimes, the events that make us feel we have been mashed down to nothing come from our own choices. It was that way with Peter. Read or have someone read Luke 22:31-34. (Keep Luke 22 open.)

This was a strong warning from Jesus. Peter could have listened to it and not had the great fall he had later that night.

But he didn’t.

Do you remember what happened in the courtyard of the high priest? People kept saying Peter was one of Jesus’ followers, and Peter denied them more and more fiercely. Now read verses 60 to 62.

If ever anyone was smashed back down on the potter’s wheel of life, it was Peter. But God didn’t do it—Peter did it to himself!

Peter was now in a very dangerous place, spiritually speaking. He had two choices. He could leave Jesus forever. (That was the choice Judas made, that same night.) Or he could allow himself to be reformed by God into something more useful than Peter could have imagined.

Peter wept. Jesus was killed, and Peter wept more. The women reported that Jesus’ tomb was empty and the angels said Jesus was raised. Peter raced John to the tomb and beat him, but didn’t know what to think when he saw the empty place.

Jesus had no intention of throwing Peter away as useless, even though Peter himself might have thought that was what he deserved. Whenever you are feeling useless and sinful, read all of John 21 and be encouraged. But right now, read or have someone read verses 15-17.

Why do you think Peter was now ready to feed Jesus' lambs and sheep? Did you know he became one of the greatest leaders in the early church after Jesus went back to heaven? And it was all because he chose to allow God to reform him over and over, a little at a time (often God works that way) until Peter was the best he could be.

## Personal Application

Today in many countries, we take for granted our freedom to have and read a Bible in our own language. If you are using these materials from General Conference Youth Ministries, you are probably in a country where you can be a Christian. But what if you're not? What if you live in a place where it is difficult, or illegal, or even dangerous to own and read a Bible?

It's possible that people who have to work hard for it might appreciate the Word of God more than people who can take it for granted. One of the most important principles Martin Luther taught the people of his time was "sola scriptura," that is, "only the Bible." He meant that we must base our lives, beliefs, and actions on what God teaches in His Word, not on the rules or rituals human beings create. It's not necessarily wrong to create either rules or rituals—but those must be secondary to the great truths of God's Word.

How can we know if we are being taught the truth as it is in the Bible? Do you simply trust your pastor or teacher? I hope you can. But you must know **for yourself** what the Bible teaches. Here is something else Mrs. White said: "It is the work of true education ... to train the youth to be thinkers, and *not mere reflectors of other men's thought*" (*Education*, p. 17).<sup>1</sup>

Each person needs to know what he or she believes and why. This only comes by daily study of the Bible, for yourself. Commentaries and books about the Bible, even your Sabbath School lessons, can be good tools, but they must not take the place of the Bible itself. Find a translation that is easy for you to understand, but which was carefully prepared from the original languages. You could use one of the plans that help you read the Bible in a year, unless that causes you to simply rush through the assigned passages for a given day. It's much better to take your time, pray over it, and understand what you read, even if it takes five years, than it is to "get it done" and not understand what you've read.

You might start with one of the passages in this lesson. Take your time. Look for details. Look especially for things that will help *you*.

Ask yourself questions such as:

- What did this passage mean to the people who first heard it?
- What does it mean to me today?
- What is God asking of me?
- What do I want to ask God? (Remember, it's always acceptable to admit to God that you don't understand, and what you are asking is wisdom! See James 1:5.)

But no matter what method you use, here's what really matters:  
Pray. Read. Pray. Repeat.

### Discussion Questions

1. Which of the reformation stories from the Bible that we have read meant the most to you right now, and why?
2. **Discuss** the various kinds of reformation you have experienced. Have you changed a behavior or choice from bad to good? Has your life "fallen apart" and been re-formed into something different? How have you coped with that?
3. Do you think your church or school needs any form of reformation? What might you do to help?
4. Share the different ways you each study the Bible. Make a commitment to study faithfully. You could create prayer/study partners who could encourage and help each other. Be sure there is one hard-and-fast rule: *what prayer partners share together is confidential*. If your partner shares something you think an adult should know, urge him or her to tell someone, or offer to go along, but don't break confidence unless you believe their safety is involved. And even then pray hard and ask a trusted adult yourself, without betraying details until that adult agrees it's necessary.

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<sup>1</sup>White, E. G. (1952). Education. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Association, 17.

DAY 2:

## **SALVATION COMES BY GRACE ALONE**

When one of the great reformers, Martin Luther, discovered the Bible for himself, he began to learn that much he had been taught in the church of the time was false. Perhaps the single most important thing Luther learned was that salvation is by grace alone.

### **What they believed**

At the time, the Catholic Church, which held sway over most of the European world, taught that people were born not just with a tendency to sin because of Adam and Eve's fall, but *already guilty*, as if they had done Adam's sin themselves. Therefore, if a newborn baby died before being baptized by putting water on its head, the baby would go to limbo. All their lives, they worried constantly about sin, confessing to priests and doing *penances* such as reciting prayers, paying money to the church, doing good deeds, or fasting without food or water for a time.

God was seen as a very angry, vengeful God. Some people even tortured themselves to try to gain His forgiveness. The most common thing you could do to try to earn God's favor was to attend *mass* every day.

The belief in mass was fundamental in medieval Catholicism. The Mass or the Eucharist, is one of the names by which the Lord's Supper was commonly called. During Mass, the priest blesses wine and special communion wafers, which then are believed to become the actual body and blood of Jesus; once consecrated, the elements cease to be bread and wine and actually become the Body and Blood of Christ. When people took part in the mass, they gained "merit" before God.

Even if someone did all these things right for their entire life, though, salvation was still not assured. At death, a person's spirit, (which they thought lived forever, with or without God), almost never went directly to heaven. First it had to go and be tortured for days, weeks, years, even centuries, in a place called *purgatory*.

## What Luther discovered

When he began to read the Bible for himself, Luther read about a very different God. He read that God loves us all, worked hard to save us throughout history, and even when He did punish, as in the Old Testament, God cried over the necessity. God sent His own beloved Son to take all the penalty of sin for us. Jesus said He had come “that we might have life,” (John 10:10) and that those who believed in His name *had* eternal life! (John 3:16)

The apostle Paul, who was a particular inspiration to Luther, said “the just (that is the righteous) shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17) and that “it is by grace you are saved, *not* of works,” so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8, 9, emphasis added). James 2 says one’s good works will show one’s faith, but the works aren’t what save us.

Luther couldn’t believe it at first.

There was a decree that anyone who crawled on his knees up a certain staircase in Rome would gain a special indulgence of forgiveness. This staircase was called “Pilate’s staircase.” It was believed that this was the staircase Jesus climbed to be tried by Pilate, and that the staircase had been miraculously moved from Jerusalem to Rome. When Luther got his heart’s desire and got to go to Rome, he thought he’d try it. Here’s how Mrs. White describes it in *The Great Controversy*:

*Luther was one day devoutly climbing these steps, when suddenly a voice like thunder seemed to say to him: "The just shall live by faith." Romans 1:17. He sprang to his feet and hastened from the place in shame and horror. That text never lost its power upon his soul. From that time he saw more clearly than ever before the fallacy of trusting to human works for salvation, and the necessity of constant faith in the merits of Christ. His eyes had been opened, and were never again to be closed, to the delusions of the papacy. When he turned his face from Rome he had turned away also in heart, and from that time the separation grew wider, until he severed all connection with the papal church (p. 126).<sup>1</sup>*

## What do we believe?

Seventh-day Adventists list 28 “fundamental beliefs” that we have learned directly from the Bible. Let’s look at some that show what we believe on this subject.



- Belief #7 states that we believe that people “share [Adam and Eve’s] fallen nature” and are subject to death. “They are born with weaknesses and tendencies to evil.”
- Belief #9 states, “In Christ’s life of perfect obedience to God’s will, His suffering, death, and resurrection, God provided the only means of atonement for human sin, so that those who by faith accept this atonement may have eternal life...”
- Belief #10 lays it out clearly. Here is a quote, and the website where you can read all 28 fundamental beliefs if you wish. *“This saving faith comes through the divine power of the Word and is the gift of God’s grace.”*<sup>2</sup>

***But...?***

In your life, have you heard or seen Adventists (perhaps including yourself) who seem to believe they can only be saved if they believe in Jesus *and* do something? Believe and also keep the Sabbath. Believe and also pay tithe. Believe and try to be perfect all the time, and worry constantly whether you are good enough.

Let’s look more closely at some of the Bible passages Luther discovered.

*Read or have someone read Romans 1:17.*

This is the text that rang in Luther’s head, and which he clung to his whole life. But did you know Paul didn’t say it first? You might think that this is a New Testament belief. Many people think the Old Testament teaches that people are saved by works, that is by following the sanctuary laws and sacrifices perfectly. (*Ask if anyone has a Bible with cross references in the margins. If so, ask them what their margin says about Romans 1:17.*) If no one does, have someone look up Habakkuk 2:4.

That’s right; the apostle was quoting from an Old Testament prophet who wrote hundreds of years before Jesus was born on earth. What does it mean that the just, or righteous, will “live by faith”? That word “live” could mean two different things: live as in live forever, be saved; or live as in live daily. So it could mean the just are saved from their sins and will live forever with Jesus by using faith—that is, depending on and trusting God. Or it could

mean the just will live every day on this earth by depending on and trusting God.

Or...it could mean both!

It could mean that once you accept Jesus' offer of eternal life, you can relax and trust Him to lead you, instead of worrying constantly about whether you are too sinful. It could mean that instead of trying to "make up" for your sins, you accept God's forgiveness and lean on Jesus to lead you to make better choices next time. What a life that would be!

Here's a second passage Luther found, which goes into salvation in more detail. Paul wrote this one, too, in his letter to the church members at Ephesus. This book is amazing, and one of the best things you could study as you learn to study your Bible for yourself every day. For now, we'll dig into one passage.

*Read or have someone read Ephesians 2:8-9.*

*For it is by grace...*

Grace is getting good treatment when you don't deserve it. When a friend simply smiles after you treat her unkindly, that's grace. A person's grace is good—God's grace is so great it's not even describable! God said, "Here are all my children, in a big mess, which they made themselves, but which they can't possibly get out of by themselves. I'll sacrifice Myself to get them out."

Who deserved that?

Nobody.

But God did it anyway.

That's grace.

