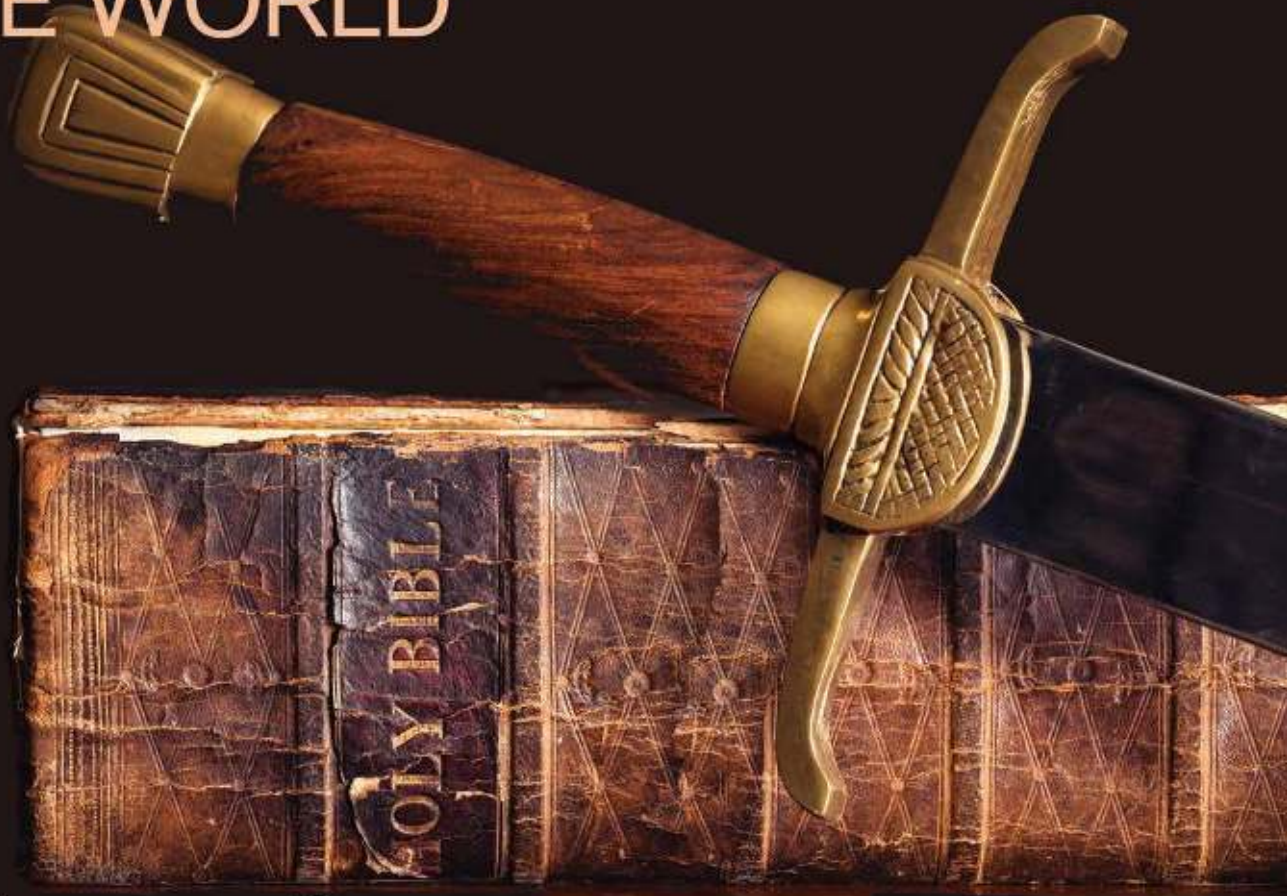


Revolution

THE REFORMATION
THAT CHANGED
THE WORLD



Youth
SERMONS

Everyday teens and young adults are in a game, but it's more than a game. It's a battle.
A battle for their souls. **HELP THEM PREPARE FOR THE BATTLE**

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GLOBAL YOUTH DAY

March 18th, 2017



...be the sermon...



Revolution

the reformation that changed the world

Principal Writer

Dr. Johannes Hartlapp

2017 Senior Youth/ Young Adults
WEEK OF PRAYER READINGS

Published by the

General Conference Youth Ministries Department





2017 YOUTH & YOUNG ADULTS YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER SERMONS

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Plan a **Homecoming Celebration** *Form a Barnabas Support Group*

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

Sometimes young people who make mistakes just need someone to believe in them.

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

WILL YOU BE A BARNABAS TODAY?

Encourage a young person to come back Home.

HELP THEM FIND THEIR WAY BACK HOME!

for ideas on planning your Homecoming program visit:

GCYOUTHMINISTRIES.ORG

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THE REFORMATION ALTAR PAINTING CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT
<http://www.medievalhistories.com/ways-cranach/>.

EDITORIAL by Pako Mokgwane



Dear Fellow Youth:

The essence of prayer is not for God to change His mind, nor for you to get what you want. Wants are not necessarily needs. Prayer is not the candy store. Prayer is meant to express our thanks and desires for our lives to God. But because we do not know how to pray, or how to express our prayer, the Holy Spirit appropriates the prayer (Romans 8:26).

Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:26-28)

Prayer should not be a mumble and rush of words, we should mean what we say, and be intentional about it. You are speaking to a loving Father, who wants to give you what is best for you. The knowledge of His love should make you speak freely with Him. This is why when you pray privately it does not matter how long you take, you are having a personal, one-on-one with your Father, who loves and understands you. It is the pipeline of communication between a loving Father and His children.

So, how does this communication work?

To begin, pick a consistent time where you can be alone with God. Jesus did it! He is our example. Prayer should not be an event, but a lifestyle. It shouldn't be a 'by the way thing.' Fit it into your schedule. Start the day with God and end the day with God and in between, consecrate to Him in fervent pray. Pray always! Prayer doesn't have to be verbalized all the time, it can be written. Some folks express themselves better in writing. If you are someone who prefers to write, then keep a prayer journal. Journaling prayers makes it easy to follow up on answered prayers and, when tempted to be discouraged, can also serve as encouragement and a reminder of how God has answered your prayers in the past.

Every sinner has a need for grace. The encounter of grace is between God and the individual and not any other person, otherwise it ceases to be grace. Grace is from God. Grace preserves the integrity of the individual since confession remains in the court of Heaven. God is fair and is free from any personal agendas and subtle inhibitions.

Grace is accentuated by Love. Only God can dish that out. A human being has no capacity to give out any saving grace. Therefore, when you ask for forgiveness, believe that it is instantaneous and real. The position of any clergy man cannot warrant any slight of grace. We have a high priest in the heavenly sanctuary!

So my friends, grace can be accessed anytime and anywhere. There is nothing under the sun too big or too sinful that the grace of God cannot handle. Yes, God is waiting to heal and forgive you, but you must seek Him in prayer. Just like He told the Israelites of old, He is telling us today: “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer *made* in this place” (2 Chron. 7:14-15).

Spend time in prayer, it will change you and those around you. The more you pray, the less you will be anxious. Pray! God always shows up.

Yours truly,


Pako Mokgwane



READ THIS FIRST

Start Your Planning Now. We know that leadership sometimes changes at the end of the year, but please, if you will no longer be the AY leader next year, do not let that stop you from planning for this special week. Start your planning, develop your target, get your team together, and make sure your pastor is a part of that team.

Form a Development/Review Team. Depending on the size of your church, this group can be four to eight persons who will go through all eight sermons with you. Include on your team only interested and committed young adults and youth ministry leaders (Pathfinder, Sabbath School, your pastor(s), etc.); this is important because it gives ownership to the entire group, rather than just you and your assistant. Ask the group to commit to meeting for at least three weeks—at least one week for four lessons, and an extra week to wrap things up. Be sure to identify the goal and direction you want to go, preferably at the first meeting, and choose a young person to speak for each day.

Integrate Global Youth Day (GYD) into Your Week of Prayer Plans. Ideally, GYD should be a time to teach youth how to sacrificially give of themselves by providing opportunities in the church and the community. If you are a small youth group and do not have the resources to arrange a community-based GYD event, you can use this opportunity to break down denominational barriers in the area by partnering with and pooling resources and ideas with other youth groups from other churches in your area. For more information on organizing a GYD program, please visit our website, www.gcyouthministries.org.

Commit Your Prayer Warriors. Get a team of adults together who will commit to praying for you and your ministry on a regular basis. Make sure this is a group with whom you can confidentially share both your personal and ministry prayer needs.

Choose a Theme Song. Involve your youth choir. If your church does not have a youth choir, this is the perfect time to get one started. Pick out songs that you all like and which fit the topic of each evening, or choose a song for the entire week.

Start a Prayer Journal. Nothing is greater for your personal spiritual growth than time spent in prayer. Your youth group will grow as you grow. Prayer journaling will help you encounter God in new and exciting ways. You will be able to “track” your walk with God as you go back and review answered prayers and see how He has lead you step by step each day. New, fresh ideas will come to mind as you spend time in His presence journaling your prayers. You can find many ideas online on starting and keeping a prayer journal. Just go to www.google.com and type in the words “starting a prayer journal.”

Picture of the Reformation Altar. The Reformation Altar painting can be found online at <http://www.medievalhistories.com/ways-cranach/>. If possible, please show this painting during your presentations. The link can be uploaded to your powerpoint files/slideshows and activated during your presentation. Be sure to test the link before your meetings. **TIP:** Try to use the same computer/laptop that you created the presentation on for your presentation.

KEEPING IT REAL *by Maria Manderson*



I am not sure when, where, or why it started, or even how it started. It just crept upon me unaware. All I know is that mobile games had fast become my drug of choice –it fixes all my problems. Seriously! No matter how bad my day has been, if I get a chance to play my Words with Friends game...win or lose...I am good. I no longer worry about whatever the problem of the moment is, and I do not even necessarily need people around either...once I could play my games with “friends” I was good. Words with Friends is an online game played with two persons at a time. The object is to make as many words as possible (this is not a money or gambling game).

