In Full Assurance
Practical approaches to joyful Christian living
He was a failure as a Christian. He had known Christ, worked with Christ, performed miracles in Christ’s name. But now he was a failure.

He hadn’t expected it to be this way. “I’m your friend. I’ll be there for you no matter what. I’ll give my life for you,” he had said with a touch of the dramatic.

Jesus had warned him. “‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times’” (Mark 14:30, NIV).

Even then Peter insisted emphatically, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you” (verse 31, NIV). And he meant it.

But he failed as a Christian. He didn’t just embarrass the church. He didn’t just break the rules. He denied that he even knew Jesus.

Peter knew that he had failed. Like Judas, he went out, away from Christ. But instead of hanging himself, he went out and wept bitterly, repenting. And trusting. Trusting that Jesus’ love reached even a disgraceful failure, an unworthy sinner.

And he let Jesus change him. He didn’t presume upon the grace of his Lord. He didn’t make excuses for his miserable failure. No, he acknowledged his wrongdoing, he repented of his sins, and accepted not only Jesus’ forgiveness but His cleansing as well.

But he couldn’t have changed if he hadn’t believed that Jesus still loved and accepted him. He knew this because he saw Jesus’ eyes. Eyes of pain, eyes of disappointment, but most of all, eyes of forgiveness.

So he knew that Jesus would accept him again. That there would be a place for him in the kingdom. That through Jesus he was redeemed, restored, renewed, ransomed, adopted into the heavenly family, invited to sit at Jesus’ right hand. That when God looked at him, He saw not a miserable failure cowering in preparation for his punishment, but the triumphant Christ, resurrected, ascending, returning, reigning. Not because Peter deserved such treatment. But because Jesus loved to give it.

“I’m a failure too. I’ve not cursed out my denial of knowing Jesus. But I’ve denied Him by my actions, my attitudes, my negligences, my treatment of “the least of these my brethren.” Can I trust Him too? Or must I find some way to prove my worthiness before I enter His presence?

Do I dare to trust His love, accept His promise, believe the witness of His Spirit, and worship at Calvary?

Yes, oh, yes! I can trust Him, for His wounded hands have touched my sorrowing brow, and His parched lips have whispered, “Father, forgive him.” His promise is true. His word is sure. And it is for me.

This week may we give up on ourselves and learn to trust Him wholly. Accept the gift. Here it is. It is called Assurance in Christ.

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I opened the door to my dormitory room at Andrews University, returning from a summer working at home. My roommate, Bob, sitting at the desk, turned to look my way, smiling from ear to ear. Then he blurted out, “She said yes!” His face said all the rest. When he had asked her “Will you marry me?” Marilyn’s answer was yes. Before the sun went down that day at Andrews University, all the students knew Bob was engaged to be married. It was written all over his face.

As with Bob, the Lord wants His people to live not only a joyful, victorious life but also an abundant life radiant with joy and happiness. This truth appears as the Bible writers use words in transmitting God’s message. For example, when we look at the use of certain key words in the Gospels we find words for joy used 26 times in only those four books, Clearly God wants us to enjoy our walk with Him.

Why is that important? As His followers we want to talk about the things He talked about. Of course Jesus spoke of such things as sin, judgment, and sorrow, for they are part of life. But the emphasis from His lips and those of the apostles was joy. And this is the emphasis that should be ours as well.

Today there is a strange reluctance on the part of some Christians to connect the ideas of holiness and happiness in one package. For some reason they feel that a dedicated Christian must be somber and serious at all times. Happiness seems something alien, in some way tainted by a spirit contrary to real love for God. From this viewpoint joy and Jesus do not belong in the same breath, and somehow to put them together compromises proper reverence for God.

But such ideas come from somewhere outside the Bible. Listen to these statements from the Word. “I will . . . make them joyful in My house of prayer” (Isa. 56:7, NKJV). And we read, “Let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy” (Ps. 5:11). Again the psalmist sings, “Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?” (Ps. 85:6, NIV). What attitude among Christians best reflects the life and ministry of Jesus? The Gospels tell us that even children came gladly to the Saviour, and that tells us a great deal about the atmosphere that surrounded His sunny face.

But was not our Lord a “man of sorrows and acquainted with grief”? Of course He was. There is in every Christian’s life a part where our hearts are broken by the things that break the heart of God. Every Christian knows the agony of heart-wrenching guilt and the toll of tragedy. There comes to each of us a time to weep. Every Christian knows sadness as they watch people they love make destructive choices. But friendship with Jesus opens up the setting for a joyful journey, even when we walk a path littered with sorrows.
In His most famous sermon, which we call the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talked about the formula for joy. Repeatedly He introduced His truths with “Happy are those who,” then proceeded to describe how to find true joy. Here He was drawing from words of praise found often in the Hebrew Scriptures, where the expression is a powerful one that carries the idea “O the happinesses of...”. From that powerful sermon it is clear that Jesus wants His people to seek and to find radiant joy in serving Him.

How can a judgment-bound generation live filled with joy? We find the answer in Psalm 98:4-9. “Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; make music to the Lord with the harp, with the horn and the sound of singing, with trumpets and the blast of the ram’s horn—shout for joy before the Lord, the King. Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Let the mountains sing together for joy; let them sing before the Lord.” And why such jubilation? The verse continues: “For he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity” (NIV).

All the earth, even nature, is urged to shout for joy, because the Lord “comes to judge the earth?” But why should the coming judgment cause us to shout for joy? Because God’s judgment means vindication, the lifting of charges against us. It means no more injustice, no more inequity. It means that God Himself stands vindicated throughout His universe. It means the reign of sin is ended. It means harmony is restored between the Creator and all His creation. It means no more sorrow, death, sadness, and tears. If we cannot be joyful in the face of judgment, it can only mean that we do not see the Judge as our friend.

God’s people—His church—should radiate a sense of inner spiritual joy to everyone they meet. Our faces should shout to our friends, neighbors, and co-workers, “I have absolute joy in my life because I trust and walk personally with my Lord.” That kind of joy attracts people—men and women, boys and girls, teenagers, grandparents and grandfathers, everyone—to our Lord. For some people life and the church appear like fortresses to be protected from outside evils. While Christians do indeed exercise wise care, the biblical picture paints a people not so much that glows in them. That comes not by the radiant, irrepressible sense of joy that flows from recognizing what God is doing for us, and we rejoiced” (Ps. 126:2, 3, NRSV). Such joy can even be something we create; rather, it flows from recognizing what God is doing for us.

Can it be that we have painted the Lord’s face with such somber tones that to many He seems no longer attractive? Have we been slow to acknowledge that the most conspicuous outward characteristic of the reborn Christian is joy? If this is the case, then we must change it. What is needed is not levity or any kind of superficial silliness. Real Christian worship is not telling jokes in church, for that is irreverence. But the Christian experience is a deep, irreplaceable joy that makes us attractive and brings a radiance to our countenances that cannot be dimmed by circumstances.

What is the source of this kind of joy? Several verses in Nehemiah 8 tell a story not frequently read. Nehemiah, which is the Tishthara, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh. 8:9-10). The next verses tell us how the people rejoiced with great joy because they had heard the words of the Lord and understood that God accepted them.
A ll too often we are led to believe that it is circum-
stances that control us, bring-
ing joy or sadness. But real joy flows
from an intimate walk with our God.
Our circumstances may change, bring-
ing new factors into our lives, but
nobody can take from us the ultimate
satisfaction of knowing that we are
beloved by the God who cares. Jesus
came that we might have life and
have it more abundantly. The evi-
dence is seen in the joy it produces
in His followers. Ellen White observed,
“To honor Christ, to become like
Him, to work for Him, is the life’s
highest ambition and its greatest joy”
(Desire of Ages, p. 297).

Paradoxically for the Christian, joy
begins at the cross, at the scene of
the most heinous crime in history. Can
this become the birthplace of ultimate
joy? Only a sovereign God could
transform such an event of agony into
the most significant event of all time.
But for the Christian who has been
touched by its healing power, we know
it is true, for here we were set free.

The reason the cross brings joy is
that from that point we are no longer
condemned to slavery. The one
honest, universal trait we bring to the
charges against us that are all too
crippled by guilt, and the devil brings
minds. We stagger through life
condemned to slavery. The one
that from that point we are no longer
the most significant event of all time.
transform such an event of agony into
this become the birthplace of ultimate
history. At the cross He stamps
that, for there God rewrites our
Desire of Ages, page 668:

1. How can a correct understanding
of the biblical concept of judgment
bring joy to the Christian? And why
do we not always face the prospect of
judgment in an attitude of joy?

2. How can you reconcile the idea
of a judgment-hour message with joy?

3. What important idea do you take
away from this reading that will
enhance your future walk with God?

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The Assurance of Salvation
Finding our anchorage in “the sure word of prophecy”

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe” (Heb. 1:1, 2).

The Bible is full of instances of God’s attempts to communicate with us for the sake of our eternal salvation. Those attempts did not always have the desired effect, however, making it necessary to modify His method of communication (though not the content) again and again in order to reach us. Our opening text describes that process perfectly.

The important point is that after centuries of such communication, God effected the ultimate communication, the revelation through His Son.

But we cannot neglect God’s attempt to reach us through the centuries, the record of which is contained in the Scriptures. If we are looking for assurance of salvation in Christ, we must start with the history of His fulfilled word. This, in fact, becomes the principal means by which we come to know Jesus and find assurance in Him. When we see that God has been faithful in the past, we can have the assurance today that whatever He promises, He will fulfill. And that includes His promise to save us, quite apart from our own feelings on the matter.

In this context, the words of 2 Peter 1:19 take on new significance: “And we have the word of the prophets made more certain,” the text says, “and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”

When we link Hebrews 1:1, 2 (the passage we used above) with 2 Peter 1:19, it becomes abundantly clear how important God’s word has been, how important it is, and how important it will be for the plan of salvation.

The fact that God has spoken “to our forefathers through the prophets” convinces us that He still speaks to us through that same means today. The certainty of God’s words must be indisputable. The prophets lived by it, and they admonish us to do the same.

So God manifests Himself and His plan for us in at least three ways (1) through His spoken word, (2) through His written Word, and (3) through His Word made flesh. Each of these manifestations testifies of God’s saving grace. They complement each other, exhibiting an increasing intensity as humankind became more and more stubborn in its rejection of God’s grace. That intensity reached its climax in Jesus Christ.

Let’s look now at each of these revelations in turn.

First, the spoken word
By the spoken word we were assured of God’s power, God’s will to save, and His ability to carry out the plan of salvation. The power of His spoken word made it clear that there is nothing too hard for Him to do. God stands by His word. He cannot do otherwise. So that we today can possess “the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time” (Titus 1:2).

So before the written Word as we know it today, there was God’s spoken word, so powerful that it needed no other confirmation. “Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath” (Heb. 6:17). Oaths are taken by invoking the name of a person or thing higher than the one pronouncing it. But in the case of God, there was none higher.

The whole universe testifies of the power and the certainty of God’s Word, thus giving us absolute confidence in His promise of salvation.
It was this powerful (spoken) word that created the universe and all it contains. “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. . . . For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm” (Ps. 33:6-9). “Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created” (Ps. 148:5).

