

Adventist World

**Week of
Prayer**

**Kingdom
Values and
Christian
Living**
Page 6

**The
Incomparable
Christ**
Page 12

**Life-changing
Encounters**
Page 16



The Journey Home

Faithfulness in
Christian Lifestyle



Week of Prayer

3 First Sabbath

“Your Word Is a Lamp to My Feet”

Ted N. C. Wilson

6 Sunday

Kingdom Values and Christian Living

Audrey Andersson

8 Monday

Learning Holy Living

Alain Coralie

10 Tuesday

Enjoy Life to the Full!

Torben Bergland

12 Wednesday

The Incomparable Christ

Angel Manuel Rodriguez

16 Thursday

Life-changing Encounters

Klaus Popa

18 Friday

He Made All Things Beautiful

Gina Wahlen

20 Second Sabbath

Living in the End-time

Ellen G. White

23 Children’s Readings

Living for Our Best Friend Jesus

Linda Mei Lin Koh

Faithfulness in Christian Lifestyle

BY TED N. C. WILSON

Just before His ascension, Jesus Christ gave His followers an important commission—to reach the world for Him (see Matt. 28:18-20).

Our theme this week is “Reach the World: Faithfulness in Christian Lifestyle.” What does Christian lifestyle have to do with reaching the world for Christ? A lot. Because who we are as Christians is revealed by how we live. What are our values and priorities? How do we spend our time and resources? What kind of life are we living?

“What is it to be a Christian? It is to be like Christ,” stated Ellen White.* He is our example, and only through His grace and power can we be faithful to His calling as we lean completely on Christ and His Word.



During this week we will explore some very important topics, beginning with the Bible as the foundation for Christian lifestyle. We’ll look at how kingdom values inform Christian living, and how Christian virtues guide our lives. Health is a very important aspect of the Christian lifestyle. As we see Christ as our model, we’ll be truly encouraged and inspired. Christian lifestyle and media and sexuality

and the Christian life will also be addressed. We’ll end this special week with “Living in the End-time: Christian lifestyle and last-day events” by Ellen White.

I hope you’ll join me in exploring the connection between Christian lifestyle and reaching the world for Christ. Let’s humbly pray for the promised latter rain of the Holy Spirit and the power only He can give in helping us to live our lives for Him.

* Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases* (Silver Spring, Md.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), vol. 9, p. 230, egwwritings.org/?ref=en_9MR.230.1¶=59.1290.

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We believe in the power of prayer, and we welcome prayer requests that can be shared at our weekly staff worship every Wednesday morning. Send your requests to prayer@adventistworld.org, and pray for us as we work together to advance God’s kingdom.



First Sabbath

“Your Word Is a Lamp to My Feet”

The Bible as the foundation for a Christian lifestyle

BY TED N. C. WILSON

It was a pivotal time in my life. After graduating from Takoma Academy in Maryland, United States, I decided to continue my studies at La Sierra College (now University) in California, more than 4,100 kilometers (2,600 miles) away. After I embarked on this new and important phase of life, my father sent me a notecard in a letter with the following quotation, penned in his own handwriting:

“Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, ‘Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee.’ This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ.”¹

Not only did I appreciate the time and care my father showed in sharing this with me, but it also meant so much to receive such powerful spiritual instruction from the Spirit of Prophecy. This has endeared the writings of Ellen White to me from that time on.

I kept that handwritten quotation in my Bible for years until that precious Bible was lost. I asked my father to rewrite the same quotation some years ago, and I still have that second version in my Bible. It's such a meaningful quotation, and a reminder of my father's spiritual concern for me. Never dismiss as unessential your spiritual focus and invested time directed toward your children. It will pay spiritual dividends through the influence and power of the Holy Spirit.

THE POWER OF GOD'S WORD

As we consecrate ourselves to God and surrender our plans to Him each day, how important it is to take time to listen to Him speak through the Bible. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps. 119:105).

In today's world many humanistic philosophies vying for our attention ultimately lead us down a very dark path. But the trustworthiness of God's Word is proven. It lights our way and gives us reliable, divine direction. It provides the very foundation for developing and maintaining a relationship with Jesus Christ, and for learning what it means to live the life He intends for us. It's Christ's living word—timeless truth that transcends all human cultures and points us to the culture of heaven.

When confronted by Satan, Jesus boldly stated, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"

(Matt. 4:4). This tells us that every part of Scripture is important. And while we don't claim God dictated the Bible word for word, we accept it as fully inspired by His Spirit. Peter made this very clear: "And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place . . . ; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:19-21).

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

While praying for His disciples (and for us), Christ indicated the power of the Word when He stated, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:17).

In a world in which truth is considered relative, based upon one's own lived experience, Christ boldly proclaims that His Word—the Bible—is solid, unchangeable truth. Through the power of His Holy Spirit, His truth works on our hearts, changing and sanctifying us.

This is why the Bible is foundational to a Christian lifestyle. It defines for us what it means to be a follower of Christ (see Matt. 5). It gives us godly role models and reveals that "the way of the unfaithful is hard" (Prov. 13:15). It provides timeless wisdom, making us "wise for salvation" (2 Tim. 3:15), yet it's simple enough that even a child can understand. Through history and prophecy we see how God has led in the past, and are assured that what is yet to be will come to pass (Joshua 21:45; 2 Cor. 1:20). Through the pages of Scripture we learn of our origin and of our destiny (Gen. 1:1; Rev. 21:1, 7; Rev. 22:17).

It's through Scripture and prayer that we come to know God. "If you

Through Scripture and prayer we come to know God.

would become acquainted with the Saviour, study the Holy Scriptures," we are told in *Steps to Christ*. "Fill the whole heart with the words of God. They are the living water, quenching your burning thirst. They are the living bread from heaven."²

Ellen White explains, "The Bible was not written for the scholar alone; on the contrary, it was designed for the common people. The great truths necessary for salvation are made as clear as noonday; and none will mistake and lose their way except those who follow their own judgment instead of the plainly revealed will of God."³

She then warns, "We should not take the testimony of any man as to what the Scriptures teach, but should study the words of God for ourselves."⁴

ITS OWN INTERPRETER

This method is supported by the biblical-historical (or the biblical-grammatical) approach to reading the Word of God, as described in the "Methods of Bible Study" document voted by the world church.⁵ This carefully reviewed method of Bible study allows the Bible to be its own interpreter, not the individual or culture, as critical methods of Bible study encourage readers to do. This

method is further explained in the book *The Great Controversy*:

“The language of the Bible should be explained according to its obvious meaning, unless a symbol or figure is employed. . . . If men would but take the Bible as it reads, if there were no false teachers to mislead and confuse their minds, a work would be accomplished that would make angels glad and that would bring into the fold of Christ thousands upon thousands who are now wandering in error.”⁶

For centuries, faithful men and women have taken great risks in accepting the Bible as it reads. Some even gave their lives for their faithfulness to Scripture. Today the book itself is readily available. Each year more than 100 million Bibles are printed, and YouVersion, a downloadable Bible app, has more than 100 million total downloads.⁷ This is in addition to the many other online versions available.

BELIEVING GOD’S WORD

Clearly, many people believe it’s important to *have* a Bible, but how many believe it’s important to *read* it, *meditate* upon it, and *follow* its counsel?

The Jews in Berea definitely thought so. “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

And so can we. Daily Bible reading coupled with prayer is the foundation of our spiritual experience. If we are not connecting with heaven, it’s impossible for us to grow spiritually (see 2 Peter 3:18). But what a privilege is ours to reach out to God every day, knowing that He longs to commune with us.

I try to start each day by dropping to my knees as I get out of bed.

I place myself in God’s hands, asking for wisdom and the Holy Spirit in my life. The Lord is never-failing in His provisions for us. I try to read from the Bible in a systematic manner following the Believe His Prophets⁸ reading plan, and from other sections of the Bible, followed by the Spirit of Prophecy. I have found it’s also helpful to study the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* and other forms of study resources that strengthen one’s walk with the Lord.

I always pray before reading God’s Word, since studying the Bible should never be done without prayer, asking for the Holy Spirit’s guidance. I’m so grateful for the “Written Word,” which is the inscribed embodiment of the “Living Word,” Jesus Christ.

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, never allow anyone to dissuade you from the importance of studying daily God’s inspired written Word. Drink in the deep truths of Scripture and the instruction found in the Spirit of Prophecy. Your spiritual life will be enriched beyond measure. As we commune with God, He will transform us, as He did with Enoch, when we daily walk with Him.