*...you have been saved...*

Wait—*have been*? Reread it. Yes, that's what it says. Jesus died once for all, Hebrews points out (9:28) and God is not willing to lose a single person, according to Peter (2 Pet. 3:9)—and Peter ought to know. Jesus went to great lengths to get him back when he fell. So, Jesus' death and resurrection was enough for *every single person on the planet* to be saved...if only they don't turn away!

*...through faith...*

This is the not-turning-away part. We have to say, "Yes." God is reaching His hand down, longing to save every single person. All we have to do is look up, reach up, grab His hand. That's all. That can be hard, but—

*...and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God...*

—even the faith is a gift! Romans 12:3 says God has given to everyone a measure of faith. In a sermon recently, I heard a pastor say, “Do you know what “everyone” means in Greek? *Everyone!*”

Just say, “Yes.” Really.

And then that’s when you start working hard to do everything correctly and perfectly, right? So you can show God how grateful you are? Well, not exactly.

*...not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Not by works. (Not means not in Greek, too!) NOT by works.

Fact: You are not perfect.

Fact: God loves you more than He loved the thought of keeping His Son safe in heaven with Him. Jesus loves you so much He left heaven and went through a horrible death *so you don't have to!*

Yes, *of course* loving Christians will obey God’s teachings and live the most loving lives they know how to. Yes, they will learn better and better how to do that. They will also ask forgiveness of God and the sinned-against one when they mess up, and they’ll try to do better. That can *only* happen inside the trusting, peaceful relationship of a saved child of God with his or her beloved Lord. You can know Jesus loves you. You can stop worrying about being good enough and just try to get transparent enough that all the love Jesus pours out on you will pour out on everyone around you.

## **Penance vs Restitution**

One important point—let’s try to understand the difference between penance and restitution. Penance was about paying for your sins. This is actually impossible. When you do something wrong, there are often ways you can make what is called “restitution.” In other words, if you steal something, give it back. If you tell a lie about someone, then tell the same people the whole truth, and ask forgiveness of them as well as the person you lied about. If you didn’t clean your room, go clean it!

But this does not “pay for” the sin, much less make it as if it didn’t happen. You can’t “unsay” or “undo” things. Neither can you pay for sin. If you stole money and paid it back, you paid for the money, but you didn’t pay for the sinfulness that made you covet and then take something that belonged to another child of God.

The bottom line is, *only Jesus* can pay for sin. His forgiveness to you is free for the asking. Although you might still face consequences, those have nothing to do with the forgiveness.

Those who go to heaven will all, every single one of them, be there because of the total grace of God.

In 1528, in a writing called *On Faith and Coming to Christ*, Luther wrote, "Should one imagine he is able to do anything good of his own strength he does no less than make Christ the Lord a liar."<sup>3</sup> In other words, Jesus said He alone could save us, by His perfect life, death, and resurrection in our place. If we say we have to (or even that we *can*) add anything to that, we're calling Him a liar.

## **Personal Application**

Have you clearly understood that salvation is completely a free gift of God, or have you been trying to work for it or earn it some way? If you have any concerns about this, there are several things you can do.

One is talk to a trusted pastor, teacher, or other deeply godly person you know who believes in grace. These people may look very wise to you, but they were all young once, and they had most of the same questions and doubts. They can often encourage and strengthen you.

Another is to study the subject in your Bible. If you made the commitment that you would study regularly, this would make a great first subject to start with. Using a concordance, you can look up all the times words like "salvation," "faith," or "grace" appear. Take several weeks reading and studying and praying over these passages.

Most important, of course, is prayer. Tell Jesus how grateful you are that He provided salvation for you. Tell Him the truth if you have doubts and questions or are having a hard time believing it can be that simple. It's not like He doesn't already know your heart! He can help you more if you are open with him and with yourself. Ask Him to grow your faith and give you peace. And in the meantime, say what the father in Mark 9:24 said, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!" In other words, "I do trust You! I am trying to believe! Only You can help my faith to grow!"

Last, spend your time with people who do believe; people who have faith and trust in God for their own salvation and are trying to learn to live as Christ would have them live. Human beings are created for community, and they have a lot of influence on each other. You are influencing your friends,

and they are influencing you, every day of your life. Be sure the influences are helpful ones.

And if you *are* already sure of your salvation in Christ, you can be an immense help to your friends. Share the Good News! It's not just for unbelievers; it's a great comfort and reminder for believers, too.

## Discussion Questions

1. Discuss your reactions to the early part of the lesson. What do you think it would be like to believe the things people of Martin Luther's day believed? Do you see signs of some beliefs like this even among some Adventists?
2. Now discuss your reactions to the second part of the lesson. Look up some more of the Bible passages Luther discovered. Have you understood thoroughly that salvation is completely free—a gift of God? Have you said yes?
3. If you are not sure, what kinds of things will help to make you sure?
4. If you are sure, how can you help your friends without being pushy?
5. Do you try to obey God and His commandments? Why? (If you search your motives that can help you understand more clearly what you really believe, down deep.)
6. With your prayer/study partner, come up with some specific things you want to do or say to encourage others and try them. You could talk with your friends or write in a journal about what happens after you try these things.

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<sup>1</sup>White, E. G. (1967). *The Great Controversy*. Phoenix, AZ: Inspiration Books, 126.

<sup>2</sup>*Seventh-day Adventist 28 Fundamental Beliefs*. (n.d.). Retrieved November 9, 2016, from <https://www.adventist.org/fileadmin/adventist.org/files/articles/official-statements/28Beliefs-Web.pdf>

<sup>3</sup>Luther, M. (2008). *The Essential Martin Luther: The large catechism of Martin Luther, selected sermons of Martin Luther, Martin Luther's Ninety-five theses*. Radford, VA.: Wilder Publications LLC.

## DAY 3

### **JESUS IS THE CENTER**

In Martin Luther's day, many people were honestly and earnestly trying to follow God and be good Christians. They did what their priests and bishops told them to do, even if it meant giving up lifetime savings to get some loved one out of purgatory or keep themselves from going there. They faithfully did all kinds of penances to try to pay for their sins. God knows every individual heart, and He knew the ordinary people did not have access to the Bible. He knew which ones were honestly trying to follow Him and which ones were just doing things from fear or trying to look good. But He also wanted people to learn the truth.

We've looked at two important truths Martin Luther discovered: that only the Bible is the rule of faith, not what others say about the Bible; and that salvation is a free gift, given by grace and accepted by faith. Today let's examine another important truth he found.

### **Jesus is the Center**

In Luther's time, the church was the center of people's lives, and the pope was the center of the church. When Luther began to read the Bible, he realized it was all about Jesus. The pope wasn't the center. Jesus was the center! Even the Old Testament is filled with prophecies of the Messiah who will come to take away sins. But the New Testament really contains only one story, in two parts.

The story is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

The first part is found in the four gospels, and gives four testimonies of His life and death on earth, ending with His resurrection and His command to go to the whole world and share this story.

The second part is how people obey that command. You could see this as a separate story—the story of the early church. But it's still all about Jesus. All they were doing was telling His story, over and over, in different lands, in different languages, using different methods.

Jesus was *everything* to them. And He had promised that as soon as they told everyone in the whole world His story, He would come back. They couldn't wait! They thought He might come any day. We Adventists know what it feels like to think, "Maybe it will be this year!" ...year after year after

year. Did you know people were already getting impatient within 100 years after Jesus died? Peter reassured people, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). According to *The Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 548, this was likely the mid-sixties AD, only thirty-some years after Jesus' death and resurrection, and people already thought Jesus was taking too long.

As he read and studied all this, Luther realized these people loved Jesus with the passion with which he loved his church. He began to realize that neither the pope nor the church should be the center of life. Those early Christians spent time praying to Jesus, time talking about Him, time learning to live as He lived. Their greatest desire was to keep *Him* in the center of their lives and lead others to do the same.

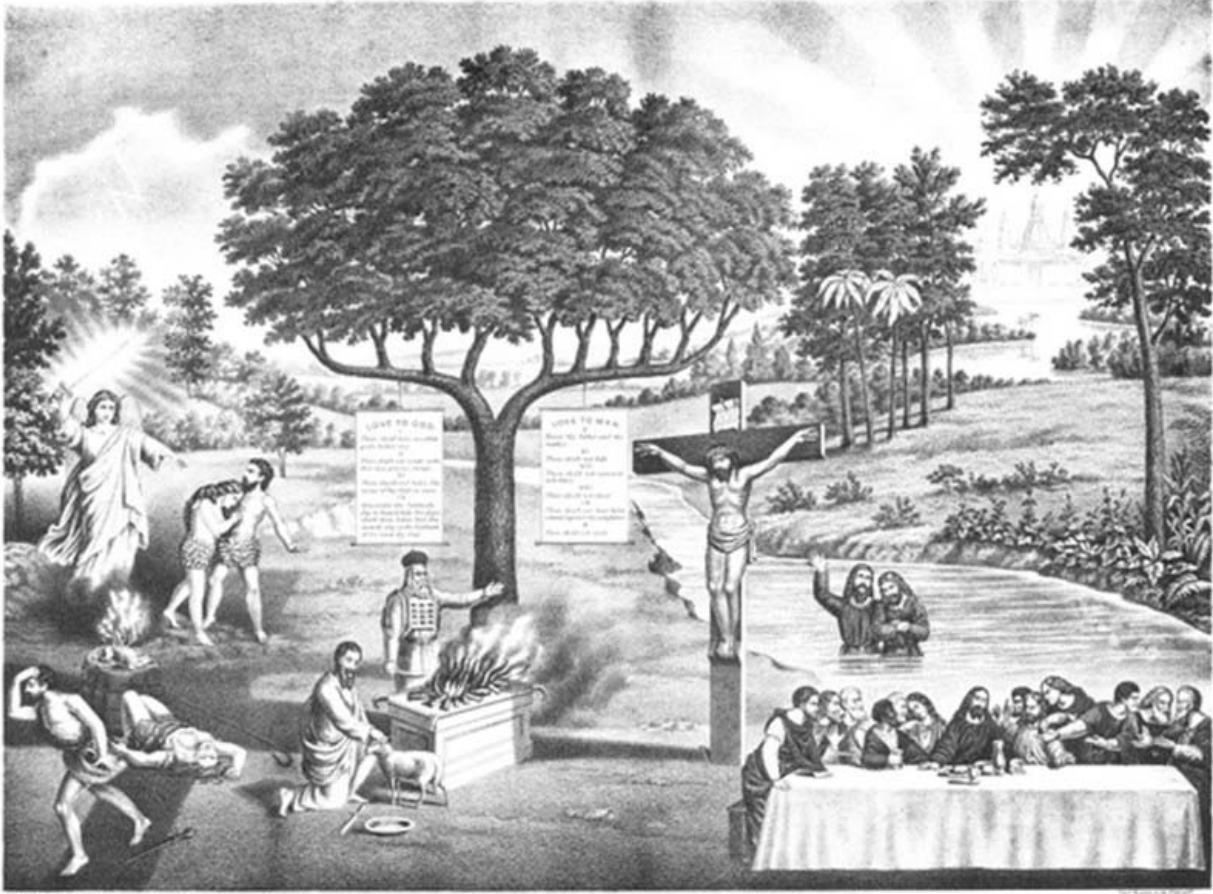
Luther wanted to do that, too.