Second, the written Word

From Genesis to Revelation the prevailing theme is that God wants to save humanity. The purpose of the written Word is for the benefit of posterity, to ensure that we who come afterward have access to the same word spoken long ago. The same arguments used to accept the spoken word can be used for the acceptance of the written Word. However, all arguments against and doubts about the certainty of salvation are lost when the written Word is read and understood.

God has been very clear in His communication. So much so that it is impossible for the honest seeking heart to misunderstand. When God communicates, whether verbally or in writing, it is as if an echo remains in our minds from His utterance. The psalmist expresses it in Psalm 62:11, 12 as follows: “God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God. Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work” (KJV).

The beauty of that passage is that there remains no doubt in the mind of those who understand God’s words. For those words, even if spoken just once, continue ringing in the ear, leading the hearer into an ever-increasing understanding of them, especially in the matter of God’s mercy and love. Yes, “God hath spoken once,” but we keep hearing the words again and again.

God’s written Word and spoken word form the basis of our assurance of His saving grace. “The Lord is gracious and compassionate,” the psalmist writes, “slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made” (Ps. 145:8, 9). As one reads such words, one can only praise God for His grace and mercy, and at the same time feel fully assured of salvation in Him. We know that it is “because of the Lord’s great love [that] we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail” (Lam. 3:22).

The reading of His Word gives us assurance and helps us to believe that everything has been done for our salvation.

Third, the living Word

When all was said and written, God yet wanted to give the most vivid example of what it all meant. So He gave us Jesus, the ultimate divine revelation. The “Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14). Again, it was to confirm to us His great intention of salvation. The incarnation of Jesus is also part of this “sure word.” He was promised prophetically, He was spoken about, and now He was manifested, a manifestation of the perfect “sure word.” He was promised, propheticly, He was spoken about, and now He was manifested; in fulfillment of the word spoken and written, that there is nothing more to say. In other words, Jesus became the perfect manifestation of God’s expressed will to save to the uttermost. “For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever” (Heb. 7:28).

The whole purpose of the word is to present Christ and make Him part of our lives in the process of salvation. Christ’s total involvement in our salvation comes through clearly when we understand the meaning of John’s statement that “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14). That Word was present “in the beginning,” “was with God,” and “was God. Through him all things were made. . . . In him was life, and that life was the light of men” (verses 1-4).

Jesus, then, is the ultimate manifestation of God’s sure word of prophecy. If nothing else, this alone should give us full assurance in His promise of saving grace. “The grass withers,” says the prophet Isaiah, “and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isa. 40:8).

We can believe, because God said it.

Questions for Discussion

1. If we have Jesus, why do we still need the written Word? Isn’t Jesus enough?

2. The book of Hebrews refers to the revelation in Jesus as perfect. And the present writer interprets this to mean that the last word has been spoken and there is nothing more to say. Why then do Adventists, in particular, advocate that God has not again spoken in our times through the gift of prophecy? How do you reconcile these concepts?

3. What would you say is the whole purpose of divine revelation?

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I was 14 years of age when I had my first encounter with the Word of God. I had never seen a Bible before! I still remember the joy and enthusiasm my mother and I felt when that beautiful book was placed in our home. There was immediately a love relationship with the Word of God and with its Author. It was such a joy to read it, to investigate it, to research it, to study it. I would spend hours on Sabbath afternoons reviewing the beautiful stories and the messages and promises of assurance that nurtured my new faith.

I can relate to Jeremiah when he says: “When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty” (Jer. 15:16, NIV).

Christians Need to Look for the Word

Some versions of the Bible bring out the thought that the Word of God, like hidden treasures, must be found. One can find the precious gems of the Word only by digging deep. A casual look at a place where there are amethysts will not show the precious gems. One has to dig for the crystals. We may have many Bibles in our homes and libraries, but they will never bring us joy until we open and diligently study them.

Ellen G. White says that we “should study the words of God for ourselves” (Steps to Christ, p. 89). If we want to “become acquainted with the Saviour,” she says, then we should “study the Holy Scriptures. 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” (ibid., p. 88).

Is it possible that, like the desert, we are dry and arid because we have not taken time to study the Scriptures? Is it possible that we don’t know the Saviour as we should because we have not read His book? Is it possible that we are starving to death because we have not taken from the Bread of Life? Is it possible that we accept all sorts of theories and interpretations because we did not dig the Word for ourselves?

The study of God’s Word is the sine qua non of the Christian life. That study must be done with prayer and reflection. As a matter of fact, Ellen White says: “Never should the Bible be studied without prayer” (ibid., p. 91). The Lord is the author, and we must communicate with Him so that through His Spirit He can communicate with us, make flow the precious promises, and give us the assurance we need to face life knowing that He is by our side.

Here is the testimony of blind Helen Keller, one of the best-known Christians of our time. After the American Bible Society had sent her a copy of the new braille Bible in 20 volumes, she said: “I sat beside them, caressing them with loving pride. For forty years I have loved the Word of God. I feel the blessed pages under my hand with special thankfulness as a rod and a staff to keep firm my steps through the valley of the shadow of depression and world calamity. Truly the Bible—the teaching of our Saviour—is the only way out of the dark” (quoted in W. B. Knight, 3,000 Illustrations, p. 40).

Christians Need to Feed on the Word

It is so sad to see people starving to death. Quite often we watch on our television screens or read in the newspapers reports of physical famine and starvation. However, the greatest tragedy of the world is spiritual famine. Hosea wrote: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6).

It seems like a paradox. With the abundance of food and waste in many of the developing nations, people should not be starving anywhere. All we need to do is to take this food and...
to those who lack. Why is it so hard?

The same thing applies in the spiritual realm. So many people are dying without the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and we have the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ. As Christians we must face the responsibility of sharing this food with a world straying to death spiritually.

A beautiful robin came upon the scene as I was digging in my garden one day. I noticed after a while that he was following me. He did not seem afraid, only delighted that I had provided such an abundance of food for him. I think that as Christians we need to open the Word of God and make it possible for others to feed on it. Like my little robin friend, they will experience joy and happiness.

An important aspect of the study of God’s Word is that, like bread, it must be masticated and digested. Thus we experience joy and happiness.

Many of us are acquainted with the most fascinating story of the mutiny on the Bounty, that British ship that sailed from England in 1787 to the South Seas on a goodwill mission. After a lengthy stay in Tahiti, the sailors rebelled, putting Captain William Bligh out to sea in a small boat. Miraculously, he survived, got back to England, and then headed an expedition that caught up with 14 of the mutineers.

However, a small group of nine made their way to the island of Pitcairn. Once liquor started being produced on the island, it became a depraved place, with drinking and murder the order of the day. Only one man, Alexander Smith (who later changed his name to John Adams), survived, accompanied by 11 women and 23 children. Then came a miracle. Among the possessions of a dead sailor Adams found a Bible. As he read and studied this marvelous Book and taught it to the women and children, a transformation occurred. Later, when the island was found, it was discovered that a godly group of people were living there in peace and prosperity.

In 1876 James White and J. N. Loughborough sent literature to Pitcairn. Ten years later John I. Tye, a Seventh-day Adventist ship’s carpenter, spent five weeks on Pitcairn and persuaded the islanders to keep the seventh-day Sabbath. . . . During a three-week stay, E. H. Gates and J. A. Read baptized and organized a church of 82 members and a Sabbath school of 114 members (Dec. 6, 1902) (Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia [1996], vol. 11, p. 355). The Word of God had transformed the entire group.

Christians Will Find Joy in the Word

As we look deeper into Jeremiah’s experience, we find that even though he was known as the weeping prophet, he found joy when he found and “ate” the Word of God.

Without the companionship of a wife, and rejected by his own people, the prophet found comfort in the Word of God. And so may we. Jesus’ wish for His followers is expressed in John 15:11: “That my joy may remain in you, and that your joy might be full.”

Oswald Chambers says: “The joy of Jesus was the absolute self-surrender and self-sacrifice of Himself to His Father, the joy of doing that which the Father sent Him to do . . . . The first thing that will hinder this joy is the captious irritation of thinking out circumstances. The cares of this world, said Jesus, will choke God’s word” (My Utmost for His Highest, p. 244).

The psalmist says: “The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes” (Ps. 19:8, NIV). “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Ps. 119:105, NIV).

And Paul gives us a good reason why we should have the Word in our hearts: “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God” (Col. 3:16, NIV). John 1:1 suggests once more the source of the Word: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning” (NIV). The appeal is that we should let the Word live within us. When Christ is part of our lives, there will be a zest for life and endless energy for service to others and for further search of His Word. Adventist Christians should be the happiest people in the world because they have confidence and trust in the Word of God. Let us look for His Word with perseverance. Let us feed on the Word with gusto. Let us rejoice in the salvation offered to us by Jesus, our Saviour.

Questions for Discussion

1. The author of this reading drew a parallel between physical starvation and spiritual starvation. You may want to flesh out these parallels in greater detail. How are the two situations alike? How are they different?

2. We hear about the reaction to the Bible by people such as Helen Keller, individuals in totalitarian countries, and even people such as our author, upon seeing the Bible for the first time. In what ways has its ready availability where you are affected your appreciation for the Bible?

3. Relate an experience in which you found particular strength, courage, or comfort in some portion of the Word of God. What was the scripture that ministered to you?

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The Assurance of God’s Promises

It flows from every page of the Bible.

The day we brought home a bicycle—a gift that we had promised to our young son—is still vivid in my mind. His wide eyes filled with excitement, and his unbridled grin made us parents swell with emotion. There was nothing we would rather do, no place we would rather be, no greater joy we could imagine, than to be able to endow our boy with this gift. As he climbed onto that bike and rode around, there were tears of joy in my eyes.

It was then that the real meaning of Matthew 7:11 dawned on me. “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him.”

Usually promises are made out of love and concern of one person toward another. God’s promises are an evidence of His love. The Scriptures are abundant with promises, and some people have made efforts to count them. It is said that John Loughborough, one of our pioneers who preached till his death at 92, read through the Bible at least 70 times. In the flyleaf of one of His Bibles, written in his own handwriting, is this note: “Total of 5,891 promises in the Bible.”

Oh, that each of us would search out those promises as did this pioneer!

Every promise of God finds its affirmation in Jesus. In the words of Paul, “all the promises of God in [Christ] are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God” (2 Cor. 1:20).

Let us now, in a few broad strokes, review some of the most important promises of the Word.

1. The Promise of a Saviour

The unconditional love of God has staggered the minds of people all through history. Through all His promises the Lord says, “I love you.” He not only says it; He shows it. He showed His love to our first parents by giving them a second chance after they fell, and in the promise of a Redeemer, the Bible’s very first promise: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Gen. 3:15, NIV).

The fulfillment of that promise came when a baby was born in Bethlehem thousands of years later. The Saviour came to die for us “while we were yet sinners” (Rom. 5:8).

2. The Promise of Safety

Again and again God has shown His love through His promises. He flung the rainbow across the sky after the Flood as a promise that He would never bring a similar destruction upon the earth again. “The bow shall be seen in the cloud,” God said, “and I will remember my covenant” (Gen. 9:14, 15).

The Bible tells of another rainbow as well—a rainbow in heaven. “Behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne . . . and there was a rainbow round about the throne” (Rev. 4:2, 3). “The rainbow of promise encircling the throne on high is an everlasting testimony that ‘God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life’ (John 3:16). It testifies to the universe that God will never forsake His people in their struggle with evil” (The Desire of Ages, p. 493).