“In the midst of a life of active labor, Enoch steadfastly maintained his communion with God. The greater and more pressing his labors, the more constant and earnest were his prayers. . . . He would withdraw, to spend a season in solitude, hungering and thirsting for that divine knowledge which God alone can impart. Communing thus with God, Enoch came more and more to reflect the divine image. . . .”

“We, too, are to walk with God. When we do this, our faces will be lighted up by the brightness of His presence, . . . we shall speak of His power, saying, Praise God. Good is the Lord, and good is the word of

the Lord. . . . And those who will be translated at the close of time will be those who commune with God on earth.”⁹

What an amazing privilege we have—to commune with God every day through the ways He has given. And what a joy to know that one day soon He will come to take us home. ©

Questions for Reflection

1. How can we make personal Bible study more engaging? Think of five creative ways of studying God’s Word.
2. How do we deal with difficult passages in Scripture? What would be Jesus’ approach?
3. How can we transmit the importance of connecting to God’s Word to the next generation of Adventists?

¹ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1892), p. 70.

² *Ibid.*, p. 88.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ “Methods of Bible Study” document, www.adventist.org/articles/methods-of-bible-study/.

⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1892), p. 598.

⁷ “29 Good Bible Sales Statistics,” BrandonGaille Small Business & Marketing Advice, <https://brandongaille.com/27-good-bible-sales-statistics/>.

⁸ This Bible reading plan can be accessed at www.believehis-prophets.org.

⁹ Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1955), p. 20.

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Sunday

Kingdom Values and Christian Living

BY AUDREY ANDERSSON

Seventh-day Adventists are found in most countries of the world. Revelation 14:12 tells us why. This apocalyptic passage describes two key values and truths that measure Christian faith. They are saving faith in Jesus as humanity's only Saviour, and obedience to God's commandments. These eternal values create peace, joy, and happiness in human life.

THE CALL TO LOYALTY

Loyalty to Jesus as Lord is critical to the credibility of our witness. Disloyal living means total spiritual failure.

Ellen White observed: "We deny Jesus Christ as the One who taketh away the sins of the world if we do not, after accepting the truth, reveal to the world the sanctifying effects of the truth on our own characters. If

we are not better men and women, if we are not more kindhearted, more pitiful, more courteous, more full of tenderness and love, if we do not manifest to others the love that led Jesus to the world on His mission of mercy, we are not witnesses to the world of the power of Jesus Christ."

A LOVING EXAMPLE

We cannot convincingly share Jesus' love with others before we experience it ourselves. We cannot share what we do not have. The world is full of people searching for love and acceptance, longing for peace and happiness. They quickly know if we are fakes. But sincerity wins many hearts.

Tom was the son of Christian parents. He was baptized at 15, along with his friends. It was what everyone expected him to do. He was not really converted. He married a beautiful Christian woman, but that did not keep him from joining those who travel on the wide road that leads to destruction. Many years later his wife invited a pastor to have a Bible study group in their home. Tom was not interested, but he did not argue, as he and the pastor were friends.

Unknown to everyone, Tom listened to the Bible studies from another room. After a few weeks, he joined the group, sitting inconspicuously near the door. He witnessed the changes in the life of his wife and the other group members. Tom loved their honesty in admitting mistakes and making changes in their lives. One night he started to cry. Not ordinary tears, but tears of joy and sorrow. He testified: "I never understood the Adventist message. Listening to these studies, I saw Jesus in a new light. God has given me a second chance and a new pair of eyes. I see things differently."

Profession has convincing power only when it is lived out in real life.

He was baptized because he discovered a compelling love that was genuine and infectious.

A HEALING OBEDIENCE

Obedience is a much maligned and misunderstood truth. Obeying God's commandments ultimately leads to the healing of humanity and always benefits the individuals who practice it. It's a true expression of our love for Jesus. John wrote: "This is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

A young woman, age 18, left home for university. During the first week she discovered that one of her lectures was on a Friday evening after sunset. She went to see the lecturer, explaining that as a Seventh-day Adventist she kept the seventh-day Sabbath and would be unable to attend Friday evening lectures. The lecturer expressed his disappointment but refused to alter the time. Rather than being intimidated by the difficult situation, the young woman took the problem to God.

A week later the lecturer informed the class that he had

changed the lecture time to Friday morning. Unknown to her, he had contacted church headquarters and asked, "Is it true that Seventh-day Adventists observe the Saturday Sabbath from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday?" Learning that this was correct, he altered the time of the lecture.

The result was a double blessing. It confirmed the young woman in her faith; it influenced her lecturer and led him to respect her; and it acquainted him with the Adventist faith and lifestyle.

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR BLESSING

The values and truths of God's kingdom have no power to bless those who know them, and influence those who do not know them, unless they are joyfully lived out in the life and behavior of church members. Profession has convincing power only when it is lived out in real life. When we do what is right, honest, and true, and stand up for the biblical values of God's kingdom, we create possibilities for God not only to act on our behalf, but to touch the lives of others.

Consider this query from the psalmist: "Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent? Who may live on your holy mountain?" (Ps. 15:1). The answer is clear: "The one whose walk is blameless, who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from their heart; whose tongue utters no slander, who does no wrong to a neighbor, and casts no slur on others; who despises a vile person but honors those who fear the Lord" (verses 2-4).

Our world is fractured and confused. This is true wherever Seventh-day Adventists are found. In order to live out our faith in public, we must prepare and grow it in private. God challenged Jeremiah to "go up and down the

streets of Jerusalem," looking for one person who dealt honestly and sought the truth (Jer. 5:1). Today God still looks for such people: those who will deal honestly with the things they discover in God's written word, who live out truth, have faith in Jesus, and walk in His commandments.

Each of us may respond positively to Him saying, "Dear Lord, I will be that faithful person. Help me to be what I should be as a true Christian." Our response creates opportunities for God to bless us and those we touch. This is our delight as Seventh-day Adventists. ©

Questions for Reflection

1. How can we live our lives in a manner that reflects our faith?
2. What do we need to change in our lives so that our testimony is credible to others?
3. Only the Holy Spirit's work can truly fix our lives. How can we find the courage to set Him free to do just that? What would stop us from responding to Him?

* Ellen G White, *That I May Know Him* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1964), p. 306.

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Monday

Learning Holy Living

Christian lifestyle and the fruit of the Spirit

BY ALAIN CORALIE

Can there be an “Association of Adventist Bank Robbers”? Such a question, you might say, is ridiculous because there are certain modes of life that you cannot associate with Adventism. How then should we live out our faith? This question begs for a biblical answer, yet falsehoods abound. Let’s consider two of them.

GETTING IT WRONG: TWO CRUCIAL FALSEHOODS

For some, a distinct Christian lifestyle does not really matter, because they refuse to see the link between belief and lifestyle, doctrine and behavior. Then there are those who focus only on rules and regulations, displacing Christ from the center of their religious experience.

The apostle Paul faced a similar situation in Galatia. Some Christians believed that freedom in Christ dispensed with ethical living (Gal.

5:13–6:10). There were also others who believed they could earn God’s favor by following obsolete Old Testament regulations, including circumcision (Gal. 1:1–5:12).

Paul challenged both positions. To those who thought that works are unimportant, the apostle stressed that God’s people will be judged according to their deeds (Gal. 6:7, 8). To those who believed that works earn them divine merit, Paul emphasized that “a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal. 2:16). The apostle reckoned that unless a Christian lifestyle is rooted in the gospel, it becomes cheap grace at best and perfectionism at worst.

The key to Christian living, according to Paul, resides in a radical commitment to Christ through the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit. In Galatians 5:22, 23, he uses the expression “fruit of the Spirit” to refer to virtues or character traits produced by the Holy Spirit. Paul lists nine virtues that make up the “fruit of the Spirit.” These include “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness self-control” (NASB).¹ All these virtues represent the character of Christ that we are called to manifest as His followers.

As the term indicates, the fruit of the Spirit is not human-made but God-given. Just as apple trees cannot bear bananas and pigs cannot fly, it’s impossible for sinful human beings to produce godly virtues by themselves. Only God can produce and express His character in us.

Hence the question: Do we share the biblical vision of a Christian lifestyle? The truth is that we cannot exalt Christ in our families, in our churches, and in our communities unless such virtues as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness

The fruit of the Spirit is not human-made but God-given.

[and] self-control” become an integral part of our Christian character and lifestyle.

GETTING IT RIGHT: THREE VITAL TRUTHS

Now the question arises: How can the fruit of the Spirit take root in our hearts and be manifested in our daily living? In Galatians 5:24, 25, Paul points us to three related ways in which we manifest true Christian lifestyle as fruitful disciples.