## **Jesus as the Center of Seventh-day Adventism**

There are some ways in which our own church has gone through a little reformation on this subject. Of course the early founders in the 1800s already believed Jesus was the center of Christianity. But they were so excited to learn about the blessings of the whole law including the Sabbath that they tended to speak and write about the Ten Commandments a lot, and people began to make the law central, instead of Jesus. James and Ellen White realized this fairly quickly. There was a particular incident in which you can see the story play out.

On May 27, 1873 the *Review and Herald*, our early church paper which continues today as *Adventist Review*, advertised a special picture called "The Way of Life from Paradise Lost to Paradise Restored." It was designed and copyrighted by Dr. M. G. Kellogg, and that same year he published a 15-page booklet explaining all the parts of the picture.

Here is the picture.



**THE WAY OF LIFE**  
FROM PARADISE LOST TO PARADISE RESTORED.

Source: Ellen G. White Estate

The picture was intended to show the whole story of the gospel. You can see Adam and Eve sent away from the garden, and Cain killing Abel to show how quickly sin took over. In the center is what was called “the law tree,” with the Ten Commandments hanging from it. Notice that the tree has four branches on the left, representing the four commandments which are about love to God, and six branches on the right, showing the six commandments that are about love for people. The sacrificial system, with its Day of Atonement representing the death of Christ for us is shown below the law tree. You can see Jesus being baptized by John (the beginning of His earthly ministry) and His last supper with His disciples (the end of His earthly ministry). Centrally located is the death of Jesus on the cross, and to the right, the open way that leads back to “paradise restored”—the perfect life with God.

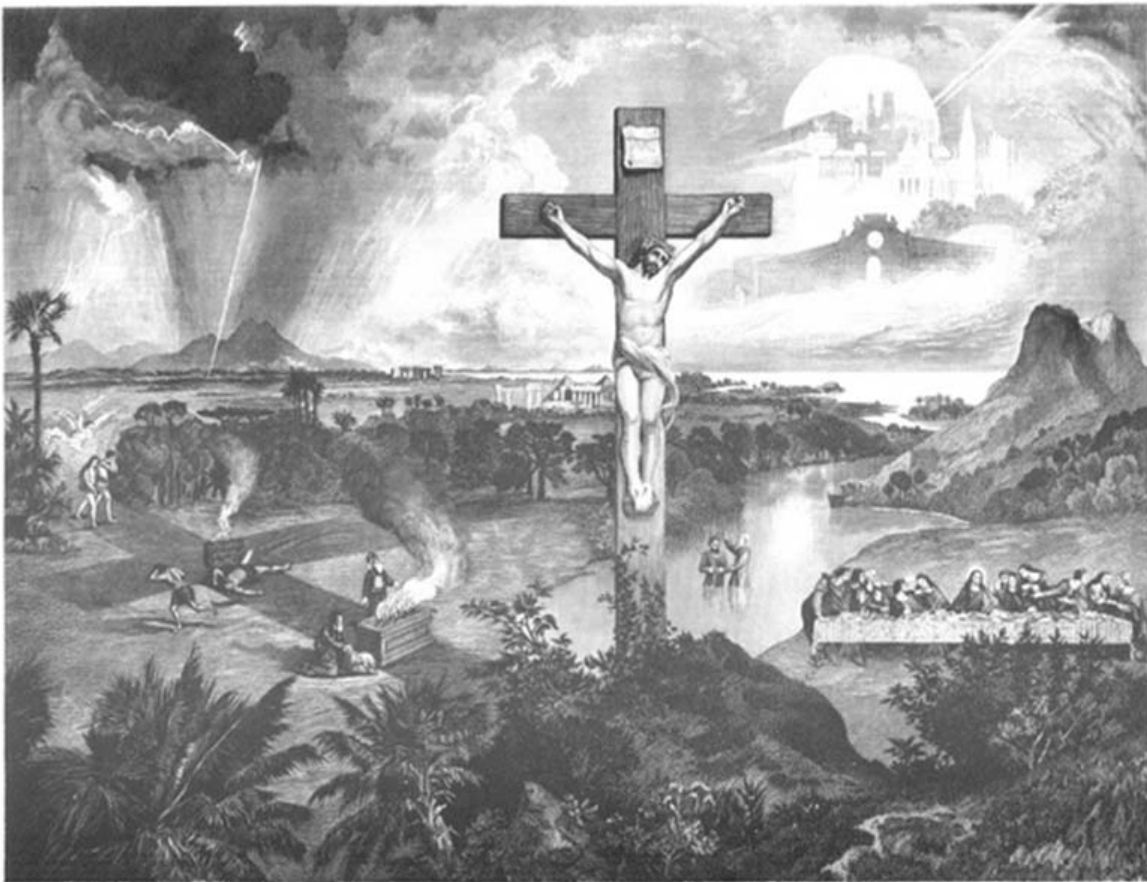


According to the Ellen White Estate, "The picture was an immediate success, and proved to be a great aid to Adventist evangelists in their efforts to properly present the relationship between the law and the gospel."<sup>1</sup>

But! Can you see any problem with the picture? What is the biggest thing in it? What is the central image?

Some improvements were planned within a few years, but by 1880, the picture was changed substantially. Elder White wrote to his wife, "I have a sketch also of the new picture, 'Behold the Lamb of God.' This differs from the Way of Life in these particulars: The Law Tree is removed. Christ on the cross is made large, and placed in the center."

Here is the new picture:



## CHRIST, THE WAY OF LIFE

Source: Ellen G. White Estate

When you compare the two pictures, what do you think? Is the law gone? Is it unimportant? Of course not. But *Jesus is the center*.

## Keeping Centered on Jesus

How do you keep at the center of your life someone you can't see, hear, or touch? It's hard for young people today to understand what it was like just a few decades ago, without social media or cell phones. These days, you can see the face and hear the voice of someone on the other side of the planet!

When your grandparents were young, if someone was travelling, even within the same country, they had to write letters, wait days for those letters to be delivered, then that person had to write back, and they waited more days for answers to their letters. Even then we had telephones, so at least we could hear each other's voice—but only once in a while, because calling long distance was expensive.

Peter, in the first century, and Luther, in the 16<sup>th</sup>, actually had quite a bit in common so far as lifestyle. The only modes of travel were walking, riding an animal, riding in a cart or wagon of some kind, or riding in a boat. That's it. That meant letters took weeks or months, or never reached their destinations at all. Besides, most people couldn't read or write, anyway. People in those days were used to the idea of having someone they loved go away, perhaps never to be seen again in this life. People might go on trading missions, taking long trains of donkeys and mules thousands of miles into Asia or Spain. They might go on long sailing voyages—though, the biggest sea they crossed would be the Mediterranean. They might move to a new country, knowing they would never see their families again.

So perhaps, for them, the concept of Jesus "going back to My Father" (John 14:3, 12, 28, etc.) might not have been so hard to understand, even though of course they knew He wasn't going elsewhere on the earth.

They would have to maintain a long distance relationship with Him through this mysterious Being He promised would come to them: the Holy Spirit. It is clear in the first few chapters of Acts that they figured out right away that this relationship would require lots of prayer and Bible study. They could talk to God and God would "talk back to them" through His Word and through the Holy Spirit.

## Personal Application

For a generation used to constant contact and communication, perhaps there's one way it's actually easier for *us* to understand than it was for them. You probably know how to text back and forth to a friend all day, throughout the other activities you are doing. That's what your relationship with Jesus can be like.

## Prayer

Prayer doesn't have to be a formal petition on your knees at church or beside your bed morning and night. These are important, and I hope you don't neglect them. But all-day prayer is just as important. All day long, you can be "texting" quick prayers to Jesus.

"Wow, Lord, what a great sunrise!"

"Thank you, God, for helping me with that test."

"Oh, Jesus, what do I do about *this*?"

"Here comes the person I like/don't like. What should I say, God?"

"Oh, Lord, I'm so sorry I said/did that! Help me apologize humbly and find out what I can do to make things better, please!"

You will learn to be aware of Jesus with you all the time through the Holy Spirit, and sometimes you will be aware of some kind of particular guidance or "word"—You will have an idea what to do in your difficulties, or know what words to use to your friend (or enemy). You will be enabled to apologize sincerely and find a way to make restitution if necessary. But the main way God will speak to you is through His word. This is why daily time with your Bible is so necessary.

## Bible Study

There are two main kinds of Bible reading. One is to study and learn information. The other is to worship—to draw closer to God and hear His voice in His word. Both are important. As a young person, you are still busy storing up as much of God's word as possible in your heart and mind. You need to learn as much as you can about the Bible—what it says, how it says it, what varieties of meanings can be found in the same passage. But for our purposes here, for developing a friendship with Jesus, the worship kind of Bible reading is most essential. This means reading the story or passage to find out what it means to you, personally.

Sometimes this is simple. If you are a lonely girl, let's say, and you read about how Mary Magdalene was treated as a person of importance by her friend and Master, Jesus, you can hold those images to your own heart, knowing that Jesus considers you a person of importance, too, no matter what anyone else thinks. If you are a boy who feels he has little to offer, the story of the boy with his lunch of loaves and fishes can encourage you to give what you do have to God and wait to see what he will do with it. (Neither of these stories is gender-specific, by the way. Lonely boys can learn from Jesus' relationship with Mary, and girls who feel they have little to offer can also give what they have to Jesus.)