Now, don’t get me wrong...I am not an anti-social person with no need of human Companionship. On the other hand, I am a person with a great need of human relations. I raised three boys, so I was used to having children, then teenagers in my house just about all the time. It was wonderful. Then suddenly I was alone. Me, a person who lives by routine, used to taking care of a family for 20+ years, suddenly alone. That type of loneliness can be very painful and confusing. The greater the need, the greater the risk of betrayal and hurt.

So, after realizing life can be painful, it was a heaven-sent when I discovered my mobile games. It became my night-time and weekend routine friend.

I am an addict.

But I am a Christian.

I should not be feeling lonely...I can always talk to God about it. Our children are not here to stay with us forever, we are supposed to train them into becoming independent, contributing members of society. They need to leave. How did it get to this? A mobile game, two or more hours a night playing a game with random people you may never meet. It felt safe. No hurt, no rejection, no risk of betrayal. Nothing. No risk at all.

After working on this Week of Prayer project for a while, I thought about the whole cycle of reformation. What it takes to really change and I decided that’s what I will do. In my quest to abide in Christ, I will have to change my way of thinking. I need to be careful; playing word games on a mobile phone is very innocent. It’s not a “sin,” it’s not even a temptation, it just started as something to pass the time. But, the danger is that anything that can take your mind off of Jesus, anything that can attempt to replace what only He can give, is an idol. It is wrong –it’s just that simple. The way back is also simple, but it will take discipline. No longer will I spend two or more hours a night and countless weekends playing games with random people I may never ever meet. Instead I am going to invest in spending time, and countless weekends with Someone I plan to meet one day. Jesus.

“What God has said isn’t only **alive and active!** It is sharper than any double-edged sword. His word can cut through our spirits and souls and through our joints and marrow, until it discovers the desires and thoughts of our hearts.”

Hebrews 4:12
Contemporary English Version (CEV)
Copyright © 1995 by American Bible Society

Ellen White says, “Divinity cooperates with humanity in the work of elevating and purifying the character. When the converting power of God takes hold of the soul, it will work a radical change” (Signs of the Times, July 29, 1889, paragraph 9). That is my desire....to have my character purified.

If you are struggling like I did, maybe developing a routine will help you get the communication going between the Lord and yourself. My routine looks something like this:

1. Prayer
2. At least 30 minutes in the morning reading the Bible
3. Work, school, or whatever daily activities you need to do.
4. Relax time
5. At least 30 minutes in the evenings reading the Bible
6. Prayer
7. Bed

Martin Luther once said: “To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.”

Bible reading and prayer done together are important for me. Experience has taught me that when I make prayer a priority, that special connection between me and God is strengthened, and because I like to read and write notes it is perfect for me to do them together; pray and read the Bible. I feel a lot closer to the Lord when I do that. God will always speak to us in ways that will not only transform us from the inside out, but also give us a better grasp on who we really are and what drives us.



www.globalyouthday.org

JOIN OVER 8 MILLION ADVENTIST YOUTH

MARCH 18

MOBILIZED ON THE STREETS *WORLDWIDE*

- Join in an Act of Kindness
- Give blood
- Volunteer at a shelter
- Visit the sick and shut-ins

Exit the building. Be the Church.

want to join? Contact _____



NEWSLETTER/CHURCH BULLETIN INSERT

MAKING SMALL GROUPS WORK

In this book are eight outstanding messages on reformation. Throughout these readings you will find opportunities to share stories from your own life. Use them. They will give you a chance to show that what you are talking about is real and personal, not just something theoretical from Scripture.

To encourage interaction we have included discussion questions to be used at the end of each day's reading. These discussion questions are very important in the process of adapting and applying the lesson to their daily lives. They can be done together as a large group, or you can break down into smaller groups of 10-15; however, we are suggesting that you break into small, core groups of three to five persons and get together in these same small groups each night. Please remember that no two small groups will be the same. Each will have its own dynamic character, reflecting the varying characteristics of the members. The common thread running through the entire group will be Jesus Christ, and it is in His name that the group will meet each night of this special week.

Avoid the "Christianese" and theological terms. Stick to language young people will understand. Always remember: this week and all the discussion will mean nothing to them if they don't understand what you are saying.

So what is a Small Group Covenant (SGC)?

A Small Group Covenant is a set of promises about behavior to help foster a safe environment for spiritual exploration and provide relational ground rules. It is a very good way to help your groups affirm and remember their commonality. Creating a covenant together as a group will require that the members consciously and intentionally commit to growing with each other as Christians and will help in keeping the group healthy and focused.

Guidelines for creating a small group covenant can be found on the next page. Please feel free to make as many copies of needed of the sample covenant on page 15.

As you create your small group, keep in mind that churches are different and what may work for another church may not necessarily work for your church or youth group. Some groups may want to do a formal covenant that is typed and given to each member to sign and keep. Or you may choose to do an informal covenant such as a verbal agreement that you review orally when there are new members.

Global Youth Day

Global Youth Day is set to launch the official week of the Youth Week of Prayer meetings. **Ahead of time, please contact your pastor or conference youth leader to see what projects your church will be involved in on this day, March 18.** After the Global Youth Day event, on the first night of your meetings, you may want to take some time to discuss or talk about the events that you just participated in.

SMALL GROUP COVENANT (SGC) GUIDELINES

The purpose of a small group is to create a safe place where every member can be themselves, wrestle with questions regarding their faith, be supported and encouraged in their walk with God, support one another in prayer and worship together so that group members glorify and honor God through their lives, individually and as a group.

Below are some guidelines to consider when creating a covenant for your youth group.

- ☐ **Duration** of the meeting (how long will the meeting be)
- ☐ **Time** and frequency of the meetings is set by church or youth leader.
- ☐ **Location:** Will the meetings be at the church, someone's house, or be on rotation?
- ☐ **Mission and Service:** We will serve the church and the community by encouraging the mutual discovery and application of talents and gifts so that group members embrace and serve people in families, their small groups, schools, churches, and community. Engaging in service is a way of learning together as well as giving.
- ☐ **Growth and development:** "We will develop and grow by..."
- ☐ **Participation:** There are no "dumb questions." Everyone is given the right to their own opinion and all comments are encouraged and respected.
- ☐ **Spiritual growth:** We will endeavor to grow in mutual submission and in the application of spiritual truth, so that as a group, and individually, we can become more like Jesus in attitude and behavior.
- ☐ **Confidentiality:** Anything of a personal nature that is said in the meeting is not repeated outside the meeting.
- ☐ **Openness:** As we are able, we will be honest and forthright with one another. Non-judgment zone!
- ☐ **Accountability:** We give each other permission to hold each other accountable for the goals we set as a group or our personal pledges (you may want to document accountability pledges in a log book).
- ☐ **Graciousness:** We will not speak about a person when he or she is not present.
- ☐ **Courtesy:** When the group meets, we will come on time.
- ☐ **Relationship-building:** We will be honest and open with each other and pray for one another between meetings.
- ☐ **Community:** We will commit to join the global church in repositioning mission at the very heart of who we are and what we stand for as Christians (depending on what your acts of kindness were, you can use this time to debrief after the Global Youth Day event).
- ☐ **Roles and Responsibilities.** We will seek to share the following roles and responsibilities: Leader, co-leader, subgroup leaders (depending on the size of the group/church), host/hostess, prayer coordinator, Global Youth Day service project coordinator (you will need this if you will be using the Global Youth Day to launch your Youth Week of Prayer).

Some of the information on creating a small group covenant was adapted from the Menlo Park Presbyterian Church Small Group Ministry website: <http://data.mppc.org/files/communitylife/Sample%20Small%20Group%20Covenants.pdf>



Our Small Group Covenant

I agree that this group exists as a safe place for me to be myself, wrestle with questions regarding my faith, and receive support and encouragement in my walk with God.

I AGREE TO:

1. Support the members of my group in prayer and worship together so that we can all glorify and honor God through our lives.
2. Attend each small group meeting if at all possible, and, should I not be able to attend, to let the leader know in advance.
3. While not expecting or promising strict confidentiality within this group, I promise to be sensitive to the privacy needs of others and to be respectful of group members when speaking to others about what is said here.
4. Pray regularly for my fellow group members.
5. Be respectful of everyone's opinion. All questions will be encouraged and respected.
6. Keep my advice to the minimum.
7. Participate openly and honestly in group sessions and leave room for all members to share.
8. Not speak about group members when they are not present.
9. Do everything I can to support the global church in its mission to the world.

Print Name

Signature

Date

Here I stand!

The reformation was a revolution.

By nailing his 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, Martin Luther (1483–1546) got the 16th-century Protestant Reformation rolling. Although, to be sure, we need to remember that while this act is cited as the primary starting point of the Protestant Reformation, before this we had [John Wycliffe](#), [John Huss](#), [Thomas Linacre](#), [Jerome of Prague](#), and others who had already put their life's work and even their lives on the line for the same cause of truth, constructing the foundation of change upon which Luther now built. A revolution that produced a new religious theology and philosophy within Christianity, the theology of openly talking about God.

This year, 2017, we commemorate the 500-year anniversary of that moment that inspired Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation and ultimately changed the world.

**THE REFORMATION ALTAR PAINTING CAN BE FOUND ONLINE
AT <http://www.medievalhistories.com/ways-cranach/>.**

Background and current relevance

In the days of Luther, the world was on the verge of upheaval. The capital city of the ancient Eastern Roman Empire, Constantinople, had fallen into the hands of the Muslim Ottoman Empire in 1453. Only a few years earlier—in 1439—Johannes Gutenberg had triggered a media revolution, a “globalization of thought,” that allowed a new way of communication to begin when he introduced printing with movable type in Europe. The discovery of America in 1492 overturned the old concept that the earth was flat. Humanists such as Erasmus of Rotterdam emphasized the capacity of human beings to think independently as they turned to thinkers of the ancient world looking for role models. After more than a thousand years, scholars experienced a reawakening of the study of Hebrew and Greek as biblical languages which had been almost completely forgotten. The medieval age, dominated by the knighthood, came to an end with the invention of firearms; new cities mushroomed everywhere in Europe. The Western world had entered into an era of transformation. Not everything changed, but the way had been opened for the possibilities for change.