The story is told about a man who dreamed that he was walking with the Lord along the beach. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand, one belonging to him and the other to the Lord.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he
looked back at the footprints in the sand and noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times of his life.

This really bothered him, and he questioned the Lord about it. “Lord, You said that once I decided to follow You, You’d walk with me all the way. I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don’t understand why when I needed You most You would leave me.”

The Lord replied, “My precious, precious child, I love you, and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.”

The words of the song “God Hath Not Promised” tell it all beautifully:

God has not promised us a bed of roses, it says—

But God hath promised strength for the day,
Rest for the labor, light for the way,
Grace for the trials, help from above,
Unfailing kindness, undying love.

3. The Promise of Forgiveness

One of the most precious promises of God has to do with the forgiveness of sin. “As far as the east is from the west,” says the psalmist, “so far has he removed our transgression from us” (P. 103:12, NIV). “If we confess our sins,” John says, “he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

What assurance! The righteousness of Christ makes the penitent sinner acceptable to God. However sinful we may be, we belong to Jesus as our personal Saviour, we stand before God in the spotless robe of Christ’s righteousness.

4. The Promise of the Spirit

Before His death on the cross, Christ offered the most essential and complete gift to His disciples: “I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth” (John 14:16, 17).

Mrs. White writes: “This promise belongs to us now as surely as it belonged to the disciples. . . . Let every church member kneel before God, and pray earnestly for the impartation of the Spirit” (Review and Herald, June 10, 1902). Once we are born again, it is the Holy Spirit who helps to stimulate new thoughts, new attitudes, and a new agenda for our lives.

“A Promise to Meet All Our Needs

Christ admonishes us to seek His kingdom first and promises that “all these things shall be added unto you” (Luke 12:31). He wants to satisfy our souls. He promises to withhold “no good thing . . . from those who walk uprightly” (Ps. 146:11). All we need is a childlike simplicity that will lead us to tell the Lord all our wants, and a belief that according to His riches and goodness and love He will satisfy them. If you will ask anything in my name, He says, “I will do it” (John 13:14).

God wants our cup to overflow. As we wait for the coming of our Lord, may the gifts of love—the promises of God—sustain us.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the relation between the character of God and His promises?
2. Discuss each of the promises listed in the reading. Which means most to you personally?
3. What particular Bible promises have especially encouraged you over the years? Share the reason(s) with your discussion group.

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Miracles

The assurance of God’s power to guarantee our salvation

Miracles still happen. They still attract attention. And although people in our times may seem skeptical and reluctant to believe in biblical miracles, the extraordinary and miraculous are fashionable, as vividly illustrated in popular films, television shows, and commercials. Fictitious or real miracles attract and impress people.

They also raise questions: Are they possible? Can you believe them? Ultimately, miracles raise the issue of faith.

Generally speaking, something “miraculous” is the opposite of what we consider “everyday.” Being something extraordinary, something that creates awe, surprise, or amazement, a miracle has the potential of making a deep impression. That, in fact, is why they happen in the Bible and in the life of God’s true believers. True miracles in the life of faith bring a message about God. They are seen and are therefore believed. The issue is not faith, but the power of God.

The biblical pattern is to see miracles as evidence of the unique power of God and as saving acts that reveal His divine character, eliciting amazement and praise, gratitude and trust, faith and proclamation. As they are seen and recognized as acts of God, His saving miracles establish faith and assurance among His people. They remember His miracles, they rejoice and praise Him for them, and they proclaim them to the world.

Jesus Christ—The Greatest Miracle Ever

The great saving event in the New Testament is the miraculous story of Jesus Christ—His divine origin, His incarnation, His righteous life, His atoning death, His authority as the risen Saviour, His ascension and high-priestly ministry in heaven, and the promise of His soon second coming.

The New Testament makes it clear that God has testified to His salvation in Christ “by signs, wonders and various miracles” (Heb. 2:4).* By manifesting His power, God has accredited Jesus Christ. In His sermon on the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter says that “Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know” (Acts 2:22).

The miracles performed by Jesus authorized Him as Son of God, the promised Messiah. He performed them to help the people believe in Him. He said: “The miracles I do in my Father’s name speak for me” (John 10:25).

Christ’s performance of miracles was closely linked to people’s faith. As He visited His hometown, Jesus “did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith” (Matt. 13:58). The Gospel of Mark says that “he could not do any miracles there, except lay His hands on a few sick people and heal them” (Mark 6:5). But where there was faith, the wonders and miracles performed by Jesus resulted in conversions to God, surrender in Jesus as Messiah, and joy and praise (Luke 19:37).

Early Christian Miracles

Christ authorized His disciples to use God’s power in signs and miracles. As for Moses and the prophets, this would provide them with divine authority. Paul speaks about “signs, wonders and miracles” as “the things that mark an apostle” (2 Cor. 12:12).

The power of signs and miracles in the Christian church is a spiritual gift that accompanies the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul says that his ministry to the Gentiles was carried out “by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit” (Rom. 15:19).

And in his summary of the spiritual gifts, Paul includes “workers of miracles” among those whom God has appointed in the church (1 Cor. 12:28).

The gifts of healing and of working miracles were closely connected. In 1 Corinthians 12:9, 10 Paul groups the three

Nothing can change the fact that the greatest miracle of all still happens when a human heart is changed.
gifts of faith, healing, and miraculous powers together, letting the gift of faith stand first. This is the spiritual gift of the faith that can move mountains, the gift that enables God to do that which is impossible for humans but possible for Him. This gift of faith is exercised in the gift of working miracles.

Thus miracles in the early church testified to the power of God and supported the proclamation of the gospel.

Miracles Today

As I fellowship with believers in many different countries and cultures, the miraculous working of the Spirit of God strikes me. Wouldn’t it be a tremendous blessing if the 1997 Week of Prayer services gave ample time for each of us to hear and tell about the miracles God is accomplishing by His Spirit in ourselves?

The nature of miracles changes in time, because our opinions of what constitutes a miracle changes. In our time, through technology so many things that once were miracles are now happening every day. But nothing can change the fact that the greatest miracle of all still happens when a human heart is changed. Heaven rejoices with us when the Holy Spirit brings a human heart to confess sin and acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

As I try to grasp the overwhelming evidence of God’s power, I see in my mind the Croatian soldier who was hiding out during the civil war in the former Yugoslavia, firing his machine gun from the windows of the Adventist church building in Derwenta, Bosnia, which was totally destroyed. While waiting for an opportunity to escape, he found some magazines and began to read. Children’s drawings of God the Creator were still hanging on the destroyed wall of the Sabbath school. What this young soldier found in that deserted church was the powerful Word of God. It changed his life. As he returned home, he began to look for a Seventh-day Adventist church, where he accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour through baptism. I also see the miracle of a very special baptismal ceremony. The Seventh-day Adventist church in Riga, Latvia, had been used by the KGB as an entertainment hall for 45 years. One of the young pastors on the platform had once served the KGB, but he was now a new man, miraculously changed. As the candidates stepped into the baptismal pool, the union president, who had been persecuted all his life by the Soviet authorities, whispered their stories to me. Each of them was a miraculous testimony to the power of God. One of them had a criminal record. In fact, many prisoners in the town had experienced the miracle of receiving the Holy Spirit. Thus the Riga Prison Seventh-day Adventist Church was born in 1996 with 36 members. Prison officials witnessed the miracle: “We see a clear change in their lives when people become Seventh-day Adventist Christians.”

A young woman from Lithuania told the following amazing story of her conversion: “My family was not a happy family, and my parents were often quarreling. My father was a heavy smoker. But four years ago something happened that totally changed our life. One morning my father suffered terrible pain in his stomach. After surgery he felt better and returned home, but because of complications he had to stay in bed for two more months. “At that time an American evangelist commenced an evangelistic campaign in our town. My mother and
I attended every night, and when he called for baptism, we decided to follow Jesus.

"Father first laughed at us. But when he saw we were serious, he forbade us to go. But since he was in bed, he could not stop us. In order to prove us wrong, he took two Lithuanian Bibles and a Russian Bible and began to look for errors in our faith. As he studied, the clearer he saw that we had found the truth. Six months later he invited our pastor to come and visit him. He had many questions at first, but slowly he became ready to make a decision.

"God planned everything perfectly. Through my father's illness He made it possible for my mother and me to discover the good news. At the same time He made it necessary for my father to stop smoking and begin studying the Word.

"Now my father is baptized and is one of the most active church members. God has brought peace to our home. The sound of quarreling is gone. I have experienced the fulfillment of the words of Jesus: 'Come unto me, all who are weary, and I will give you rest.'"

This young woman became the interpreter for many later evangelists in Lithuania, and many have been led to the Saviour through the sound of her voice.

The Gift of Faith in Jesus

Notwithstanding all that we have said so far, however, Jesus called for a faith that was not founded on signs. "Unless you see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus said, "you will never believe" (John 4:48). Jesus knew that signs will not convince the heart that lacks faith, since faith is not an intellectual conclusion, but a spiritual gift. “Everyone who has will be given more” (Matt. 25:29).

Human beings cannot survive without a miracle of salvation. We are lost; we will die and lose everything we have and are; we will be separated from the ones we love; and there is no hope, no resurrection, no eternal life, unless Jesus Christ is risen and unless we put all our faith in Him. Jesus is the incomparably miraculous sign of the grace of God: "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:12).

God filled Christ with all His fullness, with all His glory and power—because of Christ's attitude of humility: "Being in very nature God, [He] did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, . . . Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name" (Phil. 2:6-9).

The ultimate condition for assurance in Christ is that we are filled with the power of God. How? By having the mind and attitude of Christ. His spirit of humility opens up the outpouring of the blessings of heaven into our hearts.

Finally, Christ offers Himself to us. That is the greatest miracle of all—and it happens all the time! He is the solution to all our problems. Will we receive Him? When we do, the blessings of heaven will be poured out in our hearts.

Miracles and the Seventh-day Adventist Church

The name "Seventh-day Adventist Christian" draws attention to the God of miracles. It refers to a people who are (1) celebrating the miracle of Creation through the Sabbath blessing; (2) confessing Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, founded on the miracles of His incarnation, atoning death, resurrection, ascension, and heavenly mediatorial ministry; and (3) preparing for the miracle of Christ's second coming.

All this focuses on God and His power and ability to bring His plan to fulfillment. He shares His power with His servants. In a particular way all power in heaven and earth has been awarded to the risen Saviour. He shares it with His disciples. The gift of faith and miraculous power has been promised us through the Holy Spirit. He shares it with His church.

Questions for Discussion

1. How would you define a miracle? What difference (if any) do you see between the amazing accomplishments of modern technology and miracles as defined in Scripture?

2. What are the benefits of miracles? What are their drawbacks? How do we keep from becoming either too skeptical or too gullible on this question?

3. What examples of miracles in your personal life can you share with your discussion group?*

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But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

In the beginning God created human beings in His own image, in His own likeness (Gen. 1:26), and gave them dominion over the whole creation. They were "in perfect harmony with the nature and the law of God; the principles of righteousness" were upon them (The Great Controversy, p. 467). For a period they enjoyed direct communion with their Maker.

But they yielded to sin, and immediately feeling the guilt and shame of their act, hid from Him in whose presence they'd once found their delight (see Gen. 3:8).