Sometimes it's a little more complicated. You read Psalm 1, perhaps. What does it mean to not stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers? What does it mean to you, today, in these particular circumstances, to be like a tree planted by rivers of water, giving its fruit in season? Each time you read a passage like this, in different times of your life, it will mean something that feels brand new (even though it *never* disagrees with itself!) because you are in a different situation and need to hear a slightly different word of encouragement or love or advice from God.

This will only happen if your conversation is two-way, not just something you make up in your head by what *you* think a passage means, or what the pastor said it means, or what a commentary or Sabbath School lesson says it means. Those can all be very valuable, but you need to talk to God directly.

## **More Prayer**

Before you even open your Bible, pray to ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. While you are reading, keep your mind open to His leading. Talk with Him about your questions, ideas, and insights. If you have an idea the passage means for you to do some particular thing, ask God more about that. Make specific plans to do what you are called to do, and pray about that, too.

This is where Bible study and prayer can become individual and different.

For example, let's say that two young people, April and Chombo, read Psalm 1. As April prayerfully reads, she remembers she has been sarcastic about some other girls at school this week. She feels guilty as she realizes the Spirit is bringing this memory to her mind right now to point out that she has,

in fact, been sitting in the seat of mockers. She tells God she is sorry, asks Him to cleanse her of unrighteousness, and promises to reach out to the other girls, apologize and ask forgiveness, and seek to create better relationships with them.

The next day at school, April feels nervous and embarrassed. Does she really have to go directly to the girls and apologize? What will they think? As she silently prays again, she understands that Satan is tempting her to doubt what she knows in her heart God has shown her in her Bible study and prayer time. She asks God to give her words and actions, and she sets out to make apologies and—she hopes—friends. (Others may not always respond. We make our best efforts anyway.)

Chombo, on the other hand, as he prayerfully reads, has been feeling empty and unhappy lately. He is doing his Bible study time only because he promised he would. He doesn't feel what he thought it would feel like to be "spiritual." He comes to the phrase about being like a tree planted by living waters. He feels sad. He is not like a tree, and his life feels like a dry desert, not a riverside! He hangs his head as he tries to pray. He asks God to show him what is wrong, and help him to find living water for his soul.

The Holy Spirit draws very near to Chombo. Perhaps there is some kind of trauma or abuse going on in his life. Perhaps he has depression or some other illness. Or maybe he's just feeling low and dry. We all do, sometimes.

But as he prays, and as he listens for God's voice, Chombo doesn't give up. Slowly, he feels a sense of peace begin to steal into his heart. He realizes it must be true that God loves him, otherwise Jesus would be a liar, and he *knows* that's not true! Maybe the water his soul needs is just this—more prayer, more worshipful Bible reading. When he walks away, the thing Chombo has been called to do isn't something outward like making new friends. It's a quiet thing only God and he will know he's doing. But he's not going to give up. And it will change his life.

Here's the best thing of all: like Martin Luther so long ago, April's and Chombo's personal relationship with God will change the world around them, too. They may never be famous. There may be no movement named after them, or Wikipedia article about them. But Jesus will know. And their friends will notice. When they are around April or Chombo, they feel loved.

## Discussion Questions

1. What do you believe is first in your life? What would your friends or family say is first in your life? If an invisible alien could watch what you do and how you spend your time, what would the alien say is most important to you?
2. Discuss the two pictures in the lesson. Share your reactions, insights, or ideas about the two. Why did they paint them the way they did, and why did they change? Do you think either picture is actually wrong? Why or why not?
3. What are some things you have learned in your Bible study?
4. What are some things that have happened when you pray?
5. What are some of the things you pray about?
6. With your study/prayer partner, look up some Bible texts about prayer and pray about them together.

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<sup>1</sup>Way of Life Picture. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://ellenwhite.org/content/file/way-life-picture#document>



## DAY 4

### **THE PRIESTHOOD OF—WAIT—OF ALL BELIEVERS? EVEN ME?**

The more Martin Luther studied the Bible, the more he began to realize that the whole organization of the church in his day was out of alignment with what the Bible said, at least the New Testament.

His church had people in ranks—the pope closest to God, then the cardinals, then archbishops, bishops, monks and nuns, and finally the common people. God must have seemed very far away from the ordinary believer.

Now, it is true that in the Old Testament, God ordained a priesthood, and in a sense, they did stand between the people and God. Not in any true, spiritual way—all of God's people throughout all the ages of the world have been able to pray directly to their Creator. But in the sacrificial system, to teach the people clearly the difference between holy and common things, the priests were the only ones allowed to make the sacrifices, and even then, only after they had undergone special purification rites. And only the High Priest himself could enter the Most Holy Place, where the Ark of the Covenant was. This Ark represented the throne room of God, and God wanted people to understand that when Adam and Eve chose to follow a different ruler (Satan), and all their descendants made that same choice, then they were in a very real sense cut off from God.

But they were never out of God's heart. He always came to them, in visions, in dreams, in the words of prophets, in miracles. You can find endless stories in the Old Testament that show that God was always very close to His children, and sometimes, some of them were aware of that.

All too often, though, they still thought God was far away. Jesus came to change all that—to “buy back” the earth from the devil and put people back in direct touch with God. Luther saw that when Jesus died, the curtain that set apart the Most Holy Place tore from top to bottom, exposing it to view (Matt. 27:51, Mark 15:38, and Luke 23:45).

The book of Hebrews was specifically written to explain the new order of things to Jews who had been following the sacrificial system all their lives. Let's take a closer look at chapters 9 and 10. (*Have everyone open their Bibles to Hebrews 9.*) The first ten verses outline the sacrificial system as it was set up by God when He brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. (*Read or have someone read verse 11.*)

What do you think this “greater and more perfect tabernacle...not made with human hands” is? When God gave Moses instructions to build the tabernacle, He was having Moses build an earthly copy of the real sanctuary in heaven! The earthly tabernacle had embroidered angels on the curtains, but heaven has real ones. The mercy seat on the ark represented God’s throne, but God has a real one.

Now read verse 12. Jesus is the real High Priest, and not only that, He’s the sacrifice as well! No earthly priest could have done that. (*Now read verse 15.*) Isn’t that amazing? We are set free, and promised an “eternal inheritance,” all because of Jesus!

*In verse 26* it says that Jesus “appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.” Once for all. Once means once. He doesn’t have to die again and again, and He certainly doesn’t need us to make some kind of sacrifices or penances to try to pay for our own sins. And all means all. There is enough salvation available for every person that ever lived or ever will. Isn’t it sad that some people will refuse it? But what does this have to do with the priesthood of all believers?

Well, we’ve learned that there is no earthly high priest, no one on earth that the church is centered on, or to whom we owe total allegiance. There are earthly leaders, and they deserve our respect, but *only* Jesus is the High Priest of the new covenant.

Let’s move on to Hebrews 10. Most of this chapter simply repeats that Jesus’ one and only sacrifice takes the place of all those repeated sacrifices, none of which were sufficient to cleanse us, but His blood is. It must have been difficult for many Jews to accept this. After all, God had given them the sacrificial system. It was right for them to study deeply and be *sure* this new way was right. Hebrews shows that Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection was the fulfillment those sacrifices had pointed to all along. Verse 19 gets to the point we are seeking. (*Read or have someone read verses 19-23.*)

Now let’s think about this. Who was the only one that used to be allowed to enter the Most Holy Place? The ark inside represented the throne of God, and a sinful human who had not been cleansed from sin would have died if they entered. And that was only a *representation* of God’s throne. What would happen if an uncleansed sinner entered the actual throne room in heaven? It’s important to understand—*God would not kill that person. God’s pure and holy presence would be automatically deadly to*



that person. But now, what did verse 19 say? (*Wait for someone to say that we can enter the Most Holy Place.*) And what is the reason that verse 20 gave? (Jesus made the way; in fact, His body was the curtain.)

We can enter the Most Holy Place! That makes us priests! Jesus opened the way for us into the presence of His Father, and now when we enter into that Most Holy Place, we are inside Jesus' perfection and can be there safely, with no fear.

How wonderful!

Luther even discovered that Peter (who had once been a rather unruly disciple) now taught that we are a royal priesthood. Let's go to 1 Peter 2:9 and spend a few minutes there. (*Have someone read it.*)

*You are...*

Once again, note that present tense. You *are*. Now. We don't have to wait for heaven.

*...a chosen people...*

This is the way the Jewish nation had learned to see themselves. When God chose Abraham's family, He did it so that they could be a blessing to all on earth (see Genesis 12:1-3.) But instead, they had become closed and self-righteous, rejecting all "outsiders." Jesus came to remind us we are *all* chosen by God, for a purpose. For loving others. The question is, will *we* choose God?

*...a royal priesthood...*

A *royal* priesthood! Princes and princesses, children of God, every one of us!

*...a holy nation...*

This is our chance to understand what "holy nation" means. First of all, it's not a political reality, like Ghana or England or Canada. It's a nation of godly people spread throughout all the nations of earth. Secondly, it's not holy in the sense of "we are better than you are"—it's holy in the way Jesus was, reaching out to every person He came across, sharing God's love all day every day.

*...God's special possession.*

What a lovely feeling. It's like Colossians 3:12, which calls us "God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved."

This is the thing which makes it possible for us to begin reforming our lives, letting the Holy Spirit shape it like Jesus' life. Because we are not afraid and guilty all the time, we are free to learn how to be loving.

And we don't need a human priesthood intervening between us and an angry God. We are all called to share God's love and lead others to the light.

This must have been amazing to Martin Luther, who had been taught all his life to revere priests, and who had been ordained a priest himself. He had been taught that priests stood between the people and God, and the pope stood between the priests and God. Now he learned that *all* followers of Jesus are called to be His priests.

Yes, even you!

## Personal Application

But what does that mean? Do we all baptize, or lead in communion? Can we marry people, or be in authority over them?

As Luther made clear, God calls all believers to exercise a ministry in terms of their spiritual giftedness. He also calls some to leadership, teaching, and administrative positions within the body of Christ. Most of these are pastors of local churches, though there are also many other offices, such as evangelist, chaplain, academy and college leaders, teachers, and so on, which these ministers can hold. In those offices they function as servant-leaders, with spiritual authority within the church. But there is a crucial difference between having spiritual authority and "exercising power."