Many people today feel the same way about our world. We are again experiencing fundamental changes: people anxiously observe the results of globalization, the digital revolution, terrorism, the dangers of war, and the destruction of our world by the lack of care for the environment. The unspoken questions is, “Is there anything we can rely on?”

While the key ideas of the Reformation—a call to purify the church and a belief that the Bible, not tradition, should be the sole source of spiritual authority—were not new

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presents

Richland Park

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- Copy text to clipboard
- Read text aloud using android's Text-To-Speech technology
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ideas, it was Martin Luther and the other reformers in Europe who were the first to masterfully use the power of print to give their ideas a wider audience. When Luther's friend, Johannes Gutenberg introduced printing to Europe it allowed a new way of communication to begin. With this media revolution came a huge increase in the production of leaflets and other printable material that served to illustrate messages on belief and faith, and gave the public access to the reformers' ideas and thoughts.

As a young man Martin Luther struggled to find peace with God. He was troubled by the question of how he could receive the grace of God, how he could find access to a God who would pardon his guilt in the judgment. The more good works he did to please God and serve others, the more peace with God seem to escape him and the more aware he became of his shortcomings and his own sinfulness. His superior, Johann von Staupitz, decided that Luther needed more things to do to distract him from thinking too much. He ordered him to pursue an academic career. It was during this time, through the constant study of the Bible, that Luther found an answer: "For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed, both springing from faith and leading to faith [disclosed in a way that awakens more faith]. As it is written and forever remains written, 'The just and upright shall live by faith.'" —Romans 1:17, Amplified Bible (AMP)

God gives us the gift of his infinite grace when we trust him, although we do not deserve it!

During this Week of Prayer, we will take a closer look at the fundamental issues that shaped Martin Luther's thinking, propelled the Protestant Reformation, and ultimately changed the world.

In an attempt to gain a better understanding of Luther's times and thinking, we will consider a painting from Lukas Cranach the Elder, a famous artist and friend of Luther. In the year 1547, one year after Martin Luther's death, [this painting](#) was installed in the City Church of Wittenberg, where Luther himself had served as pastor since 1514. This piece of art, which still can be seen today at this historical site, illustrates the most important basic principles of the Protestant Reformation. (Please note that [this painting](#) does not reflect our Seventh-day Adventist beliefs and practices in many respects, but it is being referred to as a starting point for the Protestant Reformation).

[The painting](#) is designed as a winged altarpiece (folding altar) so that the side panels could be closed depending on the day or week, and were only opened to be seen on certain holidays. In the Middle Ages, such a valuable altarpiece usually stood on what is called a predella, a costly decorated box (reliquary) in which the holy objects or relics of the church were kept. The [Reformation Altar](#) was designed according to this old concept, but reinterpreted and depicted the new faith of the Protestant Reformation.

This is a significant [painting](#) that Lukas Cranach the Elder and his son Luke Cranach the Younger had probably already begun working on it while Luther was still alive. As contemporary witnesses and personal friends of Martin Luther, the experience of the Reformation would have still been very fresh in their memories. We in turn can therefore get a sense from this [painting](#) for how the people of that time understood the Reformation.



DAY 1

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WORD OF GOD

(Sola Scriptura)

Words we can live by

There are some events that are life changing. This could be a traffic accident that disrupts all of your dreams; from one minute to the next, all the plans you had laid out for your life are no longer worth anything; you have to re-invent yourself. Nothing is the same as it once was, and you wonder what the future could bring. That is exactly what the young Luther experienced in July of 1505 while he was traveling from his hometown of Mansfeld to the University of Erfurt. Near the town of Stotternheim, he was caught in a severe summer thunderstorm and a bolt of lightning struck directly next to him. He was so petrified after such a close encounter with death that he promised God to change his life radically; he would enter a monastery and become a monk. It was there in the monastery that he became familiar with the Bible for the first time. The Word of God, the "dear Bible" as he later called it, became the foundation and rule for his faith, life and preaching.

Historical background and interpretation of the painting

Soon after, Martin Luther was sent to the new university at Wittenberg to teach philosophy and study theology at the same time. In 1512 he obtained his doctorate in theology from Wittenberg. He was not a reclusive scholar who only worked in his study. In addition to his teaching duties at the university, he was given the responsibilities of serving as pastor at the City Church. He was therefore constantly in contact with many people. His congregation understood his preaching and were deeply impressed with the way he explained the Holy Scriptures. This scenario is depicted in the bottom section of the Reformation Altar painting, where Luther is standing and preaching from the pulpit; a Bible lies open before him, his left hand is pointing to it. His right hand is pointing to Christ, to the center of our faith (at the center of the painting). The gar-

ment of Jesus on the cross is waving in the wind, symbolizing the Holy Spirit through whom the words of the preacher are given authority, through whom Jesus himself speaks and through whom the congregation understands. On the left side of the picture we can see a part of the church congregation in Wittenberg. The elderly man with a long beard at the back wall is the painter Lukas Cranach the Elder himself; the woman in the foreground with the bright scarf is Martin Luther's wife Katharina von Bora; their children are gathered around her. And just like in a real church situation, everyone is not always listening closely to the sermon, but watching the other attendees. One young man is looking towards the girls, one of whom is whispering something to another. We see a normal church service just like we experience today.

The picture with the sermon is part of the altar pedestal, or predella. This was where a church usually kept its holy relics. However, these were of increasingly little value for Luther. Ultimately, he rejected them as totally useless. Instead he emphasized the real treasure of the gospel that would bring relief and peace to the believer: in his 95 theses that he nailed to the door of the church, and which triggered the Protestant Reformation, he says (thesis 62): "The true treasure of the Church is the Most Holy Gospel of the glory and the grace of God." The true treasures are therefore not the relics that could be bought for large sums of money back then, but rather the Gospel. It is the good news, the message that Jesus Christ died on the cross for us. To proclaim this Gospel became Luther's life work, as Doctor of Theology at the university, as preacher in the City Church, as friend, as father, and even as a witness before the rulers in the imperial assembly.

The great value of the Bible for Martin Luther

The Word of God, said Luther, is neither old-fashioned nor modern, but eternal. Hence, one of his slogans was: "*Verbum dei manet in aeternum*" ("The word of God endures forever." based on Isaiah 40:6-8 quoted by 1 Peter 1:24-25). Since the Word of God does not change, in contrast to our transitory world, there is no better foundation on which to build our lives regardless of our circumstances. We can rely on it. It still has the same power that it had at the time when the first prophets were inspired to write on behalf of God. That is why it is worth putting all our trust in it. God's Word, the Holy Scriptures, is sufficient for life and death. That was so important for Martin Luther that in the fourth verse of the famous hymn 'A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,' he wrote the following: "That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth." In other words, God's Word supersedes all human authority, whether they acknowledge it or not. And another well-known hymn written by Luther begins with the words: "Sustain us, Lord with your word."

While studying the Bible, it became clear to Luther that the Good News that Jesus offers us salvation as a free gift is sufficiently and comprehensively taught in it. Therefore no church tradition should supplement and change what Scripture clearly teaches (*sola scriptura*).

Such a clear statement provoked the opposition of the church. Soon the reformer was charged with heresy. When he was summoned to appear before the imperial assembly at the Diet of Worms in 1521, Emperor Charles V demanded that he recant the things he had written. Luther was not prepared for this confrontation; he requested time to

consider his answer. On the next day, when he was again confronted with the order to deny what he had written, he answered with the words:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen. ¹

The Word of God was so important for him that he was prepared to bear all the consequences of his commitment to the Bible. That is how Luther became to be known as a man of the Scriptures. For centuries, the church had denied lay non clergymen and women access to the Bible; now began a great interest in the Bible that was made accessible in the common language instead of Ecclesiastical Latin, which itself was only understood only by a few scholars.

It therefore seems logical that Martin Luther stopped preaching in Latin, choosing instead to preach in German, his people's common language. But that was not enough. For Martin, the people should also be able to read the Bible in their own language. For this to become possible, the Bible had to be translated. A God-ordained opportunity arose when Prince Frederick the Wise had Martin Luther brought to the Wartburg Castle after the Diet of Worms to protect him from the wrath of the church and the Emperor. There, in the safety of the castle, Luther embarked on the immense task of translating the Bible. He began with the New Testament, and with the assistance of scholarly friends, the work was soon completed. In September of the following year, 1522, the first edition of the so-called "September Testament" was printed. The entire Bible in the German language was published for the first time in 1534. Until his death, Luther was continuously making improvements to his translation with the intention of making the Word of God readily accessible and understood by the common people.

Without the Bible, you can't be a Christian

The "dear Bible," as Luther called it, was so important for the Reformer, that he risked his life for it.

How much does the Word of God mean to you?

When was the last time you spent time with the Bible?

Can you still remember what you read?

Or is it so long ago that, if you were to be honest with yourself, you would actually have to admit that you don't know really know your Bible? Conversation about the teachings of the Bible are difficult to engage in. It is like a teenager who has the latest smartphone, but it's of no use to him, because the battery is flat. The Bible can give us so much more than just the good feeling of having one on our shelf, although that can certainly be a first step in the right direction. But the Bible is meant to be read and listened to; God wants to speak to you through His Word. You need to be familiar with it. It is God's letter to you. Only then will it become what it is meant to be for you: God's personal Word.

Our Legacy

The Word of God, says the prophet Jeremiah (23:29), is so powerful that it can even smash rock to pieces. It penetrates deep inside us (Heb. 4:12). But above all, it will change our lives. Whether you believe it or not, if you spend time exploring the Bible, you will be changed! You enter the sphere of God’s powerful influence, which becomes a source of strength for daily life. When we read and study His Word, God will reveal to us what, or much rather who we need to know the most: Jesus, the way, the truth and the life. He will lead us to embrace eternal life and experience the new life of godliness. This is why it is important to keep a small bible with you always. In this age of technology, it is also possible to have it as an app on a smartphone. Here is a challenge to every young person, commit scripture to memory.