First, we manifest true Christian lifestyle as fruitful disciples when we constantly remind ourselves that “we belong to Christ Jesus” (verse 24, NASB). To bear fruit we need to be daily connected to Christ (see John 15:5). In fact, to be a Christian means more than believing certain doctrines and adhering to certain rules; it means a radical transformation of the heart that leads to obeying God by faith.

Notice that Paul puts love at the head of the list of virtues, because he views this supreme virtue as the decisive evidence of an authentic Christian lifestyle. Elsewhere he admonished the Galatians:

“Through love, serve one another” (Gal. 5:13). The point is: our daily living can powerfully proclaim the gospel. Ellen White put it this way: “There is an eloquence far more powerful than the eloquence of words in the quiet, consistent life of

a pure, true Christian. What a man is has more influence than what he says. . . . The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian.”² A true Christian lifestyle is Christ-centered.

Second, we manifest true Christian lifestyle as fruitful disciples when we crucify our “sinful nature with its passions and desires” (verse 24). As Christians, we cannot indulge in the works of the flesh (verses 19-21) and claim to be heaven-bound. We need to die to self. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” As believers, we take the responsibility of uprooting all the weeds that threaten to choke our spiritual life so that the fruit of the Spirit may flourish. In practical terms, this means that any habit, practice, or vice that feeds the old life of self-seeking and self-indulgence needs to be put to death. A true Christian lifestyle is self-denying.

Third, we manifest true Christian lifestyle as fruitful disciples when we “walk in the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25). To walk in the Spirit means to be controlled by the Holy Spirit in every area of our lives, from our innermost thoughts and emotions to our daily relationships and interactions. This involves being shaped and energized by the Word, prayer, worship, fellowship, and service. It’s important to remember that any Christian lifestyle that is not led by the Spirit will fail miserably. As we keep in step with the Spirit, we must make a conscious decision to starve the old man and cultivate the fruit of the Spirit.

With divine power enabling our effort, we will do what is right. Our lifestyle values will not resemble or conform to popular practice. When the Spirit convicts us of our wrong choices (in what we say, sing, observe for entertainment, etc.), we

will humbly seek forgiveness. In contrast, when it seems to us that we are making progress, we will refrain from a critical and judgmental attitude toward fellow pilgrims who might be struggling in their walk with God. A true Christian lifestyle is Spirit-led.

ADDING IT UP: ONE PRINCIPLE

The fruit of the Spirit, daily put into practice, exalts Christ in our thinking, feeling, and behaving. Only a living relationship with Christ can bring to fruition a new way of being and living that glorifies God and draws people to Him. To sum up, this is what constitutes true Christian lifestyle: being fruitful disciples who reflect the likeness of Christ in our character and our conduct. May this be our experience! ©

Questions for Reflection

1. Why is it important to demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit?
2. Can you think of specific lifestyle changes the Spirit seems to be urging you to make?
3. What would your life be like if you gave God’s Spirit absolute control of your life?

¹ Scripture quotations marked NASB are from the New American Standard Bible, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

² Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), pp. 469, 470.

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Tuesday

Enjoy Life to the Full!

Living God's health principles

BY TORBEN BERGLAND

We're made for a better world. We're made for better lives. When God created this world and placed humankind in the midst of it, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Gen. 1:31, NIV). God designed the world, and the life in it, to be perfectly good. We were created for lives that in every action, thought, and feeling would reflect, proclaim, celebrate, and enjoy the goodness of God. That was and is God's intention and desire for our lives in this world.

But something went wrong.

THE FALL

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve chose to deviate from God's design for life. Their actions plunged their own existence and the rest of creation into unfathomable pain and suffering. Had they only listened, had they only been faithful, then all the evil that followed would have been avoided. But they trusted themselves rather than God, and listened to the devil. Since then, the story of humankind has been one of unfaithfulness to God's design for life, of not trusting God, of pain and suffering, and of death.

THE RESCUE

But God hasn't abandoned us. God is continuously trying to reach every person in the world. God's intention and desire for goodness in this world and in our lives still stands. But the devil is on a mission to attack everything that is God's—everything God created, everything that's good, everything that's life. We're living in the midst of this great controversy between Christ and Satan, between good and evil, between life and death. Christ is seeking to save, while the devil is seeking to destroy. We all have fallen victim to the attacks of the devil. We all have gone astray and walked our own way (Isa. 53:6). But wherever the devil goes to destroy, God is already there to seek and to save (Luke 19:10). God hasn't abandoned us or the world.

"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (verse 10),¹ Jesus said. His mission was and is to counter and overcome the evil of the devil, who "comes only to steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10). Christ's mission in the world is life, and life in abundance. The devil's mission is death. There's no life in evil. In evil there's only death. Life can be had only in Christ. Life can

Only He who made life can prescribe what is good.

be had only in what is good. Life—and life in abundance—can be had only in faithfulness to God’s design for the world and life in it.

Since the beginning, the devil has been “a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). His master trick has been to convince men and women that what he offers is better, more desirable, more exciting, more satisfying. He makes what is bad, sinful, and evil look good. His great deception is that what he offers sets us free and adds to life, while what God offers limits and detracts from life.

But it’s a lie. Real life, true life, can be had only in what God has created, blessed, and given. Only what God gives provides for our real needs and satisfies our deepest longings.

“No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly” (Ps. 84:11). God is the only giver, sustainer, and healer of life. Only He who made life can prescribe what is good. The Bible is His revelation to humanity of what is good. The principles for living that

the Holy Spirit convicts us of when we prayerfully read and reflect on Scripture are God’s prescription to you and me for the best life we can live in this world. From the story of Creation to the promise of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1), from Genesis to Revelation, “He has shown you, O man, what is good” (Micah 6:8, NKJV). He has withheld no good thing from us.

While we live in the midst of the raging conflict between good and evil, remembering Eden and longing for heaven, we need daily healing and restoration. God has prescribed how we should live, and Ellen White reflects on the principles of this lifestyle in the book *The Ministry of Healing*. She says, “Pure air, sunlight, abstemiousness, rest, exercise, proper diet, the use of water, trust in divine power—these are the true remedies.”²

These principles for healthful living, however, are under attack. Ellen White counsels that “every practice which destroys the physical, mental, or spiritual energies is sin, and that health is to be secured through obedience to the laws that God has established for the good of all mankind.”³ She continues: “Let it be made plain that the way of God’s commandments is the way of life. God has established the laws of nature, but His laws are not arbitrary exactions. Every ‘Thou shalt not,’ whether in physical or in moral law, implies a promise. If we obey it, blessing will attend our steps. God never forces us to do right, but He seeks to save us from the evil and lead us to the good.”⁴

As the people of Israel stood at the border to the Promised Land, Moses challenged and pleaded with them:

“See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience

to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase. . . . Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life” (Deut. 30:15-20, NIV).

We stand today at the border of another Promised Land. We live in the last days before the coming of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1). The challenge and plea to every one of us now and every day is this: Love God, listen to His voice, walk in obedience, and hold fast to Him. Then we will know what is good, and we can choose life. ©

Questions for Reflection:

1. In what areas do you most sense the devil’s attacks on your life?
2. What is God calling you to change in your lifestyle so that you can enjoy more fullness of life?
3. How can you seek power from God and support from others as you commit to making life changes?

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, Bible texts in this article are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission.

² Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), p. 127.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

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Wednesday

The Incomparable





Christ

Our model for Christian lifestyle

BY ÁNGEL MANUEL RODRÍGUEZ

The elderly apostle John wrote, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3).¹ He added, “Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did” (1 John 2:6). The apostle depicts Christians as those who abide in, or are united to, Christ. The Christian life consists of walking daily with the Lord.

To abide in Jesus, believers are called to live as Christ lived. John defined the process of abiding in Christ as having fellowship with the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and with fellow believers. The Christian life is based on a common reality—the sacrificial death of Jesus. But Christianity is demonstrated in how we live for God and for others.

Jesus’ life was characterized by *transformational* power. We access that by listening to what He said (“what we have heard”) and by doing what He did (“what we have seen”)—in other words, modeling both His *speech* and His *actions*. He is the ultimate and supreme display of how Christians should live—to walk as He walked.

JESUS SOUGHT TO TRANSFORM PEOPLE

Jesus came to radically change the lives of those who heard Him and saw Him. He called people to become His disciples. Discipleship is not simply about memorizing His teachings, but about letting the power of His teachings generate in us a new life (see John 3:1-8). Jesus, the cosmic source of God’s power, made disciples by overcoming the work of the devil in human hearts. He called people to follow Him instead.