With sin came death, a calamity that "passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12; cf. Gen. 2:17; 3:19; Rom. 6:23). To fulfill the demands of God's holy law, God, in love, gave His only begotten Son, "that whatsoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Christ, the eternal Son of God, paid the penalty of sin so as to reconcile us to God.

When Adam and Eve fell into sin, God not only went in search of them (Gen. 3:9); He also immediately promised their restoration. He pledged to introduce a supernatural enmity between Satan and humanity, between the seed of the devil and that of the woman (verse 15). It was a pronouncement of hope, a promise of the coming Redeemer.

The promise was fulfilled when "God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17). "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). Through Christ's reconciliation the relationship between God and humanity was restored. It was through Christ's merits that humans once again came into harmony with their Maker. Thus the sinner is led back to God, not alone, but through Jesus Christ. God had every right to let humanity perish, but He took the initiative in restoring the broken relationship between humanity and Himself because of His love. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). We had made ourselves His enemies, but "we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." Having been reconciled, "we shall be saved by his life" (verse 10).

It took Christ's life as well as His death to bridge the gap that sin had created. "Man had become so degraded by sin that it was impossible for him, in himself, to come into harmony with Him whose nature is purity and goodness. But Christ, after having redeemed man from the condemnation of the law, could impart divine power to unite with human effort. Thus by repentance toward God and faith in Christ the fallen children of Adam might once more become 'sons of God' (1 John 3:2)."

(Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 64).

Adam's rebellion brought sin, condemnation, and death to all. Christ reversed the downward trend. "Through His death, Christ broke the dominion of sin, terminated the spiritual captivity, removed the condemnation and curse of the law, and made eternal life available to all repentant sinners. . . . In His great love, He subjected Himself to the divine judgment on sin and became humanity's representative" (Seventh-day Adventists Believe, p. 113). He made Himself "to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Christ's atoning ministry affects not only the human race, but the entire universe. It pleased God, through Christ, "having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him, to reconcile all things unto himself; . . . whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven" (Col. 1:20).

But for reconciliation to be effective, there must first be a conviction of sin. We must accept that we are sinners...
Because we have transgressed the law (see 1 John 3:4). Our character must be tested against God's great standard of righteousness in order for us to see our guilt. The law, like a mirror, shows the perfection of a righteous character and enables us to discern the defects of our own.

But while the law reveals to us our sins, it provides no remedy. It is only the Christian who has the remedy from the condemnation or the defilement of sin. But we must exercise repentance toward God, whose law has been transgressed. We must have faith in Christ, in His atoning sacrifice, before we can obtain the remission of sins that are past. We then become partakers of the divine nature, and having received the spirit of adoption, we are now children of God (see The Great Controversy, p. 469).

Thus Christ's death ratified God's ownership of humanity. Paul said, "Know ye not that your own selves are not your own? For ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:19, 20; see also 1 Cor. 7:23).

But while the price is paid, reconciliation cannot be consummated if the sinner does not accept the gift. Reconciliation becomes effective only when forgiveness is accepted. Luke records the story of the prodigal son, who was reconciled with his father only after he accepted his father's love and forgiveness (Luke 15:11-24). The publican was justified only when he accepted that he was a sinner and asked mercy from God (Luke 18:13, 14). Only those who accept by faith that God has reconciled the world to Himself in Christ and who submit to Him will be justified and have peace with God (Rom. 5:1).

A justified person will love God because they have been reconciled to God. Loving God is the product of being saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. The test of every person's profession that they love God is their attitude toward God's law. "If ye love me," Christ says, "keep my commandments. . . . He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (John 14:15-21). But "be that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4).

One of Christ's last commands to His disciples was to "love one another" as He had loved them (John 13:34). If we have in any way grieved or wounded others, it is our duty to confess our fault and seek reconciliation. This is an essential preparation, that we may come before God in faith to ask His blessings. It is equally essential that "bitterness and animosity . . . be banished from the soul if we would be in harmony with heaven" (The Desire of Ages, p. 310).

"If there is disunion among those who claim to believe the truth," Ellen White says, "the world will conclude that this people cannot be of God, because they are working against one another. When we are one with Christ, we shall be united among ourselves" (Testimonies, vol. 6, p. 139). "Christ's influence is to be felt in our world through His believing children. He who is converted is to exert the same kind of an influence which through God's instrumentality was made effectual in his conversion. All our work in this world is to be done in harmony and love and unity. We are to keep the example of Christ ever before us, walking in His footsteps" (Selected Messages, book 3, p. 15).

The center of Christ's prayer to the Father is "that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:21). "Harmony and union existing among men of varied dispositions is the strongest witness that can be borne that God has sent His Son into the world to save sinners. It is our privilege to bear this witness. But, in order to do this, we must place ourselves under Christ's command. Our characters must be molded in harmony with His character, our wills must be surrendered to His will. Then we shall work together without a thought of collision" (Testimonies, vol. 8, pp. 242, 243).

If we accept Christ, we become new creatures; our old self has passed away. All things have become new (see 2 Cor. 5:17). When this mighty change has taken place in ourselves, then we have "passed from death unto life, from sin unto holiness, from transgression and rebellion to obedience and loyalty. The old life of alienation from God has ended; the new life of reconciliation, of faith and love, has begun" (The Great Controversy, p. 468). "The more we understand God's grace in the light of the cross, the less self-righteousness we will feel and the more we will realize how blessed we are" (Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . ., p. 116). "Gratitude, praise, and joy arise, obedience becomes a delight, the study of His Word a joy, and the mind a ready dwelling place of the Holy Spirit" (ibid.).

The amazing love revealed in God's ministry of reconciliation through Jesus Christ will motivate all who have been reconciled to God to share the gospel with others. When we have experienced it ourselves, we cannot keep secret the fact that God will not count sin against those who accept Christ's sacrifice for sins. To us is committed "the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19). "We are ambassadors for Christ" (verse 20). We are to pass on to others the moving gospel invitation: "Be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (verses 20, 21).

Questions for Discussion

1. Why the need for reconciliation? Was God mad at us? How would you explain this biblical teaching?

2. How should the biblical doctrine of reconciliation be translated into our practical, everyday lives?

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Joy

It comes from a life of prayer and service.

Joy is the hallmark of the Christian. He has promised joy—fullness of joy, in His presence, and delights and pleasures forevermore.

One of the firstfruits of the Holy Spirit is joy—the joy of our salvation. What a wonderful God we serve. Of all people on earth, the Christian, who has salvation, forgiveness, hope, eternal life—and who walks in the light—has joy, Christ’s joy.

Let’s look at this reality of joy as we explore three avenues of reaching and experiencing more and more of that precious commodity that comes with the presence of the Holy Spirit—joy so rare, so precious, so evasive.

Through God’s Eyes of Love

One simple way to get started is by what I call “prayer walking.” The effectiveness of this method is that it sensitizes us to the needs of others. It involves actually walking down a few city blocks with a friend or two, each one taking a turn to pray both aloud and silently for those living or working or going to school in that particular place. Ask the Lord to do something special for them, to open their hearts and minds to the reality of who He is and who they are. Pray that they will see their need for salvation.

Through Our Love for God

Prayer, our greatest gift, our most powerful weapon, is also the beginning place for deep joy. Our teenagers are experiencing this in a wonderful way as they see what total dependence on God can do. It’s not at all unusual at teen prayer conferences and at other times and places to see little knots and clumps of young people praying together, praying for each other, for their church leaders, for their parents, for their faculty, for their family. To hear them gives us a new compassion for the lost. He who is not willing that any for whom we’re praying should perish wants to provide His Holy Spirit for real blessings.

A group of three teens and two adults visiting Reykjavik, Iceland, for a prayer and ministry conference were invited to a public high school, where the three teens would speak to students. Warmly welcomed, they were requested, however, not to proselytize, though they were free to answer any questions put to them by students.

God blessed and honored our young people’s faith and that of their many friends and families at home who were praying. They visited classrooms in which entire class periods were turned over to them. I just sat at the back of the classroom and prayed, watching God work through John Westerbrook, 16, from Paradise, California, as he spoke and fielded questions with remarkable candor and wisdom. God used this young basketball player, not only because of his sports ability (which deeply impressed the Icelandic teens) but also because of his love for Jesus and his dependence on Him, because of his openness about prayer and his joy in leading others to Christ.

As a result of these classroom encounters, a good number of non-Christians from that particular school enthusiastically attended the prayer conference at one of our churches in the city. Greg Howell, a student at Spring Valley Academy in Ohio, attended the prayer conference in England, following the one in Iceland. His life changed, as did those of his friends. They went back home willing

Carry the sunshine where darkness is rife,
Making the sorrowing glad.
and ready to be used in witnessing to their friends and families. God had more than surprised them with His daily power and His answers to their prayers. Baptisms among their friends have followed, and opportunities for reaching others have become something that they now expect. They find joy watching God work for them as they pray for wisdom, love, and boldness.

Greg works in food service at the Kettering Medical Center in Ohio while studying at the local academy. Because he had been praying for the Holy Spirit to lead and use him, he was impressed to contact one of the women with whom he works and offer to pray for her. He knew that she was experiencing some special family stress at that time, and his offer was accepted gratefully.

Because of his prayers, she attended NET ’96 and has been attending church services.

E. M. Bounds, that great Christian writer and prayer warrior, wrote the following: “The Holy Spirit will give the praying saint the brightness of an immortal hope, the music of a deathless song. In His baptism and communion with the heart, He will give sweeter and more enlarged visions of heaven until the taste for other things will fade, and other visions will grow dim and distant. He will put notes of other worlds in human hearts until all earth’s music is discarded and songless.”

In prayer we can pour out our love for God, our confessions, our gratitude, and our needs, wants, and petitions; and we can ask Him to do something very specific and special in the lives of others. Nearly all the prayers of Scripture were prayers for others. God gives us glimpses of the needs of others—not for criticism, which is destructive both to critic and to victim. Rather He calls us to intercede, to ask Him to do what only He can do in the lives of those in need. A wonderful song says it well:

“When I pray, I will pray for you,
For you need His love and His care,”

Through God’s Love for Us

God’s Word is the source of our joy, because it is there we meet Him and receive His instruction, cleansing, and blessings to our heart personally. It is there that we find a revelation of His love. Adults and youth are discovering that there are new and

“The Holy Spirit will give the praying saint the brightness of an immortal hope, the music of a deathless song.”

exciting ways to get into the Word to find personal messages and guidance. As they take a passage, reading it carefully with prayer, the Holy Spirit interprets the meaning. Someone has said, “Isn’t it amazing that something that David said thousands of years ago is exactly what I need right now?” Yes, God’s Word is living, because God is alive.

As you study even a very familiar passage of Scripture, put yourself into the scene. Observe, interpret, ask questions about what is going on and how it all relates to your life. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what the personal applications are for you personally. Ask for courage to live by the new light and strength received. Through Scripture God becomes our dearest, closest friend.

There are such powerful promises of God’s nearness. He has promised us His presence. He has promised to be our shepherd. He has promised to provide for our needs, whether they be spiritual, mental, physical, social, professional, or financial. No wonder we are amazed and filled with joy and love in His presence!

By His Love Through Us

The Holy Spirit is given for our joy, peace, and happiness, but also for ministry. Simply praying and studying the Scriptures may bring us joy and a new relationship with Christ. But unless it all results in ministry to others, we can become complacent and stagnant. God’s purpose for us is that we be useful in this world. He wants us to know Him, to discover what He is about in the world, and to join Him in His work.