Do it at your own pace. Have a record of all the verses you can say from memory. Seek to increase the number of verses committed to memory every month. The time will come (not long) when we shall have to stand in courts to testify. The bibles would have been taken away, but we have confidence that the Holy Spirit shall bring to remembrance that which we have faithfully studied.

In her first small book called *Early Writings*, the young Ellen White wrote: “I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God.” That counsel stemmed from her own experience of reading the Bible which impacted and informed her whole life. She was a woman of the Scriptures who lived with the Bible, loved the Bible, and read in God’s Word every day. For her, it was a true source of life, just like it was for Luther, and hopefully, also for you.

“The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration. The inspired authors spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to humanity the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the supreme, authoritative, and the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the definitive revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God’s acts in history. (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20, 21)”.²

For further study you may read Ellen White’s *The Great Controversy*, Chapter 7.

Appeal

Do we take the Bible as God’s Word? Do we make time to read the Bible? Do we retain what we read? Funny how we are able to spend time doing other things yet we have no time for quality time with God. Something need to change. I definitely need to improve. I invite you to take a stand on this now.

NOTE TO LEADER: Please share this information with the audience on the first day of the meetings, and every day after that.

On (next week) Sabbath we will [celebrate a special homecoming](#). Our theme that day will be the return of Jesus. This could be an opportunity for your friends who have disengaged from our church community to experience their second coming to our church community. Please invite your friends out tomorrow night, and the rest of the week, and then on Sabbath for our Homecoming Celebration.

Discussion Questions

[Leaders: if there are too many questions for the allotted time, select those questions which will be the most beneficial to your group.]

- 1. Do good works have any salvific merit for a Christian?
- 2. How do you reconcile work and faith in your Christian walk?
- 3. When you have to constantly defend yourself against things in the popular culture, do you feel somewhat like Luther and the other reformers must have felt?
- 4. Do you feel like you are constantly having to protest against certain behavior and worldviews among your friends?

Questions for you personally

- 1. How can the study of God’s Word expose sin in your life?
- 2. What does 2 Timothy 3:16-17 mean to you?
All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.
- 3. How can you give the Word of God a more active role in your life?

¹Brecht, Martin. *Martin Luther*. tr. James L. Schaaf, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985–93, 1:460, as quoted in the Wikipedia article “Diet of Worms.”

²General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church 28 Fundamental Beliefs (Abridged Version)* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2013.) Retrieved from <http://www.adventist>

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DAY 2

BY GRACE ALONE (*Sola Gratia*) A COMPLETELY FREE GIFT!

What do you think God is like? Although no one has ever seen God, we have a certain view of him that we have formed in our minds. We form these views by referring to pictures that we are familiar with; pictures drawn from our early childhood and the rest of our life journey up to date. For some of us, God is like a wonderful father who looks upon us with kindness, and who always has an answer for our questions and problems. He has no office hours and he doesn't have to be bribed to be convinced to help us. Others might think of a friendly old grandpa with white hair, a long beard, and kind eyes; someone who is prepared to turn a blind eye to our faults, but is also someone who can easily be fooled.

Yet others might view God as a strict overseer and judge who always threatens with consequences and punishment as soon as they do something wrong; someone who is unmerciful and unpredictable; someone who is never satisfied, however hard you try. That was precisely the kind of concept most people had of God during the late Middle Ages. They viewed God as a hard-hearted judge who demands more from us human beings than we could ever manage to do or fulfill. That was also the concept of God that Martin Luther grew up with.

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Historical background and interpretation of the painting

Luther believed that after death, he would have to suffer punishment in Purgatory for every sin he had committed. According to *Wikipedia*, the free encyclopedia, in Christian theology, and especially in Catholic theology, Purgatory is an intermediate state after physical death in which those destined for heaven “undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven”. Only those who die in the state of grace but have not yet fulfilled the temporal punishment due to their sin can be in Purgatory, and therefore no one in Purgatory will remain forever in that state or go to hell.

In 1505, when Luther started living as a monk in the monastery of the Augustinian hermits in Erfurt, the sensitivity of his guilty conscience was sharpened even further. Now that he had plenty of time for devotions and prayer, he was constantly thinking about his sins; and this weighed heavily on him. It was not the ‘major’ sins such as murder or manslaughter that worried him; he did not have any problem with these. It was especially his thoughts that he could not keep under control. For example, he was haunted with the anxiety that he might sin in his dreams. But there was nothing he could do to prevent that. The more time he spent with God, the more it seemed to him that God was a ruthless judge; someone that he would rather avoid. He was increasingly tormented by questions like: “How could I ever be acceptable in God’s eyes? How can the Bible call God a merciful God if he demands something of us that we could never fulfill? I try as hard as I can, but I cannot keep the commandments. Therefore, the law of God keeps condemning me again and again. No, this God doesn’t love us humans; he is much rather playing cruel games with us. This is not a God of love.”

Luther tried harder. He fasted even more, ate even less, and spent almost whole nights in prayer. But that did not help; he could not live without sin. He felt more and more guilty and unable to fulfill the law of God. Ultimately, he began to hate God. Johannes von Staupitz, his superior in the monastery, saw how Luther was tormented with these thoughts. But how could he help him? First he made it clear to Luther that some of what he was calling ‘sin’ was actually only ‘*Mumpitz*’—the kind of nonsense he should not waste any time worrying about. But most importantly, he told him: “Brother Martin, look to Jesus and not so much to your so called sins!”

Luther followed the advice of his superior; one day in his study, God led him to understand a truth that would ultimately change the world. We do not know the exact day or year of that divine encounter; however, one year before his death, Luther wrote about the moment that set the course for the Protestant Reformation. He described how he had almost completely lost faith in God until...

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, “In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’” [Romans 1:17] There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which a merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.” Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scriptures from memory. I also found in other terms an analogy, as, the work of God, that is, what God does in us, the power of God, with which he makes us strong, the wisdom of God, with which he makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God. (Luther’s Works, Volume 34, P337).¹

Luther had recognized that God gives us his righteousness as a free gift. Therefore, he is the one who saves us. As strongly as God condemns sin, he also loves us immeasurably, and gave his son Jesus Christ to die for us on the cross. Those who look to Jesus no longer need to be afraid of God; but as Luther once put it, they already have the keys to the gates of paradise in their pockets today.

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On the predella of the Wittenberg Reformation Altar, we see Martin Luther preaching to his church congregation. His left hand is pointing to the Bible. That was the foundation and starting point for each of the many sermons that he held between 1514 and his death in 1546. With his right arm, he is pointing to Jesus hanging on the cross for our sins. Luther could not and did not want to forget who should be the focal point of every sermon. It is not about our thoughts, or the illustrations and metaphors, but about Jesus Christ himself. That is the foundation of our faith. That is the foundation for our preaching of the Gospel. And if we are skillful at preaching and sometimes have the tendency to take center stage ourselves, then we need to be reminded again and again that everything we have and are is a gift of God. We will only be able to truly understand God's word if we truly understand what Jesus himself taught us; that all Scriptures testify of Him (John 5:39).

The great importance righteousness by faith alone had for Martin Luther

In the church during the Middle Ages, everything revolved around what we, as human beings, could do to earn favor in God's eyes; about good works that please God and shorten the time spent in purgatory. Our relationship with God was thought of to be almost like a bank account: Sin keeps dragging you deeper into debt, into condemnation, which means more time must be spent in purgatory to purge you of your sins after you die. But your good works can help improve the balance of your account. However, none of us could ever really be certain that our good deeds would add up to be enough to make us acceptable in God's eyes in the final judgment. That is why good works were so important. The crucial thing was to prove to God how much we could achieve. Luther later called this way of thinking a "theology of human glory" (*theologia gloriae*), and from his own experience, he knew that it was a futile enterprise, a dead-end street. Despite all our good works, we still live with a sinful nature. Without God's grace, we cannot fulfill his will. But because Luther himself had experienced how the cross had acquired a whole new meaning for him, because Jesus had already paid for our forgiveness by his death, Luther now called the new way of thinking that was the foundation of the Protestant Reformation a "theology of the cross" (*theologia crucis*). At first, he was amazed at how easy a life of faith had suddenly become. No more constant struggling with one's conscience; no more fear of a merciless God. Instead he looked to Christ on the cross with utter gratitude because he had understood that it is the grace of God alone (*sola gratia*) that saves him. He had never been given such a gift before.

Now he realized how foolish he used to be in focusing on his human works instead of rejoicing in grace, the free gift of God. It is like someone who wants to drive a car, but after turning on the ignition and shifting into first gear, just keeps stepping on the brake; nothing happens. You just stay right where you are and do not move forward an inch. And yet, it would be so easy to simply step on the accelerator! Of course, there were no cars yet in Luther's times, but he was all too familiar with the fear and anxiety that arise when you just cannot seem to any progress in your relationship with God—until finally, through the Holy Spirit, you discoverer that you did not have to achieve anything, because you have been given everything as a free gift. That means that if I rely on Jesus, my faith will not be disappointed.

What does Jesus mean to me?

I can still remember exactly how it felt when I was really in love for the first time. All of the sudden, everything in the whole world seemed just beautiful. And that special girl was the most wonderful person in the whole world. Especially her eyes! When she looked at me, I almost felt like I was in paradise. Unfortunately, the summer camp only lasted one week, and then everyone had to go back home. But she sent me a small photo of herself. I always carried it with me in my wallet. That was a wonderful time, full of anticipation of a happy future.

Many metaphors are used to describe the relationship between Jesus and the Church. One of them is the Church is his bride. That is how much he loves us. And that is why he put everything on the line to save us as the ultimate demonstration of the wonder of his love. In fact, we cannot really even comprehend what it means that the Creator of the world, the ruler of the universe knows each of us as we truly are, and that it is precisely His knowledge of the truth about us that drives Him to love us all the more dearly. I am simply amazed at how valuable I am in God's eyes. And we don't even have to compete, master all the challenges and come out first before we are counted among the winners; it is not like competition in most spheres of life, where only the superstar wins. Our value for God does not depend on what we have become or have achieved. We are valuable for him simply because he is our creator. Our value results simply from the fact that he loves us. What kind of God is that? And when I contemplate him on the cross, I begin to appreciate a never ending kind of love that we never could have deserved.