A scientist’s work required Him to travel through the jungle. Since there were no roads or trails in the dense jungle, the man took with him a local guide. After walking awhile, he said to his guide, “I don’t see any trails. How do you know we’re heading in the right direction?”

“I am the way,” the guide replied. “Just follow me.”

Thank God, we follow someone who knows the way! Jesus looked at disoriented and lost humanity and said, “I know the way, follow Me!” (see John 14:6). In following Him, we are expected to “live as Jesus did” (1 John 2:6).

JESUS’ WORDS

It goes without saying that Jesus set the standard for what it means to be a Christian. His Word was heard on city streets, in temple courtyards, by the seashore, during His travels, revealing the values and principles of



Every one of Christ's deeds reflected His identity, thus depicting the way of life of those who would follow Him and constitute His church.

the kingdom of God. Through Him, God's voice was heard again on the fallen planet, instructing humanity and giving new meaning to what the people of Israel heard in the Old Testament.

The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' depiction of the way of life of those who follow Him and want to display their identity as Christians to the world.

In the sermon Jesus condemned murder, particularly when it is done through the angry word (Matt. 5:21, 22). He affirmed the importance of living peacefully with others (verses 23, 24). He asserted that adultery takes place not only in the act itself, but also in the mind when lustful thoughts are entertained. To be tempted by lust in this age of the Internet offers challenges unimaginable to those in Jesus' day (verses 27-30). Jesus reaffirmed marriage and reminded His listeners that divorce has its own set of complications (verses 31, 32).

Jesus talked about justice, and how generosity is preferable to retaliation (verses 38-40), and how love—even for one's enemies—is one of the hallmarks of genuine spirituality and the clearest reflection of God's character.

Jesus spoke about caring for those in need, rather than feeding our own selfishness (Matt. 6:1-4). Jesus reminded His disciples that true treasure is stored in heaven (verses 19-24), and that the quality of our spiritual lives does not consist in material goods. If we seek the Lord and His kingdom, our most essential spiritual, emotional, and material needs will be fulfilled (Matt. 6:25-34).

In an age of depression and anxiety, we should take hold of God's love for us and trust that He can provide for our deepest needs. When tempted to pass judgment on others based on their imperfections, Jesus asked us to stop and recognize that our primary task is to address our own imperfections (Matt. 7:1-5).

Jesus' teachings are designed to make our lives meaningful, enjoyable, and effective in serving others. Love is at the heart of God's kingdom values. Love for Him is not just another command; it's the glue that holds our spiritual lives together. Love for God forms the basis for our compliance to the law (cf. 1 Cor. 13). Love for each other is expressed not only to those we like, but even to our enemies.

Unfortunately, we often find it difficult to love others, and even churches can sometimes become places of conflict and tension that damage unity and Christ-centered identity. The apostle John must have been aware of this, because he wrote: "For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another" (1 John 3:11).

JESUS' ACTIONS

According to the Bible, character and identity are manifested through our actions. Jesus' identity was not hidden and inaccessible to others. He became human to display through His actions His divine identity.

When John the Baptizer was imprisoned, he sent messengers to ask Jesus if He was truly the Messiah. Jesus revealed Himself to John's disciples not only by what they heard Him say, but especially by what they saw Him do (Matt. 11:1-6).

A person's actions reveal character. Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners, thus exhibiting divine compassion (Matt. 9:11-13). He lived a life of total submission to the will of the Father (John 5:19) and strengthened this relationship by communing with the Father



through prayer and through His knowledge of the Scriptures. He kept the Sabbath holy (Luke 4:16); loved His enemies and prayed for them (Matt. 26:51-53; Luke 23:34). He overcame the evil one when tempted (Matt. 4:1-6), and defeated him by delivering those who were possessed by demons and those who were sick (Mark 1:32-34).

When people saw Jesus perform miracles, including healing two blind men, they recognized that He placed His unparalleled power at the service of others (John 9:33). Every one of Christ's deeds reflected His identity, thus depicting the way of life of those who would follow Him and constitute His church. His whole life was a display of the infinite love of God for all of His creatures. His crucifixion on the cross to take away our sin is the ultimate demonstration of God's love for humanity (John 3:14-16; 1 John 4:7-10).

"I AM A CHRISTIAN"

Jesus came to reveal who He was through both words and actions. But it was particularly through His behavior and demeanor that people recognized Him as the Son of God.

While visiting a country in which Muslims and Christians live together, I took a taxi to a meeting. During the journey I asked the driver about his religious life. He answered with a broad smile, "I am a Muslim." I told him about some Muslim friends I have, and mentioned how devoted to Allah they are.

He asked about my religion, and I answered that I was a Seventh-day Adventist Christian. He laughed with joy and practically shouted, "There are many Adventists in my village, and they are better Muslims than I am. They go to their mosque several times a week and spend Saturdays in worship and doing good deeds. They are pious people who pray more than three times a day. They do not eat pork or drink alcohol!"

People know us first by how we live (by our actions), then by what we teach. The religion of Jesus is not simply about a set of intellectual assertions or a system of theology, but about a living truth that takes possession of the whole person. It is a transformational truth that radically alters the way we think, speak, and act.

Ellen White wrote: "Christ is our pattern, the perfect and holy example that has been given to us

to follow. We can never equal the pattern; but we may imitate and resemble it according to our ability."²

This type of religion, seen by others through our actions, opens the door for them to hear and learn about the truth itself. It consists of walking as Christ walked. ©

Questions for Reflection

- 1.** Why does the Bible present Christ as our example?
- 2.** Why should we align our lives to that of Jesus? To be perfect? To be accepted by God? To serve others? Or some combination of all three?
- 3.** What do you think: Is it proper under certain circumstances to hide our Adventist identity?

¹ Bible texts in this article are taken from the New International Version.

² Ellen G. White, in *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Feb. 5, 1895.

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Thursday

Life-changing Encounters

Christian lifestyle and media

BY KLAUS POPA

Who are you, my son?" (Gen. 27:18). I wonder if Jacob anticipated that his father, Isaac, would ask this question. He probably hoped and even prayed that there would not be much talking. That his father would rather silently enjoy the dish Jacob served him, then bless him, and Jacob would leave the tent. Straightforward, no complications. Now, confronted with this question, Jacob needed to respond.

But what should he say? "I am Jacob, your son?" This would be honest, but at the same time, his father would know that he was about to be deceived. Moreover, what would happen to the desired blessing? Would it turn into a curse? Jacob decided to lie and answered, "I am Esau, your firstborn" (verse 19). He pretended to be his brother in order to receive the blessing. Apparently not convinced, Isaac made further attempts to find out who was serving him. Finally Jacob succeeded in taking on his brother's identity, and Isaac blessed him.

BEING REAL

A few years ago, I talked with a church leader about the use of media in evangelism. He had spent about 20 years in media ministry. In the midst of our conversation, he said, "As Seventh-day Adventists, we were always pioneers using the newest media types for public evangelism. In order to share the three angels' messages with an even wider audience, we started to use satellite evangelism in the 90s and several years later launched TV channels. Soon, we will operate the largest Christian television network worldwide.

"By using different types of media, we reached and continue to reach millions and millions of people with the good news of a loving God all around the globe. What a huge blessing!" Then he paused for a moment. "You know, sometimes I wonder if we tend to broadcast a beautiful and perfect 'world of faith,' which does not correspond to who we are in everyday life." He paused again. "Do we mainly focus on

showing *what* we should believe and *how* we should exercise our faith, and by doing so we distract ourselves from our shortcomings, our neediness, and our brokenness? We have a hard time admitting to ourselves and to others that we are neither as good as we would like nor as the 'ideal faith' that our broadcast requires us to be."

Such questions require a personal response. No one can give an answer for somebody else. Many of us, however, face similar dynamics when we share our faith. As a faith community, we want to help as many people as possible come to know God. With this goal in mind, it's tempting to focus on showing the ideal and not the real. Why?

First, everyone wishes to achieve and to experience the ideal. Second, communicating the ideal seems to have greater impact.¹ Stories about failure and shortcomings are not as convincing as success stories, are they? Third, sharing faith includes teaching God's law, universal truths, and principles that are independent of culture, time, and other human beings.² Fourth, isn't it all about God and not about us, about God's kindness and mercy, and about His plan of salvation for humanity? Finally, we do not want people to lose their trust in God and to give up faith because of our imperfections. These are all good and understandable reasons for deciding to broadcast an ideal faith and a perfect life.