In all three of God’s great gifts—prayer, Bible study, and ministry—we may find fulfillment and true joy in partnership with the King of kings and Lord of lords. As the Holy Spirit empowers and leads, ministry will not be something we do from 2:00–4:00 p.m. on a Sabbath afternoon. Rather it will become a sweet and beautiful way of life.

It is in seeing people around us now whom we have met through these experiences, as well as in the expectation of meeting in eternity those whom we have loved for Christ here, that we can ever know true joy.

Questions for Discussion

1. How can we make prayer a primary part of our witnessing strategy—personally and corporately?
2. What examples of the prayer dynamic can we find in Scripture? Which biblical prayer example has had the greatest impact on your life personally?

Ruthie Jacobsen served for most of her career in nursing administration and nursing education. She is now the coordinator of prayer ministries for the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland.
Jesus our Advocate presents an effectual plea in behalf of all who by repentance and faith have committed the keeping of their souls to Him. He pleads their cause and vanquishes their accuser by the mighty arguments of Calvary. His perfect obedience to God’s law, even unto the death of the cross, has given Him all power in heaven and in earth, and He claims of His Father mercy and reconciliation for guilty man. To the accuser of His people He declares: “The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan.” These are the purchase of my blood, brands plucked from the burning.” Those who rely upon Him in faith receive the comforting assurance: “Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.”

All that have put on the robe of Christ’s righteousness will stand before Him as chosen and faithful and true. Satan has no power to pluck them out of the hand of Christ. Not one soul that in penitence and faith has claimed His protection will Christ permit to pass under the enemy’s power. His word is pledged: “Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me.”

The promise given to Joshua is made to all: “If thou wilt keep my charge, ... I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by.” Angels of God will walk on either side of them, even in this world, and they will stand at last among the angels that surround the throne of God. “... We cannot answer the charges of Satan against us. Christ alone can make an effectual plea in our behalf. He is able to silence the accuser with arguments founded not upon our merits, but on His own.”

Jesus Our Saviour

It was to redeem us that Jesus lived and suffered and died. He became “a Man of Sorrows,” that we might be made partakers of everlasting joy. God permitted His beloved Son, full of grace and truth, to come from a world of indescribable glory, to a world marred and blighted with sin, darkened with the shadow of death and the curse. He permitted Him to leave the bosom of His love, the adoration of the angels, to suffer shame, insult, humiliation, hatred, and death. “The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:5).

Behold Him in the wilderness, in Gethsemane, upon the cross! The spotless Son of God took upon Himself the burden of sin. He who had been one with God felt in His soul the awful separation that sin makes between God and man. This wrung from His lips the anguished cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). It was the burden of sin, the sense of its terrible enormity, of its separation from God—it was this that broke the heart of the Son of God.

Let the mind awaken to gratitude that through Christ Jesus, the Father is faithful to fulfill the promise to forgive all sin. His mercy and His love are forever an assurance as we look upon Christ uplifted upon the cross of Calvary. Will we individually rise to the appreciation as far as we have capacity to comprehend the truth, that God Jehovah loves and forgives us if we believe in and love Jesus? Is He my Saviour? Can I lay hold upon His merits this very hour? Can I commit the keeping of my soul to Jesus Christ today? Yes. How? What assurance have we? I point you to Christ of Calvary. Can you stand under the shadow of the cross and there talk your crosses, your darkness, your wicked feelings? Can you do it? Dare you do it? You never dare to do it when standing under the shadow of the cross, because all that infinite sacrifice was made to make me love God. It was made that I might reflect the image of God in Jesus Christ. Well then, when all this sacrifice has been made for me, shall I let everybody know that it amounts to something? Shall I let the world know that Jesus, the precious Saviour, has made all this infinite
sacrifice that He might be formed within, the hope of glory, and that I might rejoice in His love?4

The Cross Is Everything

I point you to the cross of Calvary. The cross is everything to us. It is the pledge of our salvation, the pledge that we shall receive the crown of glory that faeth not away. It is to be our support in every trial, our refuge in every sorrow. It is the assurance to us that the Father loves us, and has given His Son for us. It is the assurance to us that our joy may be full.5

None but the Son of God could accomplish our redemption; for only He who was in the bosom of the Father could declare Him. Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it manifest. Nothing less than the infinite sacrifice made by Christ in behalf of fallen man could express the Father's love to lost humanity.6

The price paid for our redemption, the infinite sacrifice of our heavenly Father in giving His Son to die for us, should give us exalted conceptions of what we may become through Christ. As the inspired apostle John beheld the height, the depth, the breadth of the Father's love toward the perishing race, he was filled with adoration and reverence; and, failing to find suitable language in which to express the greatness and tenderness of this love, he called upon the world to behold it. “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1 John 3:1). What a value this places upon man! Through transgression the sons of man become subjects of Satan. Through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ the sons of Adam may become the sons of God. By assuming human nature, Christ elevates humanity. Fallen men are forgiveness blended with equity and justice, and the more clearly we discern innumerable evidences of a love that is infinite and a tender pity surpassing a mother's yearning sympathy for her wayward child.7

Through the imputed righteousness of Christ, the sinner may feel that he is pardoned, and may know that the law no more condemns him, because he is in harmony with all its precepts. It is his privilege to count himself innocent when he reads and thinks of the retribution that will fall upon the unbelieving and sinful. By faith he lays hold of the righteousness of Christ. . . . Knowing himself to be a sinner, a transgressor of the holy law of God, he looks to the perfect obedience of Christ, to His death upon Calvary for the sins of the world; and he has the assurance that he is justified by faith in the merit and sacrifice of Christ. He realizes that the law was obeyed in his behalf by the Son of God, and that the penalty of transgression cannot fall upon the believing sinner. The active obedience of Christ clothes the believing sinner with the righteousness that meets the demands of the law.8

Ample provision has been made that the people of God may attain perfection of character. The apostle says, “This is the will of God, even your sanctification.” Let every individual draw for himself from the inexhaustible source of all moral and intellectual power, in order that he may work the works of righteousness. Through the cross of Calvary every facility is furnished whereby man may be in union with his fellowmen, and in harmony with Christ in God. The Father says that He will love those who believe that Christ died for them,

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even as He loves His only begotten Son. The cross of Christ is the assurance that we may be complete in Him. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." In Christ is excellence, in Him intellectual greatness and moral efficiency.  

Sharing Calvary's Good News  

God in Christ is daily beseeching men to be reconciled to God. With outstretched arms He is ready to receive and welcome not only the sinner but the prodigal. His dying love, manifested on Calvary, is the sinner's assurance of acceptance, peace, and love. Teach these things in the simplest form, that the sin-darkened soul may see the light shining from the cross of Calvary.  

The Saviour desires your joy to be full, therefore He tells you to abide in Him and He will abide in you. Open the door of your heart, and let in Jesus, the source of Calvary, the light shining from the cross of Calvary.  

All heaven is actively engaged in the work of preparing a people for the second coming of Christ to our world, and "we are laborers together with Him. " God in Christ is daily beseeching every one who is willing to be his people, to receive and welcome not only the sinner but the prodigal. His dying love, manifested on Calvary, is the sinner's assurance of acceptance, peace, and love. Teach these things in the simplest form, that the sin-darkened soul may see the light shining from the cross of Calvary.  

The Saviour desires your joy to be full, therefore He tells you to abide in Him and He will abide in you. Open the door of your heart, and let in Jesus, the source of Calvary, the light shining from the cross of Calvary.  

All heaven is actively engaged in the work of preparing a people for the second coming of Christ to our world, and "we are laborers together with God." The end of all things is at hand. Now is our opportunity to work, "The night cometh, in which no man can work." We should proclaim Christ and Him crucified, thus preparing the way for His second appearing.  

Lift Him up, the Man of Calvary. Place yourselves where you may receive heavenly inspiration and be able to point the weary, the heavy-laden, the brokenhearted, the perplexed soul, to Jesus, the source of all spiritual strength. Be faithful minstrels, to show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.  

With pen and voice proclaim that Jesus lives to make intercession for us. Unite with the great Master-worker, follow the self-denying Redeemer through His pilgrimage of love on earth. The same Jesus that walked with His disciples, that taught them upon earth, that toiled and suffered in His human nature, is with us in His divine power. He is at our right hand to help in every emergency.  

Let us lift up Jesus, and reveal the Bible foundation for our faith. We are all to proclaim the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Jesus came to magnify the law, and make it honorable. He died to exalt the law of God, testifying of its changeless character; and as we proclaim God's law, we may look unto Jesus and be comforted with the assurance, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."  

Questions for Discussion  

1. In what practical ways do the Old Testament passages cited at the beginning of the article enhance your personal sense of assurance?  
2. Based on the present reading, what would you say should be the absolute source of our assurance? What role, if any, do we ourselves play in bringing about that sense of assurance?  
3. What is our responsibility to others in view of the cross? How does Maria White articulate that responsibility?  

Maria G. White was one of the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Her work continues to be a prophetic voice within it.
Introduction for Teachers

The theme for this Week of Prayer is assurance in Christ. We recount the story of Joseph, because it illustrates reasons for having confidence in salvation through Christ. The inspiration for this retelling comes from the book God Sent a Man, by Carlyle B. Haynes.

To help you make the Week of Prayer meaningful for the children, we include lesson sections for each day in the series:

Visual aids
- A visual aid introduces each segment of the story. Provide a world map or a map of the Middle East so the children know the part of the world in which Joseph lived. If you use felt pictures to illustrate the stories, have the children place the pictures on the board.

Introduction
- The introduction for each segment has been designed to help the children connect what they already know to the story. This will make the story relevant to their thinking. It also helps you discover how much they already know. Keep the introduction brief. Each day there is a reminder to follow up on the assignment you gave the children the day before.

Story
- The key to learning is participation. Children lose interest if their only task is listening. We have incorporated questions for you to ask. Each one of them should be answered by the children. Do not answer your own questions. Even if the children don’t answer immediately, force yourself to wait for them to respond. Listen to the children. If you do all the talking, you give them the message that they have no responsibility to think.

Children are accustomed to questions with only one right answer. Beware of jumping to the conclusion that a child’s answer is “wrong.” If you don’t understand how the child’s response applies to the question, ask the child to explain it to you. Often they have a logical idea underlying their response. As the children learn they can safely share their ideas, they will respond with fresh insights that enrich your own understanding.

If the children get into a good discussion on the topic of assurance of salvation, it is more important for you to listen to their questions and thoughts than finish a story.

Application
- Some people have enormous amounts of Bible knowledge, but no assurance of salvation, no personal relationship with Christ. Applying Bible information to one’s life is the crucial part of Bible study. The application suggested for each day has been designed to guide the children’s minds to personal meaning.

Decision
- A decision question is provided for each day. Feel free to use a different question if it would better fit your group. You may want to ask the children questions and discuss their answers with them. You may need to talk personally to a child who did not respond, as a misconception or hurt may be behind their decision not to answer. Have a child volunteer to pray as well as an adult.

Understanding
- Ask the children, “What was the most important idea you learned in this story?” Pay attention to what they say, to become aware of any misunderstandings. Their responses will help you understand the need for feedback from children in order to know what they think you taught them.

Activity
- Have the children draw a picture of some part of the story. This will help them think about what they have learned. If they have misunderstandings, the picture may make that obvious so you can gently help them revise their thinking. At the end of the week, help children combine their own pictures into a personal book of Joseph’s life.