Our Legacy

Jesus lived among men and exemplified the righteousness and love of God. God knew that the only language that human beings would understand is LOVE. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Jesus died and rose and is currently ministering in the heavenly sanctuary for our behalf. We do not need to pay for the forgiveness of our sins; we simply ask for pardon. "He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1John 1:9). Undeserving as we are, the grace of God covers us but we never take the grace of God for granted because we must all give an account. Our indebtedness to this grace must dictate our behavior and deportment.

"In infinite love and mercy God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God. Led by the Holy Spirit we sense our need, acknowledge our sinfulness, repent of our transgressions, and exercise faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord, Substitute and Example. This saving faith comes through the divine power of the Word and is the gift of God's grace. Through Christ we are justified, adopted as God's sons and daughters, and delivered from the lordship of sin. Through the Spirit we are born again and sanctified; the Spirit renews our minds, writes God's law of love in our hearts, and we are given the power to live a holy life. Abiding in Him we become partakers of the divine nature and have the assurance of salvation now and in the judgment. Gen. 3:15; Isa. 45:22; 53; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 33:11; 36:25-27; Hab. 2:4; Mark 9:23, 24; John 3:3-8,16;16:8; Rom. 3:21-26; 8:1-4, 14-17; 5:6-10; 10:17;12:2; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Gal.1:4; 3:13, 14, 26; 4:4-7; Eph. 2:4-10; Col. 1:13, 14; Titus 3:3-7; Heb. 8:7-12; 1 Peter1:23; 2:21, 22; 2 Peter 1:3, 4; Rev. 13:8." ²

Appeal

Have you ever planned to sin knowing that you will later ask for forgiveness? Have you taken the grace of God for granted? Shall we continue sinning that grace may abound? Have you ever thought that you have sinned too much to be forgiven?

We are saved by Grace through faith. Clasp the hand of God and never let go. It's time to have an honest relationship with God. Is that your desire?

Discussion Questions

(Leaders: if there are too many questions for the allotted time, select those questions which will be the most beneficial to your group.)

1. What is your value?
2. Who owns you?
3. What was paid for me?

Questions for you personally

What does this Bible verse mean to you?

“You were bought with a price [a precious price paid by Christ]; do not become slaves to men [but to Christ]” (1 Corinthians 7:23, AMP).

¹Brecht, Martin. *Martin Luther*. tr. James L. Schaaf, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985–93, 1:460, as quoted in the Wikipedia article “Diet of Worms.”

²General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church 28 Fundamental Beliefs (Abridged Version)* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2013.) Retrieved from <http://www.adventist.org/en>



DAY 3

CHRIST AS THE CENTER OF OUR LIVES

(Solus Christus)

I CHOOSE YOU—FOREVER AND ALWAYS!

When was the last time you prayed? Does praying strengthen your heart or does it leave you feeling empty? Do you keep doing it because it brings you into the very presence of God, or simply because you know it is a good practice, although it does not necessarily impact your life? Could it be that prayer is a routine exercise where you are always repeating practically the same words? Could it be that your prayer actually only consists of a shopping list, and then when it is time to share about answered prayers, you just hope that it will be over soon and because it's been ages since you experienced anything with God? If that is the way you feel, then let us see how what Martin Luther learned from the Scriptures enriched his prayer life. When he was in the monastery, the monks had fixed prayer times together; although something like that can easily become an empty tradition, it had a lasting impression on his whole life.

Historical background and interpretation of the painting

Martin Luther was a man of prayer. When he prayed, he felt like a door to God opened up for him. It was his high-speed connection to Jesus when he was studying the Bible or found himself facing seemingly insurmountable difficulties. Today we can hardly imagine what courage it took back then to challenge the church, which ruled over every aspect of life. In our modern time, people in almost every country of the western world are free to choose which faith they want to belong to. But that was not the case back then. In most European countries, everyone belonged to the same church, the universal or Catholic Church. Anyone who opposed this church and publicly criticized the Pope was branded as a heretic and became a social outcast. Anyone who was going to stand in the face of this kind of pressure needed significant support and help. Luther found his greatest help in Jesus Christ. That's why prayer was so important to him.



Now we will again turn our attention to the lower part of the Reformation Altar to consider for a moment the reason for Luther’s passion for prayer. There we find Jesus Christ in the middle of the painting. He has just been crucified—for our sins. When we look at his face, we can feel the intensity of his pain and suffering. His head is hanging to the side and blood is running out of his wounds. His gaunt, battered body is stretched out, almost unnaturally protracted and both arms have the same appearance. His overstretched body gives the impression that he himself is the cross. If we consider this lower part of the painting in the context of the entire Reformation Altar, it seems as if Jesus on the cross is bearing the load of everything with his outstretched arms: the guilt of the whole world, our sins, but also the church and the world itself. In structuring the composition of the painting, the artist Lukas Cranach placed the scene of the Lord’s Supper directly above the predella as a symbol for the whole church. Thus Jesus carries us all, every day, in his outstretched arms. When I realize this, there’s only one thing I can say: Thank you, Jesus!

How Martin Luther prayed

In the days of Martin Luther, prayer was very much part of people’s everyday life. But they were usually memorized prayers, such as the Rosary prayer, that didn’t require much thought. The prayers were just recited monotonously, over and over again. It was thought that the more often you repeated them, the more divine assistance you would get; but it didn’t help, because the heart remained empty. There was a great danger that prayer would become a mere outward form, a good deed done to please God. Luther soon recognized the great importance of personal and public prayer for the new church of the Reformation. Consequently, he wrote a first prayer booklet in 1522, which was published in numerous editions and was among the most widely distributed writings at that time. This booklet contained not only examples of prayers, but also explanations expounding on the meaning and significance of the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, and other important Bible verses.

Martin Luther wrote a special little booklet for a very good old friend, Peter Beskendorf, who was facing a very difficult situation. Entitled *A Simple Way to Pray*, it is still very relevant today.¹ He begins his advice by simply speaking of his own experience: “Dear Master Peter,” he writes, “I will tell you as best I can what I do personally when I pray. May our Lord grant to you and to all others to do it better than I!” And then a first very important piece of advice follows:

It is a good thing to let prayer be the first business of the morning and the last at night. Guard yourself carefully against those false, deluding ideas which tell you, “Wait a little while. I will pray in an hour; first I must attend to this or that.” Such thoughts get you away from prayer into other affairs which so hold your attention and involve you that nothing comes of prayer for that day.

But how should we pray? Martin Luther’s advice is to not simply let our thoughts freely run their course, but rather to read verses of Scripture that point our attention to God; for example the Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6:9–13), or the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:2–17). He takes time to thoroughly meditate on the individual Bible verses (for example the individual petitions of the Lord’s Prayer, or each of the Ten Commandments), carefully considering the words in order to grasp their meaning. And then, describing his own experience, he says we should not immediately start talking,

but rather first just listen. “For the Holy Spirit Himself preaches here.” He then always tries to ask four questions:

1. **What does this Bible verse tell us about God?** With this question, Luther is seeking for theological teachings; for fundamental principles that are important for our faith; for what the verse tells us about the nature and will of God. What is God teaching me here and now?
2. The next question Luther asks is: **What can I give thanks for?** What gift is God giving me right now? That first means the Bible verse itself. The reformer endeavors to spend much time with this question, because the heavens are opened to those who give thanks.
3. What follows is a question relating to self-examination: **What do I need to ask forgiveness for?** How often have I forgotten to thank God for his gifts? Praying includes an openness to God’s correction. Confessing our shortcomings and receiving forgiveness of our guilt and sins are important here.
4. As the last of the four basic forms of prayer, Luther speaks of our requests. **What can I ask for?** This is the point where we talk with God about everything we have on our hearts. For example, my wishes and desires, or plea for God to intervene in a concrete way.

For Luther, these four questions served as good tool for praying. Thus a conversation is established: he listens, and God answers. In this way, everything that troubles or moves him can be brought to God in prayer; and this way prayer is not just one directional, but a real dialog, a conversation with God. Those who pray hope for an answer. This is true faith in action.

Martin Luther points out that God Himself has said that prayer is an essential part of faith. God Himself has commanded us to pray; more than that, He has promised to answer our prayers. He has even given us an example of how to pray through His son Jesus Christ: the Lord’s Prayer. Those who claim these promises will not be disappointed.

Actually, prayer is similar to the communication between two people who appreciate each other very much. You don’t just keep babbling; you take time to listen. And the better you know each other, the more intense the conversation is. Luther made prayer a priority and the busier he was, the more he prayed, as he wanted to be in touch with God and keep him involved in all that he was doing. Luther often spoke of prayer, and here are some quotes that are attributed to him: “I have a lot to do today, so I need to pray a lot.” “I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer in order to be able to get it all done.” “The work of a Christian is prayer.”

How we can pray

Imagine you are part of a wonderful family and you all live together. Your family consists of you and your parents, your brother and sister, your spouse, if you are married, your siblings, your kids, and maybe also your grandparents, all living in the same house. But... you never talk to each other. No one has anything to tell the others; you all just hang around gazing at your smartphones. The kitchen is the only place you

might happen to briefly run into someone else. But otherwise, you all just go your own way. Would that really be a wonderful family? Certainly not.

Today we know that for happiness and success—whether in marriage and the family, the church, education or at work—effective communication is absolutely essential. Many graduate and post graduate courses, seminars and training programs are offered in that field. Indeed, the better we communicate with each other, the better we get to know each other. Two people who are in love with each other never seem to run out of things to talk about together, and thus they are always getting to know each other better. It’s the same in our relationship to Jesus. How can he speak to us if we don’t listen to him? And how can we expect to know him if we don’t talk with him? After all, you also can’t claim to know a popular athlete, for example, just because you have seen him on TV! Knowing someone is more than that. It means you communicate personally, it involves conversation and mutual appreciation. Just exactly how that takes place, whether via the diverse social networks or face to face, is not the most important thing.