At the same time, our concern or even fear that people might shy away from God when they also see our brokenness can lead us to hide the less-pleasant sides of ourselves and eventually make ourselves appear better than we really are. We can become more concerned about being seen in a positive light than about what kind of persons we really are. Sharing faith

We live in carefully constructed, well-arranged, and decorated “holy selfie lands.”

becomes more about appearance than about being and character, more about perception than about honest sharing and real encounters. Evangelism through media makes it even easier for us to turn faith into a perfect wishful projection than it would be possible in personal encounters, because the medium (TV, radio, social media, etc.) stands between people. We can retain a distance between the well-lit, good-looking spiritual experience and the real faith experience seen in broad daylight.

THE BREAKTHROUGH

Our fears of rejection seem to be at the center of this—both individually and collectively as a faith community. Therefore, focusing on God’s perfection, God’s law and universal truths, and on beliefs and principles can function as a convenient distractor or even an excuse from facing, accepting, and sharing our own imperfections. The goal of sharing faith, however, is not to convince others that the bearer is good and worthy, but that God is good, kind, and merciful. In Him people find acceptance, forgiveness, and life.

On Jacob’s way to the East, God revealed Himself as his Saviour and blessed him. God did not do this *because of*, but *in spite of*, who Jacob was. Jacob desired the blessing but did not deserve it; he received it because of who God is (Gen. 28:10-12):

These considerations are not only relevant for media ministry professionals. In the “social media universe,” in the midst of a constant tsunami of words, images, and clips, billions of people around the globe find themselves in the tension between their real and their mediated selves. We live in carefully constructed, well-arranged, and decorated “holy selfie lands.” Yet the fundamental question “Who am I?” is for many of us a pressing existential issue—and an issue we need to address. It’s a challenging question whether the sum of what we share with the whole world on various social media platforms reflects in the end an unreal, polished, and exaggerated fake self. Or do we allow people to see a more accurate and realistic view of who we are?

After 20 years, Jacob decided to return home. In great fear and trepidation, he prepared for meeting his brother, Esau. A fight unexpectedly ensued during the night between Jacob and a stranger, who turned out not to be human. In the midst of their struggle Jacob said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” Was he still not sure of the blessing after all these years?

“What’s your name?” asked the stranger. I suppose Jacob was surprised, if not shocked, that his opponent confronted him with the same question his father had asked him 20 years before. “*Who are you?*” Would Jacob again pretend to be someone else in order to receive the blessing? Or would he be honest this time, irrespective of the consequences?

“Jacob,” he answered. He finally had the courage to be himself—Jacob, the one who takes by the heel, the one who cheats.

Faith is always personal, relational, and expressed in our lives. Faith encompasses our whole

being. Sharing faith and life in a wholistic way requires sharing both the good and the bad, our successes and failures, our struggles and challenges, as well as our love and brokenness. The Bible does not fear vulnerability. The authors of the Bible openly and transparently shared the “whole” story and not only the presentable episodes.

During that unexpected encounter with God, Jacob had to confront himself. He decided to admit who he was. Do we dare to walk that path, making ourselves vulnerable so that others can see us? God’s love, kindness, and grace created a safe and redemptive space for Jacob. God is faithful. He provides the same space for us. ☺

Questions for Reflection:

1. Why is it so difficult to be real and show who we truly are?
2. What is the relationship between media consumption and media presentation?
3. How can we help the next generation of Adventists to relate to media in a healthy way?

¹ Marketing and advertising experts prove every day that perfect smiles, perfect bodies, perfect beaches, and perfect sunsets successfully sell everything—toothpaste, soft drinks, cars, and much more.

² The apostle Paul declared, “Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good” (Rom. 7:12).

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Friday

He Made All Things Beautiful

Sexuality and Christian lifestyle

BY GINA WAHLEN

She wasn't quite sure how it happened—but it did. Monica¹ was raised in a Seventh-day Adventist home, and living a Christian lifestyle came naturally to her.

Then she met Mark, a fellow student at an Adventist college. They spent time together, often alone, and one thing led to another until the two ended up in an intimate consensual sexual relationship.

Monica knew what the Bible taught regarding sexual intercourse outside of marriage. She often tried to silence her conscience by thinking, *How can something that feels so good be so wrong?*

Mark and Monica are not alone. According to the U.S.-based National Center for Health Statistics, in the United States 88.8 percent of women aged 15 to 44 years of age, and 89.9 percent of men aged 20 to 44 reported engaging in premarital sexual intercourse,² with the average age of the first sexual experience at 17.3 years for women and 17.0 years for men.³

Of course, premarital sex is just one of several sexual sins prohibited within Scripture. Nonetheless, many wonder how something could be wrong if it feels right. What is the connection between sexuality and the Christian lifestyle?

BIBLICAL INSTRUCTION

The Bible is filled with references to sex and sexuality, and serves as a guide for healthy roles and relationships. The first five books of the Bible “regulate sexual activity and establish sexual roles. [Its] prophetic

literature uses sexual metaphors in its announcement of God's judgment on covenant unfaithfulness. Wisdom literature distinguishes wise sexual conduct from foolish and uses sexual imagery to characterize wisdom. The Gospels use the memory of Jesus' words and deeds to shape the sexual conduct and dispositions of His followers. The Epistles deal with concrete questions of sexual conduct. Revelation contains sexual imagery and instruction.”⁴

With such an inspired reference at our fingertips, we do well to study its instruction, heed its warnings, and claim its divine blessings.

In the beginning God created human beings with distinct sexual identities: “Male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:27). Adam was created from the dust of the ground and Eve from Adam's rib, revealing the closeness the two were to share.

“This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man,” exclaimed Adam. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (Gen. 2:23-25).

To be “one flesh” encompasses the blending of heart, mind, and soul of two distinct individuals. It includes physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual unity in line with the wholistic nature of who we are as human beings.

Jesus affirms that marriage is to be an inseparable union of one man and one woman (Matt. 19:4-6). This union is meant to provide joy, pleasure, and physical completeness. And while the Bible speaks of the joys of marital intimacy, it also details the “wrong expressions of sexuality and their negative impact

Sexuality is an integral part of our identity.

on people and society. It warns humans of destructive sexual behaviors such as fornication, adultery, homosexual intimacies, incest, and polygamy.⁵ Because these behaviors subvert God's beautiful purpose for human sexuality, we are warned not to engage in them (1 Thess. 4:3-5; Rom. 1:26, 27; 1 Cor. 6:9-11).

GOD-GIVEN IDENTITY

Sexuality is an integral part of our identity. It was fundamental "for personal identity and communal life in biblical times even as it is today."⁶ The sense of who we are is foundational to how we relate to others and to the world around us. Scripture clearly reveals who we are and how we should live.

In the Garden of Eden, God gave His children two identity markers: (1) the Sabbath, reminding us He is our Creator and Lord; (2) our personhood, created male or female, in the image of God. These two identity markers will always be foundational for human identity.

In his article "Sexuality as Something Sacred," David Thomas points out, "Since sexuality is part of the intrinsic zone in which we hold sacred things, if it is not properly revered and is treated tritely a person will feel diminished and infringed upon. The misuse of sexuality or the infringement upon it by someone else becomes both

offensive and damaging, because the inner sanctum of life was trampled upon."⁷

LASTING EFFECTS

This happened to Mark and Monica. During their passionate romance, a rush of excitement and sensuous pleasure accompanied their illicit love affair. But they later experienced guilt, sorrow, fear, and remorse, and went their separate ways; carrying with them scars that affected their inner being, damaging their self-perception and relationship with others. Healing came only through repentance and return to God.

A classic biblical example of sexual infidelity is found in the story of David and Bathsheba, recorded in 2 Samuel 11. God had blessed David tremendously, and his kingdom had grown strong. But through the sins of lust and adultery, followed by murder, David plummeted into an abyss of sorrow from which he never fully recovered, even though he deeply repented and received God's forgiveness (Ps. 51; 32).

Contrast David's experience with Joseph, who, when confronted with an almost overwhelming temptation, cried out, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9). Joseph's integrity, clear conscience, and trust in God helped power him through dark days and into the light of exoneration, honor, and reconciliation.

FOLLOWING GOD'S PLAN

God never intended for us to experience the many negative outcomes resulting from illicit and unnatural sexual relationships. He warns that even impure thoughts are harmful (Matt. 5:28), as is pornography in all of its forms (cf. Ps. 101:3).

"Flee sexual immorality," we are told. "Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body" (1 Cor. 6:18).

That's why God, in His love and care for us, outlined how best to live, and why He gave clear instructions in caring for this most personal and private area of our lives. By following His plan, we become receptive to all the delights He longs to bestow. For those who are married, this includes the joys of sexual intimacy. But whether single or married, we gain the satisfaction and security of knowing that we are created in His image, that He has a wonderful and fulfilling plan for our lives, and that He will satisfy our deepest desires. ☺

Questions for Reflection

1. How are personal identity and sexuality connected?
2. What are God's purposes for human sexuality?

¹ Names have been changed.