Assignment
- An assignment is provided to help the children continue thinking about the story lesson. Adjust the assignment to fit your group of children. Be sure to ask for a report the next day.

NOTE: In each day’s segment, instructions for teachers are in italics.

SABBATH

We Are Safe in God’s Care

Genesis 35:27

Visual aids
- Bring out your own family pictures or an article that reminds you of something your parents or grandparents told you.
Provide drawing supplies.

Introduction

Show what you brought and briefly (two minutes maximum) tell your story.

What has your mom or dad, or one of your grandparents, taught you? Allow time for answers. During this Week of Prayer we’re going to be thinking about the story of Joseph in the Bible. His father and grandfather taught him important lessons that are for you and me as well as for him. Can you guess what any of those lessons might be? Listen to the children’s ideas.

Story

Who can tell me something about Joseph? What was his father’s name? Who was his grandfather? How many brothers did he have? Do you have any idea when he lived? Listen carefully to the children’s answers, because they will let you know how much detail to include in the story. If only one or two children are knowledgeable and the others are not, help them tell the story in brief to the others.

Joseph had a big family. Do you think they lived in a big house? What kind of house do you think they lived in? Yes, they lived in tents and took care of animals. When the animals ate all the grass nearby, they moved to a different place. Joseph was a boy when his family moved to Hebron, where his grandfather Isaac lived.

Joseph loved to hear the stories that his father Jacob and grandfather Isaac told. Hearing their stories was like having family worship at your house and listening to Bible stories. Do you know why they were alike? Listen to their ideas. Isaac and Jacob taught Joseph about God—the same stories you and your family read in the Bible.

Who didn’t Joseph’s family read the stories from the Bible? Let children answer. Because the Bible had not been written.

More than 200 years later Moses wrote the first books of the Bible. So Joseph learned about the true God by listening to his father and grandfather.

Grandfather Isaac told how God had asked his father, Abraham, to leave his hometown. God did not tell Abraham where he was going. Great-grandfather Abraham trusted God enough to follow wherever He led.

Several times God talked personally to great-grandfather and told him his family would have a wonderful future. Do you know your great-grandfather’s name? and where he lived?

Grandfather Isaac saw the friendship between God and his father, Abraham, so he grew up trusting God’s plans for the future and teaching his son Jacob about God. As Jacob grew older, he also learned to trust God to lead him and his family. God talked to Jacob personally. So Joseph learned the stories and knew that God would take care of them. And in the future, God would have them live with Him for ever and ever.

Application

Did you know that you are part of Abraham’s family? In Romans 4:16 the Bible tells us that everyone who trusts God is part of Abraham’s family. So the stories little Joseph heard are about your family too, and you too can depend on God to take care of you now. You can be sure God has planned a wonderful future for you that will last forever.

Decision

How many of you want to trust God like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph did? Let’s pray and tell our heavenly Father that we trust Him and thank Him for loving us and planning a good future for us.

Understanding

What was the most important idea you learned in this story? See the Introduction for Teachers.

Activity

Have the children draw a picture of little Joseph listening to his grandfather tell a story. See the Introduction for Teachers.

Assignment

I want you to talk to your mother and daddy, or the adult who cares for you, and share what you learned in this story. Tell them that now you know you are part of Abraham’s family, because you love and trust God like Abraham did.

Tell them God has a good plan for your future in this life and forever. Then ask them to tell you a story about how God has led them. Tomorrow you can share the story with us.

Have the children practice telling each other what they learned so they will be prepared to share the lesson with their parents.

SUNDAY

God Knows the Future

Genesis 37:1-22

Visual aids

Provide supplies to draw pictures of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, with names to be written under each one.

Introduction

Who has a story you heard from your parents about how God helped your family? Let them tell their stories, but keep them brief. Have the children draw a picture of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph and write their names. Give help as needed. Ask the children to tell you what they have learned about these people. Help the children make the family connections by thinking about their own father, grandfathers,
and great-grandfathers. If they are coloring, ask if they remember the special coat Joseph received. Have them color his coat with different colors.

**Story**

Even though God had chosen Abraham's family to be His special people, Joseph grew up with relatives who had problems. Joseph's mother died during the birth of his brother Benjamin. Perhaps that was one reason father Jacob gave extra time and attention to Joseph and Benjamin. Their mother, Rachel, had also been Jacob's first choice as a wife. Joseph would have been Jacob's first son if Rachel's father had not tricked Jacob into marrying her older sister, Leah, before he married Rachel. So you see, this was a mixed-up family. If you sometimes feel like your family is mixed-up, you can be sure that God understands and loves families with problems.

One father, one grandfather, three stepfathers, 12 brothers, at least one sister, and many helpers—all these people did not always get along with each other. Just as you and I make mistakes, Joseph and his family made mistakes too. Perhaps Jacob shouldn't have given Joseph that colorful coat. When they saw him in the beautiful coat, the older brothers hated Joseph. Because of that coat, the older brothers hated Joseph. God still loved them even though they were not perfect. Are you perfect? Does God love you? Pay close attention to how the children respond. Assure them of God's love.

Do you know what the word "prophecy" means? Listen to their ideas. Prophecy is knowing about something before it happens. Only God knows what will happen in the future, but sometimes God tells His people about the future. God told many secrets to His friend, great-grandfather Abraham. He said that Abraham would be the father of a great nation (Gen. 12:2), that his family would live in Canaan (Gen. 12:7), and that he would have a son (Gen. 15:3-5). God also told Jacob about the future (Gen. 28:11-15). Both Abraham and Jacob shared these secrets with their family, so Joseph and his brothers knew that God had plans for them.

Now, in a dream God gave Joseph a hint about what would happen to him in the future. We all dream every night, but few of our dreams mean anything. But once in a while God sends a message to someone in a dream.

One night Joseph dreamed that he and his brothers were gathering grain into bundles in the field. Suddenly Joseph's bundle of grain stood up straight, and his brothers' bundles leaned over as though bowing to Joseph's bundle. What a strange dream! What could it mean? Joseph told his brothers about it. In anger they asked him if he expected to rule over them. In their minds, that idea went right along with the coat that showed he would someday rule the family. The dream made them hate him more than ever.

God sent Joseph another dream; again he shared it with his family. In this second dream the sun and moon and 11 stars all bowed to him. His brothers looked at him and thought, "Just you wait! But father Jacob remembered that dream. Just as God had given prophetic messages to great-grandfather Abraham and to father Jacob, now Joseph himself had received prophetic messages.

One day Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers, who were out herding the animals. They looked mean when they saw him in the beautiful coat coming toward them. They planned to get even. They ripped off his coat. Some of the brothers wanted to kill him, but Reuben, the oldest, wanted to save Joseph. He persuaded the others to put Joseph into a cistern (a hole carved in a rock for storing water). Reuben thought he would finish his work, then later sneak back, pull Joseph out, and send him home.

After Reuben left, a caravan of traders came riding by on their camels. They were going to Egypt to sell things. Judah, the fourth brother, also wanted to save Joseph. Not knowing about Reuben's plans, he thought these traders would save Joseph as well as pay them money. Within minutes Joseph was headed for a faraway land to work as a slave.

What good would God's prophecies do him now?

**Application**

Why do you think God still loves people even when they make mistakes? Why do you think God lets bad things happen to people, like letting Joseph be sold as a slave? Listen carefully to what the children say. Pray for wisdom to respond appropriately to their concerns. In Romans 8:28 the Bible tells us that God works out something good for everyone who loves Him. Joseph loved God. So even though something sad happened to Joseph, we know that God will take care of him. When you love God and something sad happens to your family, will God take care of you? You can be sure He will work out a wonderful future. The Bible promises Jesus will come again and take us to live with Him in heaven.

**Decision**

Raise your hand if you want to love and trust God as Joseph did. Let's pray and thank our heavenly Father for making good plans for our lives and letting us know about the future. Prayer.

**Understanding**

What important ideas did you learn in this story?

**Activity**

Have the children make a cover for their book about Joseph's life. Add the picture they drew during the introduction.

**Assignment**

Ask your family to tell you stories about your grandfather and great-grandfather. Does your family remember how God helped your grandparents and great-grandparents in the past? Maybe tomorrow you will have an interesting story to share with us.
MONDAY

We Can Believe God’s Word

Genesis 37:25-36

Visual aids
Have enough cloth for blindfolds for half the number of children. Provide drawing supplies.

Introduction
Who has a story to tell about your grandfather or great-grandfather? Let them briefly tell their stories. Divide the children into equal-sized groups. Hand blindfolds to one group. Each of them chooses one person from the other group as a partner and ties a blindfold on them. If there is an extra child, you tie the blindfold on him/her and be the partner. Instruct the partners to walk around, with the “seeing” one telling the “blind” one which way to turn and when to stop up or down. Then discuss “trust” with the children. The blindfolded partner had to trust the companion to keep him/her safe. In our story about Joseph we have come to the part where he has been sold into slavery in a foreign land. What should Joseph do? Whom should he trust?

Story
Show these places on the map. Joseph was sold to the traders at a place called Dothan, north of Shechem. It was about 60 miles north of Hebron, where his father and grandfather lived. The traders were headed south to Egypt. Probably by the second or third day Joseph could see the hills where his family lived. He must have felt sad to think that they were so close, but his family didn’t know that and could not help him. The traders had tied Joseph so he could not escape. What should he do? Listen to the children. He must trust in God, couldn’t he?

As the days went by, he probably walked a lot, or maybe he rode on a camel. He had lots of time to think. What do you suppose he thought about? Let children suggest ideas. I think he reviewed in his mind what he knew about the future. His father expected him to be somebody special because he gave him that coat. God had said that his family would have a great future. God had given him dreams that he would be respected by his family. Now he had to choose whether to trust God to work out His plans.

He remembered that great-grandfather Abraham had been called to leave his home. And God took care of him just as He said He would. Joseph remembered the time his father, Jacob, ran away from home because his brother wanted to kill him. It was Jacob’s fault. He had made a mistake. Nighttime came, and he had no place to sleep except on the ground. He had to use a rock for a pillow. While he slept, he had a dream that a stairway reached from earth all the way up to heaven. Angels walked up and down the stairs. And at the top of the stairs God talked to Jacob, told him about the future, and promised to take care of him. When Jacob woke up, he trusted that God would do just what He said in the dream. And God did. Many years went by. God cared for Jacob and brought him back to live in Hebron, near his father.

Do you think Joseph decided to trust God’s word as his father had? Yes, he decided that he would not worry about what would happen to him in Egypt. Every day he would pray and remember that God would work out a good future for him.

When the traders arrived in Egypt, they took Joseph to a slave market and sold him. Could God take care of him even in a slave market? Yes, God sent one of the most important men in Egypt to buy Joseph. He was the man responsible for guarding the king of Egypt. What was his name? Yes, Potiphar. Potiphar took Joseph home to work in his beautiful big mansion. Joseph trusted God’s word that he would someday be important, so how do you suppose he did his work? Did he make other people do his work for him? Did he care whether Potiphar’s house was clean or not? Listen to children’s ideas. Every day Joseph asked God to help him do his best so he would be ready to do the work God was preparing for him in the future. Potiphar noticed what a good worker Joseph was and put him in charge of everything in the house.