If we take a look at the Bible, we quickly discover how much prayer meant to the people in the Bible, how “normal” it was for them to share all their joys and aspirations, all their burdens, worries, and even anger with God in prayer. The book of Psalms contains many personal prayers written by David and a number of other authors, which are well worth spending time meditating on. For them, as for Luther the reformer, prayer was the door to spending a lifetime in the presence of Jesus—like a wonderful spiritual marriage.

Our Legacy

It is a fatal oversight to start the day without talking to the Creator and seeking strength to face the day from God. Ellen White writes, “If the Savior of men, the Son of God, felt the need of prayer, how much more should feeble, sinful mortals feel the necessity of constant fervent prayer” (Steps to Christ, page 93). Prayer is one way that shows who the center of our lives is. Through prayer we acknowledge the power of God and we make petitions only in Jesus’ name! Oh, what a name! What a friend we have in Jesus! “And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist” (Colossians 1:17). Jesus is the center of lives. Jesus is the Gospel. Through Him all things came to be. For these reasons, Jesus is ready to be accessed through prayer.

“God the eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Through Him all things were created, the character of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is accomplished, and the world is judged. Forever truly God, He became also truly human, Jesus the Christ. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived and experienced temptation as a human being, but perfectly exemplified the righteousness and love of God. By His miracles He manifested God’s power and was attested as God’s promised Messiah. He suffered and died voluntarily on the cross for our sins and in our place, was raised from the dead, and ascended to heaven to minister in the heavenly sanctuary in our behalf. He will come again in glory for the final deliverance of His people and the restoration of all things.” Isa. 53:4-6; Dan. 9:25-27; Luke 1:35; John 1:1-3, 14; 5:22; 10:30; 14:1-3, 9, 13; Rom. 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4; 2 Cor. 3:18; 5:17-19; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-19; Heb. 2:9- 18; 8:1, 2.²

Appeal

Often we disregard times for prayer or postpone or not even pray at all. We are living in perilous times. We are safe only as we are constant communication with God. It’s time to avail ourselves for more prayer sessions, seminars and conferences. It starts with you, then the family and ultimately the church! It starts somewhere! Can we commit to that today?

Discussion Questions

(Leaders: if there are too many questions for the allotted time, select those questions which will be the most beneficial to your group.)

- 1. As Seventh-day Adventists how do we balance the law and faith?
- 2. Discuss ways you can begin about reform in your church or community?
- 3. Is it okay to pray from a liturgy or should prayer always be spontaneous, “from the heart”?

Questions for you personally

Is prayer supposed to change us, our attitude, etc. or is it intended to change the world and what is around us? What does 2 Chron. 7:14-15 mean to you?

¹J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Eds., *Luther’s Works*, American Edition, Vol. 43. “Devotional Writings II” (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, pp. 193-211).
²General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church 28 Fundamental Beliefs (Abridged Version)* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.adventist.org/en>

Join us as we reposition mission at the very heart of who we are and what we stand for. Join us as we bring hope to our world and to our Church. **On March 18, 2017**, like the Good Samaritan, we exit the building to be the Church, we leave the barracks to be God’s army.

We come together as **ONE** to be Jesus on he streets.

Today, you are the **SERMON**.



DAY 4

THE CHURCH AS A PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

We are all united as one—and are all loved by God!

Who am I? My name and ID number are in my passport. Of course, inside the passport there is also a picture of me. The name was given to me by my parents, the ID number was determined by the authorities. For shopping online or social media, I can decide what username I want to have. I can choose it freely, and also log on to the account with a password of my own choosing. When I play games on the Internet, I create a whole new character and identity for myself. Then I am who I want to be; successful and strong, clever and invincible, attractive and interesting. But who is the real me? Is it the me I would like to be, the one I dream about being while I wistfully watch others who seem to have everything I dream of? Or am I the person I just want to escape from again and again? The one that gets me so aggravated because I suddenly can't recognize myself at all in what I think or do? Whatever we do, this question will keep following us as long as we live.

Historical background and interpretation of the painting

Luther often asked himself these questions: Am I just an insignificant monk from ignorant Germany, as the popes in Rome have said about me? Am I the ringleader of the peasant mobs who have placed all their hopes on me in their rebellion against the rule of oppressive serfdom? Am I a folk hero who has been received by the masses with great enthusiasm because I have demanded that the Roman Catholic Church carry out the reforms which have also been called for by most of the German princes?

Back then, society was strictly segregated in three classes that were readily apparent everywhere in public life. There were those who had little or nothing, usually farmers, peasants and craftsmen. Above them there came the church clergy as religious rulers, and finally the nobility as secular rulers. These differences were even visible in every church: the nobility had special seats in royal boxes called *Schwälbennester* (or swallow's nests). Clergymen had their place in the front part of the church called the choir with exquisitely crafted seats called choir stalls. Everyone else had to remain standing in the nave or main hall. It was a strictly segregated society. Thus Luther was very rarely allowed to visit his protector, Prince Friedrich the Wise, although they lived only about one kilometer away from each other. The entire society, as well as the church, suffered under this segregation. The class distinctions also governed what you were allowed to wear, as well as what you could eat. All that also shaped the concept of God that many people had at that time, because the church and clergy proclaimed that it was the God-given order of things that no one had the right to change—that was your destiny!

In 1520, Luther published his famous treatise entitled *On the Freedom of a Christian*. He presented a new order and Christian model of society. Luther declared, "A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to every one."¹ At first glance this statement seems contradictory and confusing. But with the knowledge that back then, such a dialectical statement was an invitation to enter into a dialog; intended to provoke a public discussion, we then can better understand why Luther chose this kind of statement to introduce one of the central statements of the Reformation to a wide circle of educated people. The first statement refers to the life of a Christian who has been liberated by God to live a new life; the second refers to his life in relationship to his fellow human beings. A Christian who has been accepted by God and thus been set free, who is therefore no longer caught up in the desperate—and in the end always unsuccessful—fight to define and assert himself, can finally really see and understand the worries and needs of others. Because he no longer needs to worry about finding the meaning and purpose of his own life. Such a Christian is then free to serve and help his fellow human beings with unleashed creativity, and can pass on the love that he himself has received from God. That is what it should be like in the church.

It is exactly this understanding of God's love and the concept of the church according to Luther's ideal that Lukas Cranach painted on his renowned Reformation Altar. Here Cranach painted a round table, in contrast to the long tables at which meals were eaten in those days. The most important person sat at the head, and the least important, poorest person was banned to the lowliest place, at the foot of the table. At a round table, there is no head and no foot. Everyone is equal. Even Judas, who has already placed one foot towards the outside in preparation to leave the fellowship, is still sitting next to Jesus. Next to Jesus on the other side, we see the apostle John, and on the right side of the painting, we see Luther himself. He is no longer depicted as a monk,

and also not as a university professor, but as “Junker Jörg” (“Squire George”). That is what he looked like while he lived under a false name at the Wartburg Castle. Luther is sitting as an ordinary citizen with Jesus Christ at the supper table. And Lukas Cranach the Younger is handing him the cup of communion wine. Cranach is depicted here wearing the clothes of a nobleman to demonstrate that in the eyes of God, there are no differences in social hierarchy. In the presence of Jesus, there is no first and no last, no aristocracy and no ordinary citizens, but simply children of God. By the way, the other people at the communion table are not just randomly painted figures with anonymous faces. They were all well-known citizens of the town. For example, among them is the renowned book printer Melchior Lotter, who printed many of Luther’s writings. In the presence of Jesus, the church and society are united together.

How Martin Luther understood the priesthood of all believers

Luther viewed the church as a place where all people are equally loved and accepted by God without regard of their social standing. You don’t need to come from an influential family, neither education nor income make a difference, all that matters is that we simply come to Jesus. The best place for this is when the church comes together to worship—just like the disciples depicted in the painting of the Lord’s Supper who came together to be with Jesus. That is the foundation of a Christian church, in a sense the powerhouse that makes us strong, and the motor that drives us as a church.

At the dedication of the Castle Church in Torgau, the first new Protestant church building, Martin Luther characterized the “worship service” as an occasion where at the same time that we render our service to God, God also renders service to us human beings. For example, in his sermon he described the church as being consecrated to Jesus Christ for the sole purpose of being a place where the Lord would speak through the Holy Scriptures to those who assemble there, while they would speak to Him in their prayers and songs of praise.

At church worship services, different people come together, ranging from those with little education to those who carry great responsibilities at work and in society. There are people who have always lived here, as well as refugees from other countries—that is the church. But in worship, God makes no difference and speaks to each of us without discrimination. We all can understand him. And we respond together—as with one voice—when we sing and pray. It would seem as if the world is turned upside down here. But whatever may otherwise separate us, whether age, gender, nationality, wealth and possessions, education etc., in the church, we are all united as one—because God loves us and has created each one of us. This is a completely new kind of freedom—the gift of freedom that comes from the Gospel.

This freedom was something Luther had experienced. He was actually born as “Martin Luder”. But in the German language, that last name is not a very nice word: on the contrary, it designates someone of very questionable reputation. That’s why—following the custom of the times—Luther later gave himself a new name. Around 1512, he began calling himself “Eleutherios.” The word originally comes from the Greek—the language of the New Testament—and means so much as “he who is free.” He later only used an abbreviated form, calling himself “Luther.” Thus his new name was an indication of his new life with Christ. He had been set free, had experienced the Gospel in his own life, and sought fellowship with others who had the same experience.

How we all can be united as one

Have you ever met someone and you knew right away that they were a Christian, a fellow believer? Well, that is because true Christian unity is based on the principle of a new life in Christ. It is based on the unseen, spiritual body of Christ, made-up of believers—not a denomination, but all believers throughout the world.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ (John 3:6-7)

In the text above we see Jesus telling Nicodemus that he had to be born again. The Holy Spirit is the agent of this new birth. Without the Holy Spirit you cannot belong to Christ (see Romans 8:9). It is the call of God that unites us into the one body through the one Spirit.

The church is the place where we can sense in a special way that Jesus is right here with us. I’m sure you’ve also experienced how your heart was deeply moved by a song, a sermon, a Sabbath School discussion, or simply by the fellowship with other church members. In those moments it feels like Jesus is right there with you. That was precisely what he intended when he founded the church. His disciples had the same experience back then.