Paul's counsel to Timothy helps to make it clear. In 1 Timothy 1:3, Paul tell Timothy to "command" people not to teach false doctrine. In some cases, the minister is to be like the shepherd, protecting the sheep from wolves. But he also used words like "manage" and "take care of" (1 Tim. 3:4-5,13) and "serve".

Unless we are called to this particular ministry, the fact that we are "priests" for God does not mean we have this kind of authority. Fortunately, the rest of the verse explains what Peter meant: "...that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

One of the most important jobs a priest has—the heart of all other things a priest is called to do—is to tell people about Jesus. To "declare God's praises." To tell the story of the one who called *you*—and *me*—out of darkness into light.

And yes, I can do that! So can you!

How? Jesus, of course, is our most important role model. He was gentle and kind, listened to people, walked and talked and ate with them, and did you know the people He is most recorded as rebuking were the church leaders?

Every one of us can listen with love to the concerns and worries and joys of those we come in contact with. We can offer help when it is needed, and rejoice when people are excited, and mourn with them when they mourn. We can serve them. And we can share our own stories, concerns, and joys. When a friend has a family crisis, and you listen, and pray with them, and offer help where needed, that is a great blessing and makes your friend feel loved and comforted, even though you probably cannot “fix” the situation. When *you* have a family crisis, and you share your story, and ask them to pray with you, and when you are able to share with them how much comfort it gives you to be able to turn over your troubles to the King of the Universe; when they see you holding peace deep within even when you are in trouble and sorrow, *that* is “declaring God’s praises.” That could lead your friend “out of darkness into light.”

That will lead God to say to you one day, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Because in the end, that’s what a priest is—a servant of God and humanity.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What do you see as the main differences between Old Testament priests and New Testament priests?
2. Have you ever thought of yourself as a priest before? How will it change your attitudes or behavior?
3. What does it mean to you to be able to “enter into the Most Holy Place”? Have you ever tried imagining in your heart that you are going through that veil into the throne room of God when you are praying? Try it, and share with your friends what it was like.
4. Do you ever think you might be called to the ministry? How would you know for sure?
5. With your study/prayer partner, spend more time in Hebrews 9 and 10, and consider how you can be priests of God this week, declaring His praise and telling how He brought you from darkness to light.

## DAY 5

### COMMUNION = COMMUNITY

“Communion,” “community,” and “common” all have one thing in...well, in common! They all begin with “com,” which means “together,” and they all end with “uni” or “on,” which means “one.” In other words, they all mean “together as one.”

The concept of being together as one has often been misunderstood. People, including many in Martin Luther’s time and many in our time today, can think that “one” means “the same.” They can believe that everyone should think, speak, act, and believe exactly the same. If some people disagree about something, even something as important as a doctrine, someone is sure to say that they are “causing disunity.” This might be true. But often it is not. Often, it is simply individuals acting as the unique individuals God made them to be. (Did you notice the “uni” in “unique”? Unique means the only one of something. And there’s only one of you. You are unique.)

Lest we misunderstand this, the apostle Paul made it clear what unity really is when he wrote 1 Corinthians 12, using the imagery of a body. We are one body, he says, the only physical body Christ has on earth right now, in fact. But a body is not one thing. It’s more like one collection. It has a nervous system, a digestive system, a skeletal system, a circulatory system, and more...and even those systems are made up of millions of cells, each doing *their unique job*. Can you imagine what would happen if your cells got confused about what their job is? We call it cancer. Cancer cells think they are supposed to grow, and grow...and grow! And take over all the cells nearby.

That kind of false unity kills.

Each believer is *one small part* of Christ’s body on earth, and each has a job to do. The other error would be to just go our own ways. “Well,” we might say, “God gave me a different job to do than He gave you, so let’s just go do our own jobs. See you later!”

Let’s just recognize that this, too, would be rather a problem if the cells in our bodies decided to do it! Somehow, all those millions or billions of cells each do their own jobs *and* all work together, all at the same time!

The celebration we call Communion, or the Lord’s Supper, can help with this. Let’s see how.

## **What they believed**

In Luther's day, it was believed that rituals had power in and of themselves. Baptism literally washed away sins. Even a newborn baby had to be baptized to wash away the sin they believed the baby was born with, so it would not go to hell if it died. The penances the priest gave a person after they confessed their sins—saying the Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary Prayer ten times, for instance—had the power to wash away those sins.

Communion, which they called the mass, had power to turn bread and wine into Jesus' flesh and blood, and partaking of it had the power to give a person "merit." The priest did much of the mass with his back to the people, facing God in their place. It wasn't something the people shared in, at least not completely, though the priest did put the bread wafer on their tongues. Also, the service was all done in Latin, which very few people understood.

There wasn't much "communion" in church.

## **What Luther learned**

Luther saw that communion began by Jesus and His disciples sharing a meal together. The early church "broke bread together," too. They shared everything, having "communion," that is community, as if they were all one family. Some were even given the gift of speaking in the languages of various people.

After Luther had been writing and preaching for a while, new churches, called "protestant" because they protested the excesses of the medieval Catholic Church, had begun to form. In these churches, the people were sharing in the wonderful spiritual experience of the Lord's Supper, and also doing the service in their own language, German. Instead of being just an audience watching the priest commune with God, the people were involved, too. Luther also said the only rituals that churches should have to follow were the ones Jesus Himself commanded, like communion. Churches might add other rituals and ceremonies, but they should not be required.

## What Jesus taught about communion?

Remember, the word communion means together as one. One of the most common and important ways people practice communion or community in ordinary life is by eating together. And the service of communion, or the Lord's Supper, began with a meal together.

The most important ritual meal in the Jewish calendar, the Seder, or Passover supper, had been dictated by God in detail. In Exodus 12, God describes to Moses the meal, what should be eaten, even how it should be prepared, and that it needed to all be eaten in one meal, so if a family was too small to eat a whole lamb, they should share, inviting enough people to eat it all. He then follows this holy day with a week-long festival called Unleavened Bread.

The Passover meal is described several more times in the Old Testament, and is mentioned even more times than that. Over the centuries, the Jews have added more rituals and special prayers to this meal, and if you have not experienced a Messianic Seder, that is, one which is held in celebration of the fact that Jesus fulfilled all the types of Passover, you should. It's a wonderful community experience.

Jesus fulfilled those types by dying as the true Passover Lamb, *on* Passover. He shared a Seder with His disciples a night early. He knew this was not only an important celebration time together, but was His very last chance to eat anything at all with them before He died. But the disciples weren't paying much attention. They definitely were not "together as one." No true communion was going on.

The story is told in every one of the four gospels. You can find it in Matthew 26:17-30, Mark 14:12-26, Luke 22:7-39, and John 13:1-26. You have to read all four to get all the details of this important night.

The disciples were in an argumentative mood. The situation was not improved by the fact that no one had remembered to hire someone to wash their dusty feet. In an attempt to draw all their hearts to Him, including Judas' heart, Jesus took the task on Himself and washed all their feet.

It is hard for western people to understand how shocking this was, but if you live in the Middle East or in other countries where feet are considered very low and unclean, you have a better idea of why Peter refused at first. Can you imagine having Jesus kneel down to wash *your* feet?

Peter, as soon as he understood the importance, was as eager as he had been reluctant, but Judas' mind did not change. When Jesus blessed and broke the bread, saying, "This is my body, broken for you," Judas took some. When Jesus then blessed the cup, telling them in clear language that this was His "blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins," Judas drank some.

But he was not communing. Mrs. White describes it this way: "He received from Jesus the emblems of His broken body and His spilled blood. He heard the words, 'This do in remembrance of Me.' And sitting there in the very presence of the Lamb of God, the betrayer brooded upon his own dark purposes, and cherished his sullen, revengeful thoughts" (The Desire of Ages p. 653).<sup>1</sup>

It is important to note that Mrs. White goes on to teach that this is an example of how we should treat people who we might not think "deserve" communion. On page 656 she says, "There may come into the company persons who are not in heart servants of truth and holiness, but who may wish to take part in the service. They should not be forbidden."

Jesus tried everything He could to win the heart of Judas. We must try everything we can to win the hearts of those around us, and setting ourselves up as judges as to who is "good enough" to take communion will not do it. (Not to mention, it shows where our own heart is...)

Jesus got their attention when He finally said there was a betrayer present. Once Judas got up and left, it's hard to imagine how the thoughts of the company went from there. Was there more togetherness? Or were they all so upset that the supper was ruined? When they sang a song and left, they were about to have one of the closest, most blessed times with their Lord that they had ever had. Jesus longed to give them some last words of comfort, advice, and warning. They still didn't understand that He was about to die, but He knew it. Only John describes what they talked of that night, in John 13 through 16. Then he records a wonderful prayer that Jesus prayed for *all* His followers, including us, in John 17. A whole new era was beginning, but nobody knew it. People were oblivious.

## Personal Application

Like the people in Luther's time, we today can sometimes put more emphasis on the ritual itself than on its deeper meaning. We can use the word "communion" just to mean a certain service, and never really *commune* at all. We can worry about whose feet we will wash, and fidget while the songs are being played. We can drink the grape juice and eat the communion bread with no thought except to get it done and go to lunch.

If we do, we are completely misusing the word. Communion is not a service. It is an attitude of heart. When we are preparing our hearts, we are communing with God. When we wash the feet of a friend or visitor, we can be in true union with that person. We can look into their eyes. We can pray together. When our feet are being washed, we can be in communion not only with the person doing this humble service for us, but also with God. It can be a small renewal of our baptismal vows.

Are our spiritual "feet" dirty and dusty?

Are there sins we need to confess, repentance and reformation to be made?

What is the Holy Spirit whispering at that time?

It can be especially meaningful if we are sharing foot-washing with a family member. In one way, that might feel "safer," less embarrassing. But consider, those are the people we tend to hurt the most, in small ways—sometimes in large ways. We can whisper words of repentance and forgiveness to each other and resolve to make our homes more centered on Christ. However, if we are washing the feet of a guest or someone we do not know well, we can still model the love of God to them and pray with and for them.

When we are back in the sanctuary, there is usually soft music playing. In some churches, this is a testimony time. No matter how your church celebrates it, this is a special time of communion with God, with each other, and even, in a sense, with the angels we know are present. Thoughts may come to your mind of someone you want to pray for or of some change God would like to "re-form" in your life.