² National Survey of Family Growth, National Center for Health Statistics, www.cdc.gov/nchs/nsgf/key_statistics/p.htm.

³ *Ibid.*; www.cdc.gov/nchs/nsgf/key_statistics/s.htm#sexualactivity.

⁴ Barry L. Bandstra and Allen D. Verhey, "Sex, Sexuality," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), vol. 4, p. 429.

⁵ "Guidelines for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Responding to Changing Cultural Attitudes Regarding Homosexual and Other Alternative Sexual Practices," voted April 17, 2014, <https://tinyurl.com/https-www-adventist-org-arti>.

⁶ Bandstra and Verhey.

⁷ David E. Thomas, "Sexuality as Something Sacred," *Adventist Review*, June 20, 2013, p. 26.

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Second Sabbath

Living in the End-time

Christian
lifestyle and
last-day events

BY ELLEN G. WHITE

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:11-14, KJV).

This scripture teaches a very different lesson from that which is presented in the words of many who profess to believe the gospel. We are exhorted to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, and to look for the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Some have made an objection to my work, because I teach that it is our duty to be looking for Christ's personal appearing in the clouds of heaven. They have said, "You would think that the day of the Lord was right upon us to hear Mrs. White speak in reference to the coming of Christ; and she has been preaching on that same subject for the last forty years, and the Lord has not yet come."

This very objection might have been brought against the words of Christ Himself. He said by the mouth of the beloved disciple, "Behold, I come quickly," and John responds, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Jesus spoke these words as words of warning and encouragement to His people; and why should we not heed them? The Lord has said that it is the faithful who will be found watching and waiting for Him. . . .

The exact time of Christ's second coming is not revealed. Jesus said, "No man knoweth the day nor the hour." But He also gave signs of His coming, and said, "When ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the door." He bade them, as the signs of His coming should appear, "Look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh."

And in view of these things the apostle wrote: "Ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day." Since we know not the hour of Christ's coming, we must live soberly and godly in this present world, "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

Christ gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. His people are to preserve their peculiar character as His representatives.

There is work for every one of them to do. The rich should bring their means, the honored their influence, the learned their wisdom, the poor their virtue, if they would be effective workers with God. They are to bring themselves into right relation with God, that they may reflect the light of the glory of God that shines in the face of Jesus Christ.

We read of a class who put far off the day of the coming of Jesus; but upon such His coming will be as a thief in the night, and they will be suddenly overtaken with destruction. How many there are who are willing to be rocked to sleep in the cradle of carnal security; but it is time for us to wake out of sleep. Says the apostle, "We are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober."

We should be awake to discern the signs of the times, and to give warning to the people. There are many in the world who seek to quiet the alarm of the people, who say, "Peace, peace; when there is no peace"; but we should take an opposite course from this. There are many who say to the aroused people, "Do not disturb yourselves, go on in godlessness, go on glorifying yourselves, and living in pleasure. The day of the Lord is not at hand."

Did not Christ have an object in view when He said, "Behold, I come quickly"? Did He not see that His church would need to keep this solemn event in mind? Shall we say with the last-day scoffers, "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation"? I do not mean to be with this class. I mean to arouse men with the message of Christ's near coming.

A GREAT RESPONSIBILITY

Those who have a knowledge of present truth are under a great responsibility before the world. They are to warn men of the coming judgments. They are to represent Christ to the people. They are not to go about deploring their condition, talking of their darkness, and murmuring and complaining of the hardness of the way; they are to lift up their minds to God, open the door of their hearts to Jesus, and let Him come in and abide with them.

We must have Christ enthroned in the heart, that the soul-temple may be cleansed from every defilement. The soon coming of our Saviour must be a living reality to us. The question of all importance for this time is, "How is it with my soul? Am I seeking to reiterate the words of Christ? Am I teaching my children that they have souls to save; that peace and holiness must be a part of their life? Am I teaching them to place their hands in the hands of Christ, that He may guide them?"

We have most earnest work to do, and we have no time to waste in drinking at empty cisterns that can hold no water. We should come to Christ without delay for the water of life. We should diligently study the Bible. The study of the Bible is of the greatest importance to us. The Scriptures are able to make men wise unto salvation, yet how few find time to search the Word of God!

Men and women are all absorbed in the things of this perishing earth. They are building their hopes upon worthless foundations, and writing their names in the sand. Even those who profess to be followers of Christ do not heed His injunction. . . .

God gives us His rich blessings to enjoy, and He expects us to bring forth fruit to His glory; but many neglect His work. They do not make a full surrender to His will. There

are many who seem to feel that to think of God and heavenly things tends to make men gloomy and desponding; that it is detrimental to health to permit the mind to dwell upon religious subjects.

When in my youth God opened the Scriptures to my mind, giving me light upon the truths of His Word, I went forth to proclaim to others the precious news of salvation. My brother wrote to me, and said, "I beg of you do not disgrace the family. I will do anything for you if you will not go out as a preacher."

"Disgrace the family!" I replied. "Can it disgrace the family for me to preach Christ and Him crucified! If you would give me all the gold your house could hold, I would not cease giving my testimony for God. I have respect unto the recompense of the reward. I will not keep silent, for when God imparts His light to me, He means that I shall diffuse it to others, according to my ability."

Did not the priests and rulers come to the disciples, and command them to cease preaching in the name of Christ? They shut the faithful men in prison, but the angel of the Lord came to them and released them that they might speak the words of life to the people. This is our work. . . .

TRUTH AS IT IS IN JESUS

We are to present the truth as it is in Jesus. Christ came into the world to save sinners. For thirty years He lived our example. He endured insult, ignominy, reproach, rejection, and death; yet He lives. He is a living Saviour. He has ascended on high to make intercession for us.

Just before His crucifixion, He prayed that His disciples might be one with Him, as He was one with the Father. Is it indeed a possibility that sinful, fallen man may be brought into such exalted relationship with Christ? Such a union with

Christ will bring light and peace and comfort to our souls. When He went to heaven, He told His disciples, "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." Who would not have the Comforter in times of trial? . . .

Tell of the love of Christ, talk of His power, and you may have a heaven in this world to go to heaven in. Respond to the light of God, and you will be like a watered garden; your health will spring forth speedily; your light will rise in obscurity, and the glory of the Lord will be your reward. ©

Questions for Reflection

1. What does it mean to live "soberly, righteously, and godly"? In that context, does the nearness of Christ's return make us more inclusive, or more exclusive?
2. As we anticipate Christ's return, which Bible passages are most useful in learning to reflect Christ's character to those around us?
3. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being the highest), how confident are you that you will be saved if Christ returned today? Be honest.

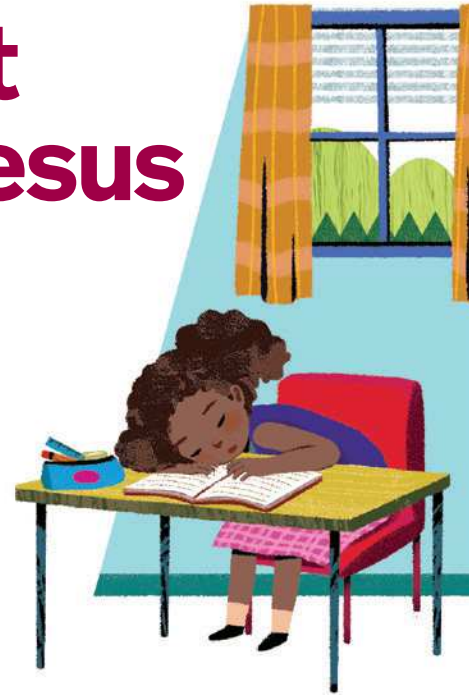
Seventh-day Adventists believe that **Ellen G. White** (1827-1915) exercised the biblical gift of prophecy during more than 70 years of public ministry. This excerpt is taken from a letter written by Ellen White that was later published in *Signs of the Times*, June 24, 1889.



Children's Readings

Living for Our Best Friend Jesus

BY LINDA MEI LIN KOH
General Conference director of
Children's Ministries



Illustrations: Xuan Le

* Scriptures credited to ICB are quoted from the International Children's Bible, New Century Version, copyright © 1986, 1988, 1999 by Tommy Nelson, a division of Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee 37214. Used by permission.

A Strange Book

Memory Gem: “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching and for showing people what is wrong in their lives. It is useful for correcting faults and teaching how to live right” (2 Timothy 3:16, ICB).*

Keke walked into this strange “Christian” school to learn English. The American teachers were very kind and patient with him. But they seemed to always use some black book as their lessons.