But now you might say: that’s what I dream of, but what I experience in the church is very different. There is strife and struggles for influence, power and official positions. I have the feeling that people don’t take me and my questions seriously. I want so badly to experience fellowship with Jesus, but I sense so little of his love in the church. Unfortunately, this is indeed sometimes true. And then it’s like driving a car with the parking brake on. If you haven’t already experienced it, you can try it out for yourself. If the parking brake hasn’t been released, it’s hard to get anywhere. You can feel there’s something holding you back. At some point, smoke starts coming from the wheels and you sense a pungent odor. What do you suppose the problem is? The wheels couldn’t turn freely, and as a result, a perfectly functioning car became practically nothing more than one big paperweight.

So what’s the solution? It’s to learn the first lesson that the gospel teaches us! We are all united as one in the love of God and the grace that he freely gives to all who believe. Unity among believers is an important issue in the Bible. It was so important for Jesus that he prayed for it right before He went to the cross.

Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, 2 as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should[a] give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent ...I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.” (John 17:1-3, 21-22)

Paul reminds us that it is the Lord who prepares our hearts to respond to the gospel with saving faith. Let’s look at two Bible texts:

Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began. (2 Timothy 1:9)

Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. (Acts 16:14)

To uphold unity in faith we must understand its importance. We must practice the qualities that preserve it. We must put out effort to protect and preserve it—it was so important for Christ that he died to make it possible for us to have it! All true believers receive the salvation that Christ offers by grace alone through faith alone. There is nothing we have to do except accept the free gift that is offered—the gift of love. If you know that you are loved, you can also love yourself and are free to grow and develop as the person you really are. If you know that you are loved, you are also free to love others unconditionally, just as God loves them unconditionally. In our daily walk of faith, we grow and mature as a Christian and in our love for one another, and we will also experience the unity of the faith. Paul talks about it in Ephesians 4:13 (emphasis added): “Till we all come to the *unity of the faith* and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” It grows stronger as we grow in faith. This is the *unity* that we will attain in full when we see Jesus, the hope of our salvation.

That’s why as Christians we sing, “We Have This Hope”

We have this hope that burns within our heart,
Hope in the coming of the Lord.
We have this faith that Christ alone imparts,
Faith in the promise of His Word.
We believe the time is here, When the nations far and near
Shall awake, and shout and sing
Hallelujah! Christ is King!
We have this hope that burns within our heart,
Hope in the coming of the Lord.
We are united in Jesus Christ our Lord.
We are united in His love.
Love for the waiting people of the world,
People who need our Savior’s love.
Soon the heavens will open wide,
Christ will come to claim His bride,
All the universe will sing Hallelujah! Christ is King!
We have this hope this faith, and God’s great love,
We are united in Christ. (SDA Hymnal, #214)²

The Church brings together all kinds of people with various backgrounds. When members focus on Jesus, unity and sisterhood/brotherhood is felt. Ellen White explains that the secret of true unity, “The secret of true unity in the church and in the family is not diplomacy, not management, not a super human effort to overcome difficulties –though there will be much of this to do –but union with Christ. The closer we come to Christ, the nearer we shall to be one another. God is glorified as His peo-

ple unite in harmonious action” (Adventist Home, p179). In God’s house all are equal. We are all children of the same God. To hate and dislike each other is to hate or dislike the image of God in another person. Thus love and peace, harmony and decorum, order and structure are values and ideals highly esteemed for the mission to take place ensuring that we are remain united in the mandate –our core business. Enjoying the fellowship of believers should go beyond mere attendance. Total involvement in the life and mission of the church will help to unite the church.

“The church is the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In continuity with the people of God in Old Testament times, we are called out from the world; and we join together for worship, for fellowship, for instruction in the Word, for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, for service to humanity, and for the worldwide proclamation of the gospel. The church derives its authority from Christ, who is the incarnate Word revealed in the Scriptures. The church is God’s family; adopted by Him as children, its members live on the basis of the new covenant. The church is the body of Christ, a community of faith of which Christ Himself is the Head. The church is the bride for whom Christ died that He might sanctify and cleanse her. At His return in triumph, He will present her to Himself a glorious church, the faithful of all the ages, the purchase of His blood, not having spot or wrinkle, but holy and without blemish. Gen. 12:1-3; Exod. 19:3-7; Matt. 16:13-20; 18:18; 28:19, 20; Acts 2:38-42; 7:38; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:22, 23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11; 5:23-27; Col. 1:17, 18; 1 Peter 2:9.”³

Discussion Questions

(Leaders: if there are too many questions for the allotted time, select those questions which will be the most beneficial to your group.)

- 1. What does unity mean?
- 2. Why is it important to have unity in school? In the workplace? In the community? In social circles?
- 3. Considering all our differences, how can we stay united as a church?
- 4. Can unity and sound doctrine coexist? How do we ensure sound doctrine while uniting with others who are not of our faith? (Read John 17:20-26.)

Questions for you personally

- 1. How do you go about creating unity in your home, marriage, family, church, community, school, etc.?
- 2. Search yourself and ask God to reveal to you what you need to do to help create unity in all situations.

¹Henry Wace and C. A. Buchheim, *First Principles of the Reformation*, London: John Murray, 1883. Retrieved from <http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/luther-freedomchristian.asp>.
²*Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*. (1985). Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 214.
³General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church 28 Fundamental Beliefs (Abridged Version)* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.adventist.org/en/beliefs>.

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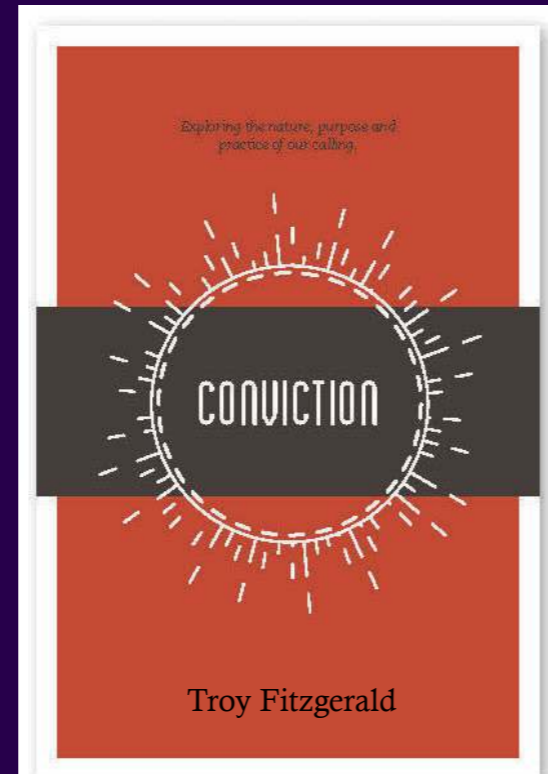
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DAY 5

THE LORD'S SUPPER CREATES FELLOWSHIP AND RENEWAL CLOSE TO JESUS

Can you remember the feeling the last time you felt completely alone and forsaken? Maybe one of your dreams had just got shattered. You failed a test and ruined everything, although the test had seemed to be so easy. *I'm sure I'll make it somehow*, you had thought, *and now this!* And maybe your best friend had also just turned her back on you, over and done with. She, of all people, the one you had always trusted so much, had then spread all kinds of things about you all over social media, not only letting everyone know that you had failed this test, but also telling how you had always been a total failure. A prime example of cyberbullying, and you couldn't do anything about it. And now everyone knows how totally incompetent you are. Can you remember the terrible feeling from back then? Or are you perhaps feeling that way right now—maligned in front of others, exposed and rejected? It really hurts not being worth anything. All at once you realize how lonely you are. All alone. All you have left is a yearning to be loved and accepted.

Historical background and interpretation of the painting

Luther experienced these emotions of rejection as a monk. He felt like God was playing a cruel game with him. He might have thought to himself: *How can this God call himself a God of love? The price he demands for that love is so high, that no one could ever pay it: I can't keep God's commandments. I try, but fail again and again, and am therefore condemned to remain in sin. I'm afraid.*

In the medieval church, many people were afraid of God, afraid of death, and afraid that God had abandoned them. And the church used these fears to fill its treasuries. There were indulgences for the remission of sins that you had to pay money for. Supposedly, there was a treasury of the good works and merit of particularly pious people, the saints, which was administered by the church—from this treasury, you could purchase indulgences. And the people were prepared to pay a pretty penny for these indulgences—out of fear. Most of the 95 theses that Dr. Martin Luther nailed on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517 concern the criticism of this practice of collecting indulgences for sins.

What did Luther put in place of the indulgences? It is a new understanding of the Lord's Supper that eliminates the need for any indulgences of any kind: the Lord's Supper according to the biblical example. Over the centuries, the Lord's Supper had become an instrument of power for the church. Only the clergy were entitled to receive the bread and wine, the symbols commemorating the suffering and death of Jesus. The ordinary church members, the lay people, were not allowed to receive the wine in the Lord's Supper. This was justified with the danger that the lay people might spill some of the precious blood of Jesus! As if that couldn't happen to a priest. But the church congregation was not worth the risk. And there was already a wall called the choir screen separating the congregation from the clergy celebrating the Lord's Supper, in the part of the church called the choir.

But here at the center of the painting, we see that just the opposite is depicted: Jesus is dressed just as simply as the disciples, not in the costly liturgical robes as worn by the clergy. The Passover lamb is at the middle of the table. It portrays the exact moment described in John 13, starting in verse 21. Jesus said: "One of you will betray me." And then the disciples asked: "Lord, who is it?" Jesus said it would be the one he gives a piece of bread to. He then gave it to Judas, but the other disciples still remained uncertain. In the midst of all their uncertainty, we see a young man standing outside the circle reaching in to hand over the cup of wine (it is Lukas Cranach the Younger). He is giving it to Martin Luther. Thus, the painter depicted something of the deepest emotional experiences of the Reformation. The humiliation of the lay church members at the Lord's Supper should come to an end. Most of them did not understand what happens at the Lord's Supper, anyway. Everything was celebrated in Latin. Because no one understood them, the Latin words said to consecrate the communion bread, "*Hoc est corpus meum*," meaning "This is my body," have become anchored in many languages as "hocus-pocus," used in connection with something that is incomprehensible, mysterious or even misleading.