When we take the bread, we can take it with reverence, knowing that this bread, created from grain God made and people grew, baked and broken up for us, is a symbol of the body of Jesus, who came and lived and was broken for us.



When we take the juice, we can think of His blood, spilled for us. And when we take into our bodies these physical bits of food, we can pray intentionally that Jesus' way of thinking and being and loving will grow into our hearts the way this bread and juice will grow into our bones and skin and blood.

Communion can truly be community.

## Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever thought about the relationship of the words "communion," "community," and "common"? What is your reaction to what you learned in this session?
2. Does your church seem to you to have trouble with unity and disunity? What is one thing you can do to help?
3. Have you ever been to a Messianic Seder? If so, share your experiences. If not, you may wish to find out if there is an opportunity to do so.
4. Have you ever been to a communion service in which your heart was distant and discordant, like the disciples? What did you do?
5. Have you thought of the communion service more as a ritual or as actual communion with God and each other? What changes, if any, will you make?
6. With your study/prayer partner, read the stories of the Last Supper and pray for each other's hearts. If possible, be each other's partners during the next Communion at your church.

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<sup>1</sup>White, E. G. (1940). *The Desire of Ages*. Mountain View, CA, Portland, Or.: Pacific Press Pub. Association, 653.

## DAY 6

### **SIN AND GUILT—AND FREE FORGIVENESS!**

One of the most important beliefs that were reformed (that is, reformed back into the Bible's original teachings) during the Protestant Reformation was the concept of sin and guilt.

#### **What they believed**

Back in Luther's time people believed that babies were born, not with just a weak and sinful nature, but already guilty, as if they had committed Adam and Eve's sins. Also, because the people were so afraid of the angry, vengeful God they thought they had, they went around feeling guilty all the time. They confessed their sins to priests and did penances, but still believed they would also have to suffer in purgatory.

#### **What Luther (and other reformers) learned**

As he studied his Bible, Luther found verses like Ezekiel 18:20, "The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child. The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them."

Even more importantly, he learned that forgiveness is full and free, offered by God for the asking. Jesus taught His followers to forgive over and over, no matter how many times a person asked. In fact, in the book of Matthew alone, Jesus is recorded as talking about forgiveness 17 times! He forgives people that He heals, tells us to forgive our brothers and sisters (and not just brothers and sisters in our own family, either), and in the Lord's Prayer, He says God forgives us as we forgive others.

He told a whole parable about forgiveness in Matthew 18. A man is forgiven a huge debt he could not possibly repay, but then he refuses to forgive another man who owes him only a few dollars. He ends up going to prison after all, and Jesus finishes the parable with "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart" (Matthew 18:35).

One of the most beautiful and reassuring verses of the Bible says, (you probably know it by heart), "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and

just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, KJV).

This passage, all by itself, contains a *lot* of teaching about sin and guilt. Let’s take a closer look at it.

*If we confess...*

In Luther’s day people believed they had to confess their sins to a priest, because only a priest could forgive them (even though he might also give them a penance to “pay for” their own sins, as well.) But James 5:16 says, “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”

This passage of Scripture is teaching that we must not allow any barriers to come between us as members of the body of Christ; it is encouraging us to always recognize when we have offended someone and to make things right. There may be times when it might be important to talk to a pastor or counselor about something wrong we have done. There could be a situation where a person you have wronged would be hurt more by your confession than by not knowing; a trusted adult or spiritual leader can help you process this. At times you might only have to share with a trusted pastor or counselor, and only confess to God. But in general, we confess *to each other* what we have done against each other. Certainly, James 5:16 makes it clear that it isn’t only a priest’s prayers that are powerful and effective. Any person who is right with Christ is counted as a righteous person, and that person’s prayers are powerful.

*...our sins...*

You will notice John does not say we haven’t sinned. We *are* sinful beings, and we are born with a sinful nature that wants what we want when we want it. (You’ve noticed that, right?) Romans 3, the whole chapter, but especially verse 23, teaches that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” The whole Bible is just one story—the story of humanity deciding not to follow God but to do what we want, and of God moving heaven and earth to get us back.

We are sinners.

We need to admit that. And then:

*...he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins...*

Now, this is a little startling if you look closely at it. “Faithful,” yes. God is very faithful, far more than we deserve, and always, *always* ready to forgive the minute we run to Him. But “just”? Isn’t God’s justice that aspect of His nature which makes sure things come out even and fair? Don’t we hear about a just God who cannot abide sin and will eventually burn it out of the whole universe, along with those who refuse to let go of it? How can God’s forgiveness be just? Let’s face it—it’s *not* what we deserve!

But it’s God’s justice that came Himself, knowing we could never cover our sins. It’s God’s justice that sent His only Son because when He died, He could come back, even though He died “the second death,” that is, the eternal death. How? It’s a mystery. We only know that God, who has life in Himself, can do it, and did do it.

Now, it’s God’s justice to let us live our lives inside of Christ’s perfection, and His justice to forgive us and let us go free because Jesus, “who had no sin” was made “to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Now that’s amazing!

But that’s still not all that’s in this verse.

*...and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

We are sinners, but we can make new choices. The book of 1 John speaks a lot about not choosing to *go on sinning*. In other words, just because forgiveness is free to us, doesn’t make it easy or cheap. Jesus died for this, and we need to do our best to figure out what we’re doing wrong and do it right instead.

This is the huge difference between the forgiveness of humans and the forgiveness of God. When we sin against each other, we need to forgive each other. This does not mean to excuse the sin or pretend it didn’t happen. It doesn’t even mean “forget,” in the usual sense of forgetting. We will not forget it happened. But we will let go of it and stop thinking about it. We will especially stop trying to think of ways to “get even.” Can’t be done, even if you did try. Whole wars have been fought because Person A did something Person B didn’t like, and Person B got even, and then Person A got angrier and brought his friends and did something worse to get even, and then...you get the picture!

When we forgive, we set that person free from any attempt to get them to “pay back” that sin. There might even be consequences, but they

will not erase the sin. We can be as loving and firm as possible with that person. We can do our best to help him or her make better choices. But *we cannot cleanse from unrighteousness or change their nature.*

God can. And He promises, in this verse, that He will.

## Personal Application

Like most Christians, Adventists still sometimes give in to the temptation to believe that we can or should somehow make up for our sins. It's easier to see this for the serious mistake it is, and to stop doing it, if we recognize clearly that this attitude means we don't think Jesus' sacrifice was enough.

Really? Do we want to say that? Absolutely not! Hebrews 10:10 says, "By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all.*" And verse 14 adds that, "For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified."

Did you see that? HAS made perfect FOREVER??

Here's the part that makes it clear: "*those who are being made holy.*"

Aha. So even though Christ's sacrifice has already made us counted perfect in God's records, we are still being made holy. Still learning how to live as a child of God. Still having to confess, and ask forgiveness, and learn to make better choices.

What does all this mean to you personally? Perhaps you have a "besetting sin" it seems you can never get rid of. You may need the help of a trusted pastor or counselor to help you prayerfully find the roots of the trouble and allow God to cast them out once and for all.

Or maybe there is someone you just can't forgive. Maybe what that person did was so damaging that to forgive feels like "letting them get away with it" or saying it didn't really matter. If that's the case, you need to understand something very important—*forgiving is not excusing!* If you bump into someone in a doorway, you may say, "Oh, sorry!" But you aren't confessing sin—it was an innocent mistake. The other person says, "That's okay." And it is. No sin, no forgiveness necessary.

The only time you need forgiveness is when *there is no excuse.* When it was sin, pure and simple. The greater the sin, the greater the need for forgiveness. If the person is still a dangerous person for you to be around, then you should not be around them. You can forgive, setting the

entanglement of your own anger and pain at their sin free from your own soul, so it won't continue to hurt you. You can pray that God will bring that person to righteousness. But you don't have to keep on being close to them.

Think of it this way: If that person is not allowing God to have full sway and will continue to hurt others, then is it really a loving thing to do, to keep making yourself available for them to hurt again?

Or perhaps you are the person you find hardest to forgive. If so, you are not alone. Christians want so much to honor God that when they fail they often do find it difficult to let go of their own guilt. But God gave us guilt for only one reason. Like the pain that tells you you've burned yourself and you should move your hand, guilt tells you that you are doing wrong, and to stop. You then confess to whomever you need to confess to, ask forgiveness, make restitution if you can (understanding that does not pay for the sin), and you make a different choice and *let the guilt go!*

If you can't forgive yourself, are you saying Jesus' sacrifice was not enough for you? We are sinners. We need God. And God is there for us. Every time.

## Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the differences between forgiving and excusing until you think all in the group understand it well.
2. What is wrong with going around feeling guilty? Doesn't it make you more careful to do right?
3. Why is it so hard to forgive sometimes? Is there anything that can make it easier?
4. Do you think sometimes people forgive *too* easily and quickly? Why or why not?
5. Why is it so hard to forgive ourselves? Is that pride? Why or why not?
6. How do you know when you need help from a pastor or counselor or other trusted adult?
7. With your study/prayer partner, consider the following and seek to help and support each other as needed:
  - a) Is there someone you need to confess to? When will you do that?
  - b) Is there someone you need to forgive? When will you do that?



# God is God.

He chooses who to bless.

*He does not give discriminately to*  
those we may think are most deserving.

# God Gives.

*without any regard* to  
social, gender, or ethnic worth.

# He Gives.

because He loves. However, while there are

*no prerequisites to receiving God's grace,*  
He lovingly waits for us to give something in return.

## DAY 7

# BAPTISM INTO A NEW COVENANT

### What they believed

We have already discovered that in Martin Luther's time, people believed that baptism literally washed away sins, and that no one, not even a newborn baby, could be saved if he or she was not baptized. Luther himself continued to believe that babies should be baptized. He held that the "sacrament" (to the people of the time, this was the almost-magical power the act itself contained) "does not become invalid even though it be wrongly received or employed"—in other words, even if an adult who did not believe were baptized, it would still be valid, so it doesn't matter if babies can believe or not (*The Large Catechism, by Martin Luther, quoted in the Wittenberg Project*).<sup>1</sup>

I had a conversation with a person (not Catholic) who was horrified that Seventh-day Adventists don't baptize until the age when people can make their own decisions. "How can you withhold salvation from your children?" he asked. He truly believes that children are not saved unless they are baptized, and that baptism is what brings the salvation. He pointed out that the Bible says "Be baptized and you shall be saved." He didn't seem to notice that those verses (Mark 16:16 and Acts 16:31, for example) say "Believe and be baptized and you will be saved." How can a baby believe?