Application
Why did Joseph trust God’s word? Have children suggest answers, but lead them to think of his family experiences where God had fulfilled what He said, and Joseph’s dreams about the future. Does God have a special future planned for you as well? Lead children to discuss the fact that God has a plan for every life, plan He plans to work out so, together with our parents (if they choose to go), to heaven to live with Him as His children. Just imagine! You are a son or daughter of the King of the universe. Have you asked God to help you do your work well so you will be ready for the harder work He wants you to do when you grow up?

Decision
Do you want to do your work well so you will be ready for what God has planned for you in the future? Let’s pray about that now. We can trust the word of our powerful heavenly Father. Prayer.

Understanding
What was the most important idea you learned in this story?

Activity
Have the children draw a picture of Joseph being sold as a slave or working in Potiphar’s house.

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Assignment

All of you are princes and princesses, aren't you? I want you to go home and look at your bedroom. Does your bedroom look as clean as a prince or princess' bedroom? Pray and ask Jesus to help you to start as Joseph did, so you can clean your room carefully. Remember that God has a wonderful future planned for you. You can tell us what happened when we get together for the next part of Joseph's story.

TUESDAY

We Can Depend on God's Promises

Genesis 40

Visual aids

Bring something that would remind children of a jail, such as handcuffs. Provide drawing supplies plus small pieces of paper and pencils.

Introduction

How many of you cleaned your bedroom so it is clean enough for a prince or princess? Give affirmation and assure those who haven't done it that they can continue to work on it. Have you ever had to wait for something? Let children briefly tell their stories. Has someone been mean to you while you were waiting? Show children the visual aids and ask them what they remind them of. When they mention jail, ask them what kind of people should be in jail.

Story

Joseph worked for Potiphar for 10 years. That was a long time to wait for his dreams to come true, wasn't it? How old was he when he went to Egypt? (17) So how old was he after working for Potiphar? (27) Let's read what the Bible says about Joseph during these years (Gen. 39:2-6). Was Joseph a good worker? Was he faithful to God? Did Potiphar like Joseph? How did Joseph look? It sounds like everything was going great for Joseph, right?

What had Joseph learned while he was working for Potiphar? Give him time to generate the following answers: the Egyptian language spoken by high government officials; how to live in a palace instead of a tent; how to dress, eat, and behave like a wealthy government official. He also learned how powerful Potiphar was. Back in those days high government officials could kill people if they didn't like them. That's not good, but that's the way Egypt was back then. Was it important for Joseph to understand how the government did things? Does God put us where we will learn what we will need to know?

Now, Satan really caused Joseph a lot of trouble. Potiphar's wife noticed the handsome Joseph. She invited him to sin with her. But she was the wife of his boss. She could get him in trouble with Potiphar by telling lies about him. What should he do? Let's read what Joseph said to her (Gen. 39:9). Is it more important for us to agree with people or to do what God wants us to do?

Joseph made a good choice, didn't he? But what happened to him when he made that good choice? He got thrown in jail! Let's read Psalm 105:18 to find out. Joseph, who made the right choice, was hurt by bad people. Why didn't Potiphar kill Joseph when his wife lied? Maybe he didn't really believe his wife's lies. Maybe he thought Joseph had done the right thing.

Now Joseph waited in prison. Do you think he lay on his prison cot and cried and did nothing while he waited? (Gen. 39:20-23). He worked hard while he waited. When you and I have to wait for something, we will feel happier if we work while we wait. God blessed Joseph, and he was put in charge of everything in the prison. What was Joseph waiting for? God had promised him a good future, hadn't He? Could Joseph depend on God's promises?

After Joseph had been in prison for about a year, two government officials came in as prisoners. One of them had baked the bread that the king ate. And the other one had protected the king’s cup, pouring drinks for the king and tasting the drinks to be sure that nobody tried to poison the king. But now the king was mad at these men and made them prisoners.

One morning Joseph came to see them and found both the baker and the cupbearer looking sad. They said they had dreamed strange dreams. But they didn't know what they meant. Read what Joseph said to them in Genesis 40:8. If there is time and the children are interested, go through both dreams. Otherwise, just say that what Joseph said came true.

When the cupbearer heard that he would be let out of prison he promised Joseph he would try to help him get out of prison (Gen. 40:23). Two years went by. Joseph waited in prison. Do you think it was easy to wait all that time? Did he get mad and stop doing his work? Do you think he felt God had forgotten him? What helped him have faith that he could depend on God's promises? If needed, give hints so the children mention the blessings Joseph received in the prison or his family stories. He didn't know it yet, but something exciting was about to happen.

Application

Have you ever been promised something by someone and they forgot to do it? Listen to their stories. People sometimes forget their promises, don't they? But does God forget? Why do you think God sometimes wants a long time to fulfill His promises? Accept all answers, but guide children to understand that God knows the best time for something to happen.

Decision

How many of you want to believe God's promises as Joseph did? Let's pray and ask Jesus to help us.

Understanding

What was the most important idea you learned in this story?

Activity

Have the children draw a picture of Joseph in prison for their book.

Assignment

What could you do at home to help someone in your family? Hand out small pieces of paper for the task to be written...
WEDNESDAY

Does God Perform Miracles?

Genesis 41

Visual aids
Equipment: Two glasses, salt, two fresh eggs. Provide drawing supplies. Preparation: Mix plenty of salt (about 10 heaping teaspoons) into a half glass of water. Fill the second glass half full of fresh water. Practice this experiment ahead of time.

Introduction
Who wants to talk about doing the task that you wrote down? Listen to their stories. Show children the "miracle" you have brought. Don’t tell the children there is any difference between the two waters. Try floating an egg in each glass, the glass with salt water and the glass with fresh water. The egg will float in the salt water and the glass with fresh water. But the egg will sink in the water because it is freshwater. The egg will float in the salt water and the glass with fresh water. Which do you think God wanted to have the children discuss how it works.

Now lift the eggs out of the glasses, hold a spoon down in the saltwater glass above the level of the salt water, and slowly pour the spoon in the salt water flow over the spoon. Don’t mix the liquids. Gently lower the egg into the water. It should float on the salt water and look as if it is suspended in the middle of the glass. Ask the children if they know what "miracle" means.

Finally show them how this "miracle" works. Help them to grapple with that something seems miraculous when you don’t understand it. Nothing is a miracle to God, because He understands everything.

In our story today something happens that seems like a miracle, but God was in control.

Story
You could have the children role-play this segment of the story as you tell it. The king of Egypt had a bad night. Strange dreams bothered him. The dreams differed from each other, but seemed similar. What could they mean? In the morning the dreams were clear in his mind, and troubling. He called the magicians and wise men together and told them all the details of the dreams. They couldn’t help him. Why do you think they couldn’t tell the king what the dreams meant? Whom do you think God wanted to have interpret the dreams?

The king paid these people to understand the meaning of puzzles and dreams, and they didn’t help him. His cupbearer stood there beside him. As the cupbearer saw the king’s anger, he remembered when he’d had a dream too. Who had told him what the dream meant? Now the cupbearer told the king about the Hebrew slave who worked in the prison. He could interpret dreams. “Bring him here,” the king said. Servants hurried to get Joseph. What did Joseph need to do to be ready to talk to the king? (Gen. 41:14). When you woke up this morning, were you ready to talk to _____? Use the name of the head of state in your country.

Who had prepared Joseph for this moment? Each day he had done the work he was given to do, depending on God to guide his life. And God had guided his life, so he had learned all the things he would need when he went before the king. He knew the right way to dress and talk and act. But how would he know what to say? (Gen. 41:15, 16). Who would tell Joseph what to say? God told Joseph what to say. Joseph told the king that God had revealed to him what He was going to do. Go through the details of the dreams if you have time and the children are interested. God would send seven good years, lots of food would grow, and the animals would be fat. Then seven . . . years would come when no food would grow, and the animals would not be able to find anything to eat. Joseph even told the king what he should do to protect his people during the bad years.

Would the king of Egypt believe what a slave said? (Gen. 41:37–43).

Where was Joseph when he woke up that morning? What happened by the end of the day? (Gen. 41:45). What two things did the king give him? Does all of this sound like a miracle? Miracles are events we can’t understand. And we surely can’t understand how in one morning Joseph went from being a prisoner to being prime minister of Egypt. Was it a miracle to God? No, because God had been guiding Joseph, putting him in just the right places. Now God saw that it was just the right time for Joseph to be put in charge of saving food so people would not starve when the bad years came. How old was Joseph when this happened? Read Genesis 41:46 to find out.

Joseph was really busy, organizing the work, traveling through the country, supervising the collection of food to be saved for the seven bad years. Besides all that, during the good years he and his wife had two baby boys. Do you remember their names? (Gen. 41:50–52).

If you could be big brother Manasseh or little brother Ephraim, what would you most like to do with your daddy, Joseph? Accept any answers they give. Suggest if they can’t think of answers: ride in the chariot (Gen. 41:43), travel around the country, play on the piles of grain, stay home with Mommy, swim in the Nile River, ride boats on the Nile River, visit the king, sit in a pyramid.

Joseph saved food for millions of people. The Bible says he saved huge piles of it, like the sands of the sea (Gen. 41:49). He saved so much food that the arithmetic system of Egypt didn’t have enough numbers or words to describe how much.

Application
Did God have a plan for Joseph’s life? Did Joseph faithfully do his work every day while he waited for God’s plan to work out? Does God have a plan for your life? Do you know what it is? What should you do while you wait to find out about God’s plan for you?

Decision
Come and stand by me if you want to
Tomorrow you can share with us what you discovered God's plan for their lives. Ask them how they look the same as they grow older? Have pictures that are the same person. Do you know who this person is? And who is the person in the other picture? Have the children draw a picture of Joseph as prime minister with his two little boys.

Assignment
Tell your family what you learned about miracles and about Joseph. Ask them if they have any idea what God's plan is for your life. Ask them how they discovered God's plan for their lives. Tomorrow you can share with us what you learned.

THURSDAY

The Family Together as Friends

Genesis 43-45

Visual aids
Bring pictures of the same person as a youth and as an adult (if possible, someone the children know). Have a few children help you set up a simple cross. You will need tape, pencils, and small pieces of paper. Provide drawing supplies.

Introduction
Do you have something you want to share with us that you learned from talking with your family? Now I want you to look at these pictures. Do you know who this person is? And who is the person in the other picture? Give them hints until they figure out that the pictures are the same person. Do people look the same as they grow older? Have you seen pictures of your parents as children? In our story Joseph is now prime minister. Do you think he looked the same as he did at 17?

Story
The seven wonderful years passed. Joseph had the mountains of grain ready. Just as God had said, the seven terrible years came. Farmers in Egypt and other countries planted, but their plants shivered up and died. Families ran out of food. Can you think of a family in Canaan worried about having food to eat? They lived about 200 miles (332 kilometers) north of Egypt. Let’s look at the map. Yes, it was Jacob’s family.

Do you think they had been happy during the 22 years after Joseph left? Grandfather Isaac had died. Jacob was sad. Do you think Joseph’s being gone made the brothers happy? Did you ever do something wrong and try to keep it a secret? How did it make you feel?
The animals got hungry, and the family ran out of food. Someone told Jacob they could buy food in Egypt. So he told his sons to go buy food. Let’s read Genesis 42:1 and find out what they did.