“Sir, why is this black book so special?” asked Keke curiously. “I have never seen it before.”

“This is the Bible! It’s God’s Word that teaches us to be good,” said Pastor Thompson.

“Really? I must read it. Maybe it can help me change and be good, which my mother would definitely want!” exclaimed Keke with a twinkle in his eyes.

As soon as Keke finished his homework, he opened the black book that he borrowed from Pastor Thompson. “I need to know what’s inside,” Keke mumbled to himself.

“Stop reading that black book, Keke!” Mother demanded. “Don’t get all these strange ideas from these Christians. Don’t forget! We are Buddhists!” warned Mother angrily.

“I love this book because it has some strange, funny ideas! They

ask me to be kind to my enemies; turn my left cheek to them if they slap my right one; think of others first; no crying at death; pray without stopping. Wow, I can’t imagine what my friends would say!” exclaimed Keke.

“What has come over you?” snorted Keke’s friends. “You just drop us and don’t play with us anymore,” his friends complained. “No more tricks and pranks. No eating pork. No more fun!”

Months later, Keke went to meet his teacher with an unusual request.

“Pastor Thomson, I need to speak to you right now. I believe in Jesus, the Bible, and everything in this book. I want to be baptized!” Keke declared firmly.

“Praise the Lord!” exclaimed Pastor Thomson.

DIVE IN DEEP

- How has the Bible helped you in your life at home and at school?
- Which Bible texts specifically speak to your heart?
- Do you find it challenging to keep reading the Bible? Why?
- Is it possible to live our lives according to what the Bible teaches?

LIVE IT OUT!

Develop a poem or a song about the Bible and its values and share it with your friends at church or at school.

Make a personal timetable for regular daily study of the Bible. ☺



Forgiving Papa

Memory Gem: “Do not be angry with each other but forgive each other. If someone does wrong to you, then forgive him. Forgive each other because the Lord forgave you” (Colossians 3:13, ICB).

Juni was just getting ready for bed when his papa’s heavy footsteps were thumping up the stairs. Immediately his body began to shake with fear as he quickly crawled under the bed. All of a sudden he felt a pair of strong hands pull him out from under the bed.

“Help! Help!” Juni yelled loudly as he tried to free himself from his papa’s hand, “Don’t hurt me! Please don’t hurt me!”



Before Juni could escape, Papa beat him.

“Don’t think you can escape from me! Ha! Ha! Ha! You’re just like your mama! Bad woman! Bad woman!” shouted papa as he was about to flop over, too drunk even to care. “You bad boy! Bad boy!”

The next day after Papa’s alcohol wore off, he felt bad about beating Juni. He was calm, but Juni was too terrified even to get near him.

For two years after Mama left, Juni’s father had been drinking himself to death. He thought he could cover up the pain of losing his wife, but the alcohol didn’t help. Instead, he beat Juni night after night. Poor boy!

“Lolo, Lola, please let me come and stay with you,” begged Juni. “I can’t take it anymore. He will kill me soon!”

“You poor boy, we must take you out of your father’s hands,” said Lolo and Lola adamantly.

Juni was grateful spending the rest of his teen years with

Lolo and Lola. No more beatings! No more fear! No more injuries and bruises!

Years passed and Juni graduated from college. One day his grandparents approached him with a strange request.

“Juni, we didn’t tell you earlier. Your papa has been in jail and is very ill. Won’t you go and visit him?” asked Lolo and Lola earnestly.

“What? You want me to visit him? No way! He’s not my father, and I don’t have a father like him,” said Juni angrily.

“No matter what he has done, he’s still your papa. He started drinking only after your mama left,” Lolo explained kindly. “Do forgive him.”

“We will be praying for you that God will help you to forgive,” Lola said reassuringly, her Bible in her hand.

Finally, after months of struggling with himself, the day came for Juni to visit his father in jail. When they met, both father and

son hugged each other, sobbing and crying.

“I’m so sorry, Son, for all the hurt I have caused you!” cried Papa.

“I forgive you, Papa! I forgive you!” wailed Juni with tears streaming down his face. It was indeed a joyful reunion! Forgiveness comes only through Jesus Christ.

DIVE IN DEEP

- What did Jesus mean when He said that we should forgive 70 times seven (Matthew 18:21, 22)?
- Why is it good for us to forgive, even though it’s difficult?

LIVE IT OUT!

- Pray for your friends or classmates who give you a hard time at school, so that you will learn to like them.
- Write an encouraging message to someone you don’t especially like. ☺



MONDAY

Jesus' Little Missionary

Memory Gem: “But the Spirit gives love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. There is no law that says these things are wrong” (Galatians 5:22, ICB).

“Oh, Mama, there are so many children around our house who don’t know about Jesus,” sighed Elena.

“Can I do something for them? Jesus loves all the children of the world,” Elena asked with excitement.

“That’s a marvelous idea!” said Mama. “What do you want to do?”

“Guess what? I have just received my Talking Backpack. I can form a small group and share the good news with them. I can teach them songs about Jesus, and I will tell them Bible stories,” Elena said excitedly.

“Let’s get started right away. I’ll invite my friends to come to the house every Friday evening,” Elena said.

Elena invited one special friend, and her friend invited other friends, and on and on. The first night 12 children came to Elena’s house. She told them Bible stories and gave each one a pin that said “Jesus loves you.” She helped her mother bake cookies for the children. What a joy and encouragement it was for Elena!

“Wow, Mama, there are so many children coming every week. I’ve lost count of the number, but they sure love the Bible stories about Jesus. I’m going to pray that they will accept Jesus as their special friend someday,” exclaimed Elena jubilantly.

After one year of running her small group, several of her friends accepted Jesus and were baptized. Great joy filled Elena’s heart!

DIVE IN DEEP

- Which fruit of the Spirit do you find difficult to practice in your life? Why?
- In today’s world of violence, fear, and terrorism, can you still have peace in your heart? Identify one Bible text that shows how you can have peace.
- Is it possible to love your enemy, or someone who hurt you? Why? Why not?

LIVE IT OUT!

- Discuss with your parents or Sabbath School teacher one or two projects you can do to show love and kindness to those who are less fortunate.
- Pray for the children whose parents are in prison. Find out the names of a few of these families and write cards to encourage them. ☺

TUESDAY

Sleepyhead

Memory Gem: “You should know that you yourselves are God’s temple. God’s Spirit lives in you. If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him, because God’s temple is holy. You yourselves are God’s temple” (1 Corinthians 3:16, 17, ICB).

Katrina Foster, do you know what time it is? Go to bed NOW!” demanded Mother.

“I’ll go soon, but I just have to finish my project. Don’t worry; I’ll be fine,” replied Katrina, reassuring Mother.

“Oh, my dear, I’m worried about you. You’re destroying your health!” said Mother anxiously.

“I’m OK,” Katrina said.

“Can’t you start your project earlier? You have the whole afternoon to do it, but you spend too much time on Instagram and texting with friends,” Mother said impatiently.

“I’m fine, Mom! Mothers worry for nothing!” snorted Katrina.

Weeks passed and Katrina was caught falling asleep in class several times. She fell asleep four times in one week. Her teacher, Mrs. Bouchett, was concerned.

“Mrs. Foster, you really need to monitor Katrina’s sleep hours,” Mrs. Bouchett told Katrina’s mother. “She fell asleep four times this week alone! She was grouchy, and snapped at her classmates often.”

“OK, I’ll try to work with Katrina on this,” Mother reassured the teacher.

“Katrina, I’m greatly disappointed with your teacher’s report about you,” exclaimed Mother sadly. “Do you know that your body is the temple of God? If you destroy it by sleeping only three or four hours a night, you’ll lose energy and power to think,” said Mother.

“I’m sorry, Mom. I’ll try to get to sleep earlier. Please pray for me,” begged Katrina.

“Yes, we need to ask Jesus to help you plan your day properly. You can finish your homework and still have time for your friends. I’m taking away your cell phone every night before bedtime,” said Mother adamantly.

“You can’t do that!” demanded Katrina. “I guess I have no choice, right?”

“You’re absolutely right!” replied Mother with a smile.

DIVE IN DEEP

- Why did Paul say that our body is the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3)?
- Why is a lack of sleep not good for our bodies?
- Why is God concerned about the health of His children?

LIVE IT OUT!

- Make a daily schedule of your activities after school and follow through.
- With the help of your parents, plan a one-week menu with nutritious foods. ☺

WEDNESDAY

Being the Hands of Jesus

Memory Gem: “Love the Lord your God. Love him with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.’ Also, ‘You must love your neighbor as you love yourself” (Luke 10:27, ICB).