In fact, in Acts, Paul specifically tells the jailer (gaoler) and his family, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." Then he teaches them the story of Jesus, and *then* they are baptized.

### What we believe

We can never repeat it too many times: *Salvation is by grace alone, completely apart from works, including the works God commands, such as baptism.* All our works constitute the response and the evidence of our salvation obtained by grace alone, through faith.

It is certain that as we understand and accept what Jesus has done for us and accepted His free gift of salvation, we will choose to be baptized.

Why?



First, it is what Jesus did, and He is our Great Example. This is one of those stories that are so important that all four gospels tell them. We will look at Matthew's account.

*Read or have someone read Matt. 3:11.* Why does John say he baptizes?

Now read verses 13-15. Why does John try to talk Jesus out of being baptized? Does Jesus need to repent? Why does Jesus say for John to go ahead and baptize Him?

Finally, read verse 16. God clearly doesn't want anyone to miss the fact that Jesus has done the right thing and God is pleased with Him. There are other places in the Bible which go into baptism more thoroughly.

*Read or have someone read Romans 6:3-4.* What does Paul say baptism symbolizes? This whole chapter and then next two chapters are all about how to learn to live a holy life in Christ even though we have sinful natures. So Paul, even though he doesn't believe the act of baptism itself has special power, certainly wants us to understand that the *act of faith and acceptance of salvation* which baptism shows publicly puts us in touch with real, amazing power. When you can, you should study these chapters in full, especially if you worry about sin having control in your life. For now, jump to Romans 8:10 and read that. What is the power that washes away sin and teaches us to live a new life in a new covenant?

He says it even more clearly in Colossians 2:12 (if people turn there with you, remind them to keep their fingers in Romans 8): "having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead." What raised Jesus and now raises us? Be careful—it could look as though this passage says it's our faith, but notice that it says *through* our faith *in the working of God*. God raised Jesus, and God raises us. Baptism just shows the world we've said Yes.

## **Then what**

Many people, young and old, believe that baptism will somehow make it easier to live a Christian life. Just notice—what happened to Jesus right after His baptism? Six weeks of fasting, followed by heavy-duty temptation! Sometimes, life gets harder, not easier. The devil doesn't like it

when God's children make public statements of their faith. He sets out to make us fall.

Which he could easily do in about a second and a half, if we try to fight him ourselves. Fortunately, we have help. A lot of help!

*Read or have someone read Romans 8:11.* Paul says that the Holy Spirit *lives in us!*

Here is a story to help us understand the principle. Pretend you are a person who has always longed to play violin. Now, imagine that Stradivari, perhaps the greatest violin builder who ever lived, comes to your door and offers you one of his fabulous violins, free of charge. Do you say "yes, thank you!" or do you argue about trying to somehow pay for it?

Of course you say yes. He hands you the violin, and it's yours.

"Now you are a violinist," he tells you.

Awesome!

But there's a problem. You hold the violin and bow in your best imitation of others you've seen play. You draw the bow across the strings, and the most horrible wail comes out. Great. You have a violin of your very own, but you can't play it!

Stradivari asks, "Do you want me to teach you? That's part of the bargain. You get the violin free, and you get my instruction free."

What is your response?

Weekly lessons sound about right, you think. But Stradivari says no, that's not enough to make you a violinist like himself. "I'm going to move in with you. If that's okay with you..."

And still no charge? If you are a person who has always longed to play violin, would you turn this down for a single second?

We Christians have an even better offer. We are given eternal life, free of charge. We do go to weekly lessons (we call them Sabbath School and Church) but that is not enough to make us live in holy love as we long to do. We are given a live-in, perfect instructor, 24/7, free of charge!

But that's not all. The safety that our live-in Instructor gives us is still not based on how well we learn to live holy, loving lives. It's based—*forever*—on His own, perfect, sinless life. It's as if Stradivari teaches you to play, but whenever you play, he puts his hands over yours and all people hear is his perfect playing.

It's complicated. It's not that we become puppets. We do have free choice—also forever. We do learn to do things that God teaches us, and

become more loving and kind (the definition of perfection given in Luke 6:36) as we go. It's just that our salvation and eternal life *are not based—ever—on what we do, even in the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Don't turn that down!

## Personal Application

If you are already baptized and you now realize you have come to a deeper understanding and you might have made the choice without really understanding it, don't fear. God has been with you and brought you to this place. It is never too late to reaffirm your decision and ask God that your baptism takes on a real, heart-felt experience. It is your privilege and gift to ask the Holy Spirit to live in you and teach you to be loving to all people, at all times, in all places. You can also use your next chance to take communion as a recommitment ceremony between you and God.

There are a variety of reasons as to why people get baptized:

- Because their friends are.
- Because they have reached a certain age or a certain grade in school.
- Because their teacher, mother, or pastor thinks they should be.
- Because they think life will get easier or they will be better able to withstand temptation.

All these reasons could have some validity in themselves, but they will never constitute the real reason; there is only one reason to make this important choice: you have understood that Jesus died for you, rose and went to heaven to be your intercessor and to prepare a place for you. Consequently, you want to show everyone you have said Yes to His gracious gift and want to learn to live under His new covenant.

Don't misunderstand. Younger children can also be under Jesus' rule and learning to be more and more loving. I hope you always have been! But this is a new step—a crossing of a threshold between a child's faith and an adult's faith. Take it when you have prayed and studied and talked it over with God and believe it is time to take it.

Talk it over with your family, too—if possible. If you are one of those whose families will oppose your baptism or even punish or banish you, God bless you! You will need extra prayer and extra support from your Christian

community. Discuss the matter with a trusted teacher or pastor. God will show you whether you should wait a while or go ahead in faith—each situation is different. Most of all, seek to remain within the Spirit’s guiding and stay patient, humble, and loving. This might possibly lead to the salvation of your family, as well.

No matter where you are in this journey, God bless each of you.

## Discussion Questions

1. What do you believe about baptism? Have your views changed since you were younger? How?
2. Has this lesson helped you? If so, how?
3. What do you think of the violin story? Share some ideas it gave you. How are weekly divine services like music lessons? How are daily life experiences like practice? If any of you plays or sings, that person could share some insights on how this is like/unlike Christian life.
4. Are you baptized? If willing, share some of your reasons, and some of the things you have learned since then.
5. Are you not baptized yet? If willing, share your reasons and where you are now in the decision-making process.
6. Whether baptized or not, are you committed to following God’s will in your life and allowing the Holy Spirit full access? Are you going to take His “violin lessons” in how to live a loving life?
7. Within the privacy of your study/prayer partner relationship, consider the following:
8. Do you need to recommit to the Holy Spirit? How can you help each other?
9. If you are one for whom it will be difficult to be baptized because of family opposition or for another reason, ask for special prayer and wisdom as you decide. (Also consult a trusted adult.)

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<sup>1</sup>*The Large Catechism*, by Martin Luther. (1921). Retrieved from <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/catechism/web/cat-13a.html>.

## DAY 8

# JESUS COMES AGAIN!

The ultimate goal of allowing God to reform our church and us individually, from the inside out, is so that the universe can be returned (reformed) to the state it was originally intended to be. God is having unspeakable patience with the human race as it learns that He really did only make rules for its best good. He was never an arbitrary, bossy, angry God. He didn't create any commandments that weren't needed to keep His children safe. One of these days, the end of all this patience will come. Jesus will come back, and instead of a gentle carpenter from Galilee, He'll be an unspeakably powerful ruler—the Most High God.

What should we think about this?

### **What they believed**

Because most people in Martin Luther's day thought God was angry and vengeful, not only making up rules just because He wanted to, but also always watching for every little breaking of one of those rules, they were terribly afraid of the Great Day of Judgment. The whole reason the young Martin Luther tried so hard to be sinless, and punished himself if he sinned, was because he thought that if he didn't, he would have to spend a long time being punished much worse in purgatory before he could go to heaven—if he ever made it to heaven at all. More than anything, he dreaded the day when God would come to judge the wicked. Because he was pretty sure *he* was wicked.

### **What Luther learned**

When Luther learned about grace, and realized what a loving God we have, everything changed. He learned that yes, he was wicked, but that Jesus came to save him while he was still a sinner (Romans 5:6), that salvation was entirely by the grace of God—a gift—and that only Jesus and the Holy Spirit had the power to make Luther loving instead of wicked. In fact, when he was worrying about his own sins all the time, he had no energy left to be loving to anyone else! Have you ever noticed that?

When Luther learned all this, he stopped being afraid of the end of time. He knew that judgment fit right in with all the other teachings; that judgment was only the end of what God had begun, and was only to be feared if one had determinedly said NO to God.

He even called the Last Day “lieber jüngster tag,” which literally means “beloved youngest day.” It’s an interesting twist—it seems that the very last day of all time would be thought of as old, not young. But Luther knew the last day was also the first day—the first day of a time in which all things will be new.

## What Jesus said

After the Last Supper with His disciples, Jesus was very sorrowful, because He knew His time with them was coming to an end, and they still understood so little of what He had been trying to teach them. In the time it took for them to walk from the upper room where they had eaten Passover to the Garden of Gethsemane where, little though they knew it, Jesus would face His greatest battle, He tried to teach them all the things He still wanted most for them to understand. One of those things was that He would come back.

*Read or have someone read John 14:1-3. We are all familiar with these verses. You may want to recite them together with the reader, even if the version is a little different. The passage says the same things in any language:*

- Don't be afraid.
- You can trust both My Father and Me.
- His house has room enough for all who will come.
- I am going to make *your* place ready.
- ***I will come again and take you there with Me!***

*[You might have a scribe write these up on a board or poster. You might each write them down on a card or paper and put them somewhere you can see them frequently.]*

When the world begins to get us down, when things look so wrong it's hard to believe that anything will ever change, we can comfort ourselves by reading these words again. They're not something a disciple said about Jesus. They're not words by Peter or Paul or James to encourage us. Jesus Himself said these words.

*Jesus.*

You can trust this promise.

## What the disciples said

Of course, it is also encouraging to read what Jesus' followers said about this subject. *Let's look at 2 Peter 3:8-9.* What are the encouraging things Peter reminded his readers of?