Why did they keep looking at each other? Now let’s read verses 3-5. Finally the 10 older brothers did go to Egypt. In Genesis 42:6-9 we find what happened when they arrived. How could Joseph recognize them, yet they did not recognize him? Had Joseph changed more than they had? What did Joseph remember when the brothers bowed down to ask him to sell them grain?

Joseph asked his brothers questions. Whom did Joseph want to find out about? Then he accused them of being spies and put them in prison for three days. Why did he do that? Were he mad and trying to get even? Let’s read what happened next in Genesis 42:18-24.

Instead of using the following five paragraphs, depending on your group of children, you may want to have the children role-play the story or read Genesis 42:25 through Genesis 45. Ask questions to be sure the children understand what is happening.

So Joseph sent all of them home but one brother. He put Simeon back in prison to ensure that little brother Benjamin would come on the next trip. Nine sad brothers went home to tell their father what had happened. Jacob thought he had now lost two sons, both Joseph and Simeon. He was determined that Benjamin not go to Egypt. Does it sound like Benjamin was now the favorite son?

Time went by, and food ran short again. Jacob told the older brothers to go buy more. They refused to go without Benjamin, and finally Jacob agreed.

When Joseph saw his 10 brothers, he told his servant to take them to his palace and prepare a feast. What happened?
The next morning they left for home with food for their families. Just when they got outside the city, Joseph’s servant caught up with them and accused them of stealing Joseph’s special cup. Where did they find the cup? Now they had a chance to get rid of another brother who was their father’s favorite. Were they happy about it? What had happened to the brothers since they sold Joseph?

During the years that they kept that awful secret, God gave them time to change. Were they willing to hurt their father again?

Judah, the fourth brother, made a speech to Joseph, pleading for Benjamin to go home to their father.

Now Joseph couldn’t control his feelings anymore. What did he do? Did Joseph blame the brothers for the mean things they had done? Read verses 7 and 8. Who did Joseph say had sent him to ADVENTIST REVIEW, OCTOBER 30, 1997 (1477) 53
Egypt, and why? Do you think God is in control of your life and where you live?

Joseph enjoyed the happiest day he had had for a long time—together again with his family. Now they were friends. Joseph told his brothers to hurry back and bring the whole family to live in Egypt, where they would have food during the years of famine. What did Joseph tell them as they left?

Application

Have you ever heard the word “reconciled”? Do you know what it means? It means that people who had problems between them have become friends. Joseph and his brothers were reconciled, weren’t they? Have you disliked someone and finally ended up being friends with them? It feels good to be reconciled, doesn’t it? Somebody has reconciled you and me to God. Who is it? Let’s read Colossians 1:21-23. Can you say this with me?

1. We all used to hate and disobey God.
2. Jesus died to reconcile us to God, to help us see Him as our friend.
3. God will introduce us in heaven as holy, perfect people.
4. Our part is to depend on God while we wait for Jesus to come.

Do you know what we just talked about? It is called the gospel. When you hear someone talk about the gospel, you will know what it is. Let’s say it again.

Decision

What does Joseph’s story teach you to do if someone is mean to you? Should you try to get even with that person? Would you like Jesus to help you be like Joseph and forgive people who are mean to you? If so, come and stand here with me while we pray and ask God to give us a kind and forgiving spirit.

Understanding

What was the most important idea you learned in this story?

Activity

To add to the book they are making, have the children draw pictures of Joseph telling his brothers who he is.

We Can Be Sure of the Holy Spirit’s Help

Genesis 39:3-6, 23; 41:18-41

Visual aid

Bring a green plant and an oil lamp. Provide drawing supplies.

Introduction

Are you happy because you forgave someone? Show the children the green plant and ask them what it needs to have the power to grow. There are several answers, but when water is mentioned, emphasize it. Show the oil lamp and ask what it needs to have the power to give light. The Bible uses both water and oil to represent Someone important. Do you know who He is? In today’s part of our story about Joseph we will talk about how Joseph had the power to be God’s representative.

Story

What made Joseph’s brothers happy as they hurried home? How do you think they felt about telling Jacob that Joseph was a ruler in Egypt? What did Jacob think when he heard the news? (Gen. 45:25-28).

The night that Jacob was on the way to Egypt, God spoke to him. Read what happened in Genesis 46:1-4. Can you find the city on the map where Jacob camped? God repeated the promises He had given to Abraham and Isaac. Why hadn’t God told Jacob about Joseph during all those long years? What would Jacob have done if he had known that Joseph had been sold as a slave in Egypt? Only God knew the right time for Joseph and his family to be together again. Jacob, Joseph, and the brothers had to wait for God’s timing.

Was it God’s plan for Jacob’s family to live in Egypt? (Gen. 15:13, 14).

Jacob became very old, and before he died he called together his 12 sons and told something special about each one. When he told about Joseph, Jacob revealed how Joseph became such a powerful witness for God. Even though his brothers attacked him and others tried to hurt him, Joseph remained faithful to God, doing his work day by day, showing the kind of God he worshiped.

What was it that gave the plant power to grow? What was it that gave the lamp power to be a light? Who do the water and oil represent in the Bible? Do you think this same power was the secret of Joseph’s success?

In Genesis 49:24, 25 we find that Jacob repeats the secret of Joseph’s power in four different ways:

1. Because of the hand of the Mighty One.
2. Because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel.
3. Because of your father’s God.
4. Because of the Almighty.

Do you think Jacob was happy to see how powerfully God had worked in Joseph’s life? Pharaoh had discovered Joseph’s secret. The woman in the prison discovered the secret of Joseph’s power (Gen. 39:23). Pharaoh, the Egyptian king, discovered the secret.

God was the secret of Joseph’s ability to do everything well. God sends His Holy Spirit to work in the lives of people who love Him and follow His guidance. All the people who knew Joseph knew that the God he served was a mighty God. So God could accomplish great things through him.

**Application**

When we study Joseph’s life, we find that God’s Holy Spirit helped him wait, work hard, and be willing to suffer rather than be unfaithful to God. Is God willing to send His Holy Spirit to work in our lives like He did for Joseph? Is there anything we need to do to have the Holy Spirit working in our lives? What evidence have you seen of the Holy Spirit working in someone’s life?

**Decision**

If you want God’s Holy Spirit to work in your life, raise your hand. Let’s pray that Jesus will help us be faithful so God’s Spirit will work in us as He did in Joseph. Prayer.

**Understanding**

What was the most important idea you learned in this story?

**Activity**

Have the children add to their books by drawing a picture of Joseph greeting Jacob as his family arrived in Egypt.

**Assignment**

When you go home, talk to your parents about God’s Holy Spirit. Ask them where they have seen Him working. Then ask them to pray with you that the Holy Spirit will work in you and your family so people will know you worship a mighty God.

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**SECOND SABBATH**

**Calvary: The Ultimate Security**

**Geneva 45:7, 8; 50:15-21**

**Visual aid**

Provide drawing supplies.

**Introduction**

What did you learn about the Holy Spirit from talking with your family? Let children talk briefly about what they learned. Hand out paper and pencils and ask the children to draw a picture of a time they were saved from danger or a problem. When they finish the pictures, have them explain their picture stories. After each story, have the children repeat Psalm 121:2 from the New International Version: “My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.” Make a transition to the story by saying the following to the children: In the last part of our story we will talk about Joseph saving his family and how his story reminds us of Someone who has saved you and me.

**Story**

This final part of the story is taken from Patriarchs and Prophets, pages 239, 240. For 17 years Joseph lived happily with his family in Egypt. What would have happened to Joseph’s family if he had not become ruler of Egypt?

After father Jacob died, the 10 older brothers feared that Joseph would now get even with them for the bad things they had done. We can read about it in Genesis 50:15-21. Did Jacob leave the instructions the brothers said he did? Why did they say that? What did Joseph say God intended to do by sending him to Egypt? God sent Joseph to Egypt to save lives. Do you and I need to be saved? Who saved us? God sent His Son, Jesus, to save us, didn’t He?

All through his life Joseph believed God. He never doubted God’s prophecies. The story of Joseph’s life encourages us to believe also. But we have a better reason to believe in God’s word. Because Jesus died on the cross, we know how much God loves us and wants us to live with us forever. This gives us assurance.

Today I want you to think about the ways that Joseph and Jesus were alike. Envious brothers sold Joseph to ensure his dreams could not come true. What did envious people do to Jesus? They thought if they killed Joseph, He could not become king. What happened? In both cases God used their wicked actions to make His plans happen.

By slavery in Egypt Joseph saved his family. What did Jesus go through to save you and me? Does that mean the wicked people were doing what God wanted them to do? No, God is never happy when people sin, because He knows that sin hurts. But God is so powerful that His plans will happen even if wicked people try to stop them.

Joseph was sold by his own brothers. Who sold Jesus? Joseph was lied about and punished for something he did not do. What about Jesus?

Joseph forgave his brothers who had done wrong. What about Jesus?

Do you love Jesus for saving you? Let’s gather in a circle and kneel as we pray and thank Jesus for being our Saviour and Friend. We can thank Him for the story of Joseph, which helps us understand Jesus better. Prayer.

**Activity**

Have children complete and admire their Joseph books.

Virginia Smith is director of Children’s Ministries of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Silver Spring, Maryland.
In Full Assurance
A Message From the President

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:22).

Of all people, Seventh-day Adventists should know what it means to have this “full assurance of faith.” Why? Because that verse itself was written in the context of Christ as our great high priest, an area where the Adventist Church has been particularly blessed with great light.

According to Hebrews, we can have this full assurance because we have a High Priest who is our representative, One who has paved the way into the heavenly sanctuary and is there to “appear in the presence of God for us” (Heb. 9:24).

The chasm between humanity and God, caused by sin, has been bridged by Jesus Christ. The barrier between God and humanity has been breached. By His perfect sacrifice, Jesus, the God-man, has made a new and living way for us to have access to God in the heavenly sanctuary (see Heb. 10:19-22).

The key to our full assurance in faith is that Jesus has already “obtained eternal redemption for us” (Heb. 9:12). By His death on Calvary He paid the penalty for our sins, and now He stands in our stead in the heavenly sanctuary, pleading the merits of His perfect righteousness in our behalf. Not because we deserve anything but death, but because of His great love and mercy. At the cross Jesus bore the wrath of God’s righteous indignation against sin so that we never have to. Instead, we can have access to God in the heavenly sanctuary because of the eternal redemption that Jesus has already obtained in our behalf.

Talk about assurance!

Accepting Christ by faith, we know that our hope does not come from what we have done, but from what Christ has done for us. “Therefore being justified by faith,” Paul said, “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:1, 2).

To a discouraged sister in Christ Ellen White penned one of her most beautiful statements on assurance: “The message from God to me for you is “Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). If you have nothing else to plead before God but this one promise from your Lord and Saviour, you have the assurance that you will never, never be turned away. It may seem to you that you are hanging upon a single promise, but appropriate that one promise, and it will open to you the whole treasure house of the riches of the grace of Christ. Cling to that promise and you are safe. ‘Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.’ Present this assurance to Jesus, and you are as safe as though inside the city of God” (Manuscript Releases, vol. 10, p. 175; italics supplied).

At this critical time let us use every resource provided for our spiritual enrichment (including the Adventist Review, through which these readings come to you)” to help us on our Christian journey. If we keep our focus on Jesus, grasping the promises by faith, we will, by His grace, never fail of eternal life.

Sincerely your brother,

Robert S. Folkenberg is president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland.

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