Mom, can we prepare food for those street children around our church?” asked the twins, Larinee and Sarinee.

“Great idea, girls!” exclaimed Mom. “But how much money do we need to have to feed every one of them?” asked Mom with a puzzled look.

“Well, maybe in church we can ask every member to donate ingredients for us to use. I’m sure they want to help too,” the twins echoed simultaneously.

“Isn’t this what Jesus said we should do? What is that text in which Jesus said something about helping others?” asked Larinee.

“Yes, in Matthew 25 Jesus said that when we help someone, giving food to the poor, visiting and praying for those in prison, we are doing it to Him. Jesus is our best model for serving others,” explained Papa.

For the next two days, Larinee and Sarinee were busy making telephone calls to church members to ask for donations of vegetables and fruit for their special project.

“Mr. Janu, could you donate some vegetables and other

foods for us to cook so that we can feed the street children next Saturday?” explained the twins when they called the head elder.

“That’s an excellent idea, girls! I’m happy to support your project. I’ll ask my wife to help you with the cooking too,” suggested the head elder with a twinkle in his eye.

When Sunday arrived, Larinee and Sarinee, with lots of help from Mama, Mrs. Janu, and several other women from the church, cooked eight big pots of soup. Papa and some elders and deacons of the church helped to transport them to the park, where they met the street children. What a hectic day it was!

“Thank You, Jesus, for helping us. Just think, we fed 80 hungry youngsters!” exclaimed the twins with big smiles on their faces, “We want to be like Jesus!”

DIVE IN DEEP

- Read Matthew 25:31-41 and discuss why it’s difficult when you follow the model of Jesus in serving others.
- Based on the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), how can we become modern-day Samaritans?

LIVE IT OUT!

- Work with your parents or Sabbath School teacher to identify one project you could do to serve like Jesus in your community.
- Find two to three friends and go on a prayer walk around your community to pray for different businesses and families. ☺



THURSDAY

Brian’s Testimony

Memory Gem: “So if you eat, or if you drink, or if you do anything, do everything for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31, ICB).

Hey, guys, have you seen the latest Harry Potter movie?” asked Zach excitedly. “It’s really amazing how those weird creatures can fly!”

“What’s the title?” Jamie and Jeannie shouted simultaneously. “Maybe we should watch it too.”



"I think we should be careful what we watch," Brian cautioned his friends. "Creatures that fly and do fantastic tricks aren't real."

"It's just for fun and excitement," said Zach. "You have to be imaginative, eh?" he said with a wink.

"Did your mom say you couldn't watch these movies?" asked Jeannie curiously.

"Yes, but it's not just Mom; it's from the Bible!" explained Brian firmly. "If we fill our minds with all these untrue stories, such as witches and wizards, pretty soon we'll believe in them more than in the power of Jesus."

"I think Brian is right! In the Bible, Paul said somewhere in Corinthians that what we watch,

read, or do, we must do it to honor Jesus," said Jamie. "Let's look it up."

"I know that, friends," Zach nodded in agreement. "These fantasy movies get you hooked, then you can't stop watching them."

"OK, let's pray for each other that we choose to read good books, watch good movies, and play wholesome computer games to honor Jesus!" the four friends said in unison.

DIVE IN DEEP

- What does it mean to "do everything" to honor God (1 Corinthians 10:31)? Can you identify some of those things?

- Is it easy to practice a good Christian lifestyle in your home, school, or church community?
- What did the apostle Paul mean when he asked us to put on "the full armor of God" (Ephesians 6:10-18)?

LIVE IT OUT

- Have a summer room cleanup day. Get rid of all the videos, books, CDs, etc. that aren't helping you in your Christian life.
- Work together with two or three friends to list the good video games, good books, and good TV programs that are safe to watch. Then pray together, asking God to help you make wise choices. ©



FRIDAY

Spring-clean Your Brain

Memory Gem: “So put all evil things out of your life. Get rid of sexual immorality and impure acts. Don’t let your feelings get out of control” (Colossians 3:5, ICB).

Dad and Mom were just getting the family together for evening worship when they noticed that Raymond was still at his computer.

“Ray, don’t you know what time it is?” asked Mom impatiently. “We’re all waiting for you.”

“OK, OK, I’m coming,” Ray said.

When family worship was over, Dad asked the children to remain behind; he had something important to say.

“What’s the problem, Ray? I see you’re spending a lot of time on your computer,” Dad asked his teenage son.

“Maybe he’s watching those naked girls,” remarked little sister Joni. “That’s why our

teachers are warning us about the danger of porn!”

“OK, Ray and Joni, let’s talk about this, so you’ll understand what it is, and why it’s not good for us,” explained Dad.

“Do you know what pornography is?” Dad asked solemnly as both the children shook their heads.

“Pornography is pictures or movies of people with little or no clothes on. They show people doing things that should only be done in private,” Dad continued. “These people do these things to make money.”

“That’s so shameful,” said Joni.

“Do you know why it’s dangerous for children?” Dad continued. “Because it doesn’t represent real love or intimacy. It treats women and men as objects. If you keep watching such pictures, you get addicted to it, like a drug.”

“I didn’t know it was that dangerous, Dad,” Ray said. “I thought it was just a few pictures.”

“Do you know that Paul advised us that we should think on things that are good, pure, true, beautiful, and respected?” Dad reminded the children (Philippians 4:8). “But the devil is out to tempt everyone, includ-

ing children, to spend time on impure things.”

“Thanks for telling us, Dad. Please pray for us to be strong enough to turn away from impure pictures,” said Ray.

DIVE IN DEEP

- Study Mark 9:47. Did Jesus really mean that we should pluck out an eye if it causes us to watch impure pictures? What was He really saying about how to live our lives?
- What are some temptations related to sexuality that you face? How can you deal with them to live as a victorious Christian?

LIVE IT OUT

- Give a speech or write an essay to present to your classmates about the dangers of watching pornography (work with your teacher on this).
- Borrow some good books that teach about healthy Christian sexuality and read them. Identify how these books help to answer your questions about sexuality. Discuss this with your parents. ☺

SABBATH

Alive Again

Memory Gem: “Look, Jesus is coming with the clouds! Everyone will see him, even those who stabbed him. And all peoples of the earth will cry loudly because of him. Yes, this will happen! Amen” (Revelation 1:7, ICB).

Mama, Carlos’ grandpa is very sick, and they don’t think he will live more than two days,” said Paulo sadly.

“Yes, dear, death is a terrible thing,” said Mama softly. “It’s sad to lose a loved one.”

“I see Carlos and Belen crying a lot whenever they talk about their grandpa,” Paulo explained to Mama.

“Don’t feel so sad. There’s hope for all of us!” exclaimed Mama joyfully. “Tell your friends.”

“What kind of hope is there after you die?” asked Paulo with a puzzled look.

“The Bible tells us that Jesus will come again to wake those who have died in Him!” Mama said enthusiastically. “Let’s look up 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17 to read more about this wonderful promise.”

“Great, Mama!” exclaimed Paulo. “I want to share this hope with Carlos and Belen.”

“Wow, it says here that those who have died in Christ will rise first, and those who are still alive

will be taken up to meet Jesus in the air!” said Paulo excitedly.

“Then Carlos and Belen don’t have to cry anymore!” said Paulo confidently.

“Go and share this wonderful news with your friends tomorrow,” Mama encouraged with a smile on her face.

DIVE IN DEEP

- Compare 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17 with 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52 and John 5:28, 29. Why is Jesus’ second coming so important to us regarding death? Would this promise be welcomed by those who don’t believe in Him?
- What was the warning given in Luke 21:34-36 concerning how we should live in these last days before Jesus comes?

LIVE IT OUT

- Pray together with your parents and/or with two friends for those who have lost loved ones, that they will trust Jesus’ promise of seeing them again.
- Decorate five or six index cards (7.5 cm x 12.5 cm, or 3” x 5”) with Bible texts that give the hope of resurrection when Jesus comes again. Share them with those who have lost loved ones. ☺

Publisher

The *Adventist World*, an international periodical of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The General Conference, Northern Asia-Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists, is the publisher.

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Adventist World is published monthly and printed simultaneously in Korea, Brazil, Indonesia, Australia, Germany, Austria, Argentina, Mexico, South Africa, and the United States.

Vol. 16, No. 11



**EVERY CHILD.
EVERYWHERE.
IN SCHOOL.**

#EveryChildInSchool

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UNDER 5 DIED
FROM MOSTLY
PREVENTABLE CAUSES.**

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