- With God, 1000 years passes like a day. And yet, He can do as much in one day as we could do in 1000 years, listening to each prayer on many worlds, helping millions of followers, calling millions of sinners.
- God is not slow, He is patient.
- God does not want *one single person* to be lost.

When it seems as if Jesus is taking too long, and will *never* get here, read these verses again. Then ask what you might do to help others to "come to repentance."

*Now look up 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18.* In the verses right before this, it is clear that Paul is encouraging people who have lost loved ones in death. Have you lost people you love? It's hard, isn't it? Just imagine how much harder it would be if you didn't know if you would ever see those faces again.

Some of the people reading Paul's letter were not sure. Perhaps sometimes you are not sure. When that happens, read these words again.

- Jesus' coming is a Big Event. It's loud, with a loud trumpet and the voice of the archangel.
- The dead in Christ rise up to meet Him in the air. (Can you imagine those reunions?)
- Then those who are still alive on earth are "caught up together with them in the clouds."
- We will be with God forever.

Forever! It's so exciting just to think about, and we really have no idea at all what it will be like.

But...

## How do we get there?

Let's go back to John 14. If we continue the conversation Jesus was having with His disciples, we will find the answer to this question. *Read or have someone read John 14:4-6.*

What is the question Thomas asks? Have you ever asked that question?

What is Jesus' answer?

**I AM** the Way. Those first two words, you know, are God's family name. In Hebrew, it's YHWH, often pronounced Yahweh or Jehovah, and it means "I am" or "I am that I am." In this case, Jesus is answering Thomas' question by saying, "I know how to get there. Just follow Me."

In one way, Jesus is the One we follow. We want to follow His path and live as He lived. In another way, He *is* The Path. Remember when we found in Hebrews that His body was the curtain that was torn so that we could enter the presence of God?

If you read the next several verses, you will see Jesus trying to explain that everything He did in His life on earth was done because He lived in the Father and the Father lived in Him. It's not a thing we humans can really understand, but it is a reality made possible through the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We can just accept it and ask for it to be true for us. Thus, eventually when Jesus comes to take us home, it will be an eternal extension of the eternal kind of life that we will have started to live in him in the here and now.

If we live in Jesus, and Jesus lives in us, every day of our lives, then when He goes home, He'll take us with Him.

## Being ready

Adventists often talk of "being ready for Jesus to come." Sometimes this leads to the same kind of anxiety that Luther and the people of his day were experiencing. What if I'm not doing enough, or not doing it right? What if I'm sinning and don't even know it? What if I do something wrong and right then I die, or Jesus comes? I'll never be good enough!

When my little girl was only seven, she came home from church school afraid that she was somehow "not ready" for Jesus to come. I'll ask you what I asked her:

Do you believe Jesus died for you and wants to save you?

Do you believe He loves you?

Do you love Him back?

Have you asked Him to live in your heart?

Are you learning to listen to Him every day?



Then you're ready. Period.

The last day is not something to fear and dread. Even the Old Testament, in Daniel 7:22, says that God will judge "in favor of the holy people of the Most High." That's you. That's me. *If* we have said Yes to God and are allowing Him to live in us and work out His will, He will judge in our favor!

Martin Luther would have liked the book Ellen White wrote 300 years after his time: *The Great Controversy*. The very last passage of that book is one of the most beloved of all Mrs. White's writings.

*"The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love" (p. 678).<sup>1</sup>*

God is love. That's the whole point. That's what every principle that Luther discovered, every principle we have looked at during this Week of Prayer, is all about.

Because God is love, He has given us His Holy Bible, and we can trust it more than anything humans have ever said.

Because God is love, He sent His Son to save us, for no other reason than because He loves us that much!

Because God is love, Jesus can be the center of our lives and prayer can be the fuel that keeps us burning brightly in a dark world.

Because God is love, He calls all His followers to be priests of His grace, sharing the joyful news with everyone.

Because God is love, He gave us a beautiful ceremony we call Communion, and it can help us to develop a true community of love.

Because God is love, He forgives every sin we confess, without scolding or punishing (though there may still be consequences of our sin. That's loving, too).

Because God is love, we can choose to be baptized into His body and live in unity with His Spirit in our hearts leading us "into all truth" (John 16:13).

Because God is love, He will never leave us here. Jesus is coming to get us and take us home forever!

That, as Luther learned, is not something to fear. It is something to look forward to with great joy.

## Discussion Questions

1. When you think of the Second Coming and of the Judgment Day, how do you feel? Why? (Tell the truth. If you are afraid, this is a safe place and time to talk about that.)
2. Does this lesson change your attitude? Why or why not?
3. It is only good sense for sinful humans to be afraid of the judgment of a Holy God. What is the only thing that makes it possible for us to be unafraid?
4. What are the things you do every day to be sure that you are paying attention to the Holy Spirit's leading?
5. Which was your favorite of the passages about the Second Coming? Do you have others you like even better?
6. Here at the end of this Week of Prayer, have you made the decision to follow God in every moment of your life? If not, what would help you to come to that decision? Prayerfully discuss this with your study/prayer partner.

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<sup>1</sup>White, E. G. (1967). *The Great Controversy*. Phoenix, AZ: Inspiration Books, 678.

# Impact Europe

**Global Youth Ministries Congress  
Stuttgart, Germany  
July 30-August 4, 2018**

***To Equip, Empower, and Engage a  
Generation of Spirit-Filled Leaders***  
to pass on the Legacy of Reformation.

**Every young person is called to leadership and needs to be there.**

## CREATING YOUR OWN PRAYER NOTEBOOK

*(note to leader/designer: if you are printing this in book form, a good idea would be to put this at the back of the book or somewhere where it can be accessed easily by the students.)*

We highly recommend that you create a Prayer Notebook because in a few days, weeks, months, and even years, you can look back and reflect on the different ways that God has answered your prayer requests.

1. **GET A NOTEBOOK/3-RING BINDER.** Any notebook or binder will do, as long as it has paper and no writing in it. It could be an exercise book, loose-leaf writing paper, or a diary with a decent amount of pages in it, at least 75 so it will last for a year (around 4 days a page).
2. **FIND A HIDING SPOT.** God doesn't want you to show off your praying, so don't go bragging about it. You will be writing down your prayers in here, even the personal ones that you don't want anyone else knowing about. It's good if no one ever knows where your journal is. It is even better if they don't even know that it exists. You cannot find something you're not looking for. If any family members find out about it, (you don't want them to know all your secrets) tell them politely to not read it and not tell anyone else about your journal. Tell them that it is very special and that you would appreciate it if it all will be between God and you.
3. **WRITE AN ENTRY.** It doesn't matter how you write it. Just write it. Make sure to begin each entry with the date, then the request. Leave 2-3 lines after each entry to write when the prayer is answered—lightly cross it out, add the answer and the date it was answered.

When you're writing, don't leave out anything. Just say your prayer that is going through your mind. Later on you'll want to remember what was happening on the day you wrote. Write exactly what you would say if you were talking to Him face to face. Just talk to God. Yes, this is where you

can share all your goals, dreams, and desires that God has placed in your heart and watch Him work in your life.

**TIP:** Writing in your notebook is another way of saying a prayer to God. You don't have to repeat yourself about the things that make you really worried; God answers before we even think to ask: *"I will answer them before they even call to me. While they are still talking about their needs, I will go ahead and answer their prayers!"* (Isaiah 65:24). The whole point of prayer is for you to share everything with God; each new thing you share will bring you both closer to each other as the days and weeks go by.

4. **ANSWERED PRAYERS.** Every now and again, maybe monthly or quarterly, go back and read your notebook. Make sure to write down any answers you've received. You will realize that prayer works. When God has answered your prayer, sometimes you will know, but other times you wouldn't know since it may be different from what you wanted or expect. Those of you who are tech-savvy just google "creating a prayer journal or prayer notebook" and get ideas to create your own. You can even turn your calendar on your phone or computer into a prayer notebook.

Below are two helpful websites in creating your own prayer notebook.

***How to Make a Faith Notebook:***

<http://thesethreegirlies.blogspot.com/2012/01/pages-of-faith.html>

***Greeting Card Prayer Box:***

<http://www.inlieuofpreschool.com/greeting-card-prayer-box/>



# Our Small Group Covenant

*I agree that this group exists as a safe place for me to be myself, ask questions about my faith, learn to love others, and receive support and encouragement in my walk with God.*

## WE AGREE TO:

1. Love each other.
2. Be in harmony with one another.
3. Speak the truth in love.
4. Welcome and accept each person.
5. Be kind to each other.
6. Not judge each other.
7. Pray for one another.
8. Attend each small group meetings when we can.
9. Not hate one another.
10. Be respectful of everyone's opinion (there are no dumb questions).
11. Encourage and build up each other.
12. Keep my advice to the minimum.
13. Forgive one another.
14. Not grumble against each other.
15. Not give up meeting together.
16. Not speak about group members when they are not present.

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Print Name

Signature

Date

# GLOBAL YOUTH DAY

March 18th, 2017



...be the sermon...





## Plan a Homecoming Celebration

### Form a Barnabas Support Group

The Bible says, "Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and strong in faith. And many people were brought to the Lord" (Acts 11:24, NLT). Barnabas strongly believed in giving people a second chance. When Paul was converted the Church was afraid to just throw the door open and let him in. It was Barnabas who put his reputation on the line for the terrorist-turned-Christian, Paul. When Paul decided that he did not want to take John Mark on a journey with him, because he had let him down before, it was Barnabas who decided to give the young John Mark, who some thought of as a failure, a second chance. So strong was their disagreement that Barnabas and Paul separated for a while. Later on Paul saw the value in this young man, and even sent for him to help in his missionary journey.

Sometimes young people who make mistakes just need someone to believe in them. Form a **Barnabas Support Group** to encourage and help those who may have grown up in the church, but decided to leave. You don't need to know the reason. Just decide to pray, five minutes a day, every day for any young persons you know who have left the church and plan the best way to reach out to them. Find a way to share testimonies from Global Youth Day and Week of Prayer with them and invite them to come for the closing program.

### *Will you be a Barnabas today?*

Will you encourage a young person to come back Home?

### *Help them find their way back home!*

for ideas on planning your Homecoming program visit:

[gcyouthministries.org](http://gcyouthministries.org)

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