The reformers put an end to this confusion. 100 years before, the Czech reformer Jan Hus had already introduced the practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper in "both kinds," that is, including both bread and wine, in keeping with the biblical example. Now this was joined by the celebration of the Communion Service in German, the language of the people, so that all could understand it. Thus the congregation was no longer just a spectator, but instead became active participants joining in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Today we cannot imagine what that meant for the ordinary church members. They came to church and found themselves fully included in the service, sitting at the table with Jesus at the Lord's Supper as depicted on the Reformation Altar. Could there be anything more wonderful?

Thus, to Luther, the Lord's Supper is not just a memorial, but an event that takes place in the here and now. Just how deeply inspiring this was for the painter can be seen in the fact that the Lord's Supper is not depicted in a scene that reminds us of

ancient Palestine. If you look through the window in the background, you can see a typical landscape for Saxony in Germany, with a castle, a table mountain and an oak tree. Thus it becomes clear to each viewer, the Lord's Supper is about me personally. *Am I that close to Jesus?*

Martin Luther's understanding of the Lord's Supper

Luther had a great dream. He was so enthusiastic about the good news of the Gospel, that he thought that other people would feel the same way when they studied the Word of God. He hoped that he could help others to share his experience of justification by faith alone that he had made as he was alone in his tiny little study room in the Black Monastery in Wittenberg. Indeed he even hoped that the Jews would finally recognize Christ as the Messiah.

But what he now actually experienced was unfortunately quite different. After the first new Protestant churches had been founded, the politics of the empire began to determine the course of events. The emperor and the pope intended to put this young heretic in his proper place. But Prince Frederick the Wise took him under his protection. Because the prince was one of the three most important secular representatives of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, the church in Rome and the pope always had to show due consideration for Prince Fredrick at imperial assemblies. But the political tensions remained. In this phase, celebration of the Lord's Supper in both kinds became one of the most important symbols of the reformation movement. Wherever nobility, ordinary citizens and former priests celebrated the Lord's Supper together, new churches were formed. These were places where one could enter into the presence of Jesus. Luther the reformer wanted to be close to Jesus at the Lord's Supper, and also to confirm that the path of reformation that he had embarked upon was indeed the right one.

For Luther, it was very important that there would not be as many sacraments practiced in the church of the Reformation as there were in the old Catholic Church. He taught that only those symbolic rituals that Christ Himself had commanded us to do, and for which the Word of God contained explicit words of institution said by Jesus Himself, should be mandatory for the church.

How can we be close to Jesus?

"As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe that the Lord's Supper is a memorial, and the bread and wine are symbols of the broken body and spilled blood of Jesus. All church members should participate in this sacred Communion because there, through the Holy Spirit, "Christ meets His people, and energizes them by His presence. Hearts and hands that are unworthy may even administer the ordinances, yet Christ is there to minister to His children. All who come with their faith fixed upon Him will be greatly blessed. All who neglect these seasons of divine privilege will suffer loss. Of them it may appropriately be said, 'Ye are not all clean.'" (White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 656; cf. p. 661)¹

At the Lord's Supper, we experience our Savior Jesus Christ in a very special way. In a solemn act, we read the words that Jesus Himself had spoken and are recorded in Luke 22:19–20: "This do in remembrance of me." This is not about a concept or

teaching that you can have different opinions about. It's a very specific command of Jesus, and then bread and wine are distributed among us, just as Jesus told us to do. As we sense the bread and the wine in our mouth, we experience a closeness to Jesus that we otherwise rarely achieve. You could almost say that in the Lord's Supper, we experience Jesus with all five senses—that is with part of our being.

The Lord's Supper is to be a joyful season, not a time for sorrow. The preceding foot-washing service provides an opportunity for self-examination, confession of sins, reconciliation of differences, and forgiveness. Having received the assurance of being cleansed by the blood of the Savior, believers are ready to enter into special communion with their Lord. They turn to His table with joy, standing in the saving light, not the shadow, of the cross, ready to celebrate the redemptive victory of Christ. (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, p. 229)²

The Meaning of the Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper replaces the Passover festival of the old covenant era. The Passover met its fulfillment when Christ the Paschal Lamb gave His life. Before His death Christ Himself instituted the replacement, the great festival of spiritual Israel under the new covenant. Thus, the roots of much of the symbolism of the Lord's Supper extend back into the Passover service.

Our Legacy

Never let the chance to participate in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper pass you by. It is a time to experience the grace of God. We are saved by grace through faith. This is why we are called to do *it* in remembrance of Jesus. Anyone who believes in Jesus is invited to openly participate. In the book, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, page 231, we read:

“In a world filled with strife and divisiveness, our corporate participation in these celebrations contributes to the unity and stability of the church, demonstrating true communion with Christ and one another. Stressing this communion, Paul said, ‘the cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation [or communion] in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation [or communion] in the body of Christ?’”³

“Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor. 10:16, 17, RSV).

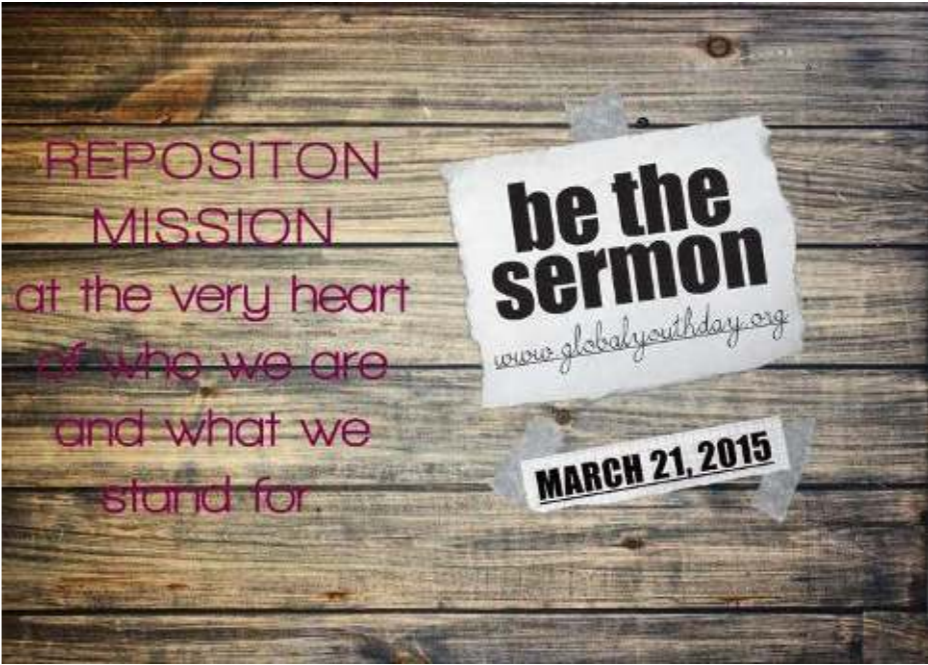
This is an allusion to the fact that the communion bread is broken into many pieces, which are eaten by the believers, and as all the pieces come from the same loaf, so all the believers who partake of the communion service are united in Him whose broken body is thus typified by the broken bread. By partaking together of this ordinance, Christians show publicly that they are united and belong to one great family, whose head is Christ. (*SDA Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., vol. 6, p. 746)⁴

“All church members should participate in this sacred Communion because there, through the Holy Spirit, “Christ meets His people, and en-

ergizes them by His presence. Hearts and hands that are unworthy may even administer the ordinances, yet Christ is there to minister to His children. All who come with their faith fixed upon Him will be greatly blessed. All who neglect these seasons of divine privilege will suffer loss. Of them it may appropriately be said, ‘Ye are not all clean.’ (White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 656; cf. p. 661)⁵

We experience the strongest and deepest sense of community at the Lord's Table. Here we meet on common ground, with the barriers that separate us broken down. Here we realize that while in society there is much to divide us, in Christ there is everything necessary to unite us. While sharing the Communion cup Jesus committed the new covenant to His disciples. Said He, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins’ (Matt. 26:27, 28; cf. Luke 22:20). As the old covenant was ratified by the blood of animal sacrifices (Ex. 24:8), so the new covenant was ratified by Christ's blood. At this ordinance believers renew their pledge of loyalty to their Lord, recognizing anew that they are a part of the amazing agreement by which, in Jesus, God bound Himself to humanity. Being a part of this covenant, they have something to celebrate. So the Lord's Supper is both a memorial and a thanksgiving of the sealing of the everlasting covenant of grace. The blessings received are in proportion to the faith of the participants.”

“The Lord's Supper is a participation in the emblems of the body and blood of Jesus as an expression of faith in Him, our Lord and Savior. In this experience of communion Christ is present to meet and strengthen His people. As we partake, we joyfully proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again. Preparation for the Supper includes self-examination, repentance, and confession. The Master ordained the service of foot-washing to signify renewed cleansing, to express a willingness to serve one another in Christ-like humility, and to unite our hearts in love. The communion service is open to all believing Christians. Matt. 26:17-30; John 6:48-63; 13:1-17; 1 Cor. 10:16, 17; 11:23-30; Rev. 3:20.”⁶



Let's make a commitment to celebrate the death of Jesus by being true disciples.
Now we have eternal life at the expense of Jesus' life.

I am ready to make that commitment. Are you?

(Leaders: if there are too many questions for the allotted time, select those questions which will be the most beneficial to your group.)

1. Does the communion service at your church seem like an inspiring service or a lifeless ritual?
2. After hearing this message, how do you feel about the ordinance of foot-washing?
3. Based on the Paul's warning below, what should be our attitude toward taking the Lord's Supper?

Questions for you personally

The Lord's Supper help us look upward and inward. How is this for you? As you reflect on your life from one communion to the next, do you see growth or do you become discouraged?

¹White, E. G. (1940). *The Desire of Ages*. Mountain View, CA, Portland, OR: Pacific Press Pub. Association, 656; 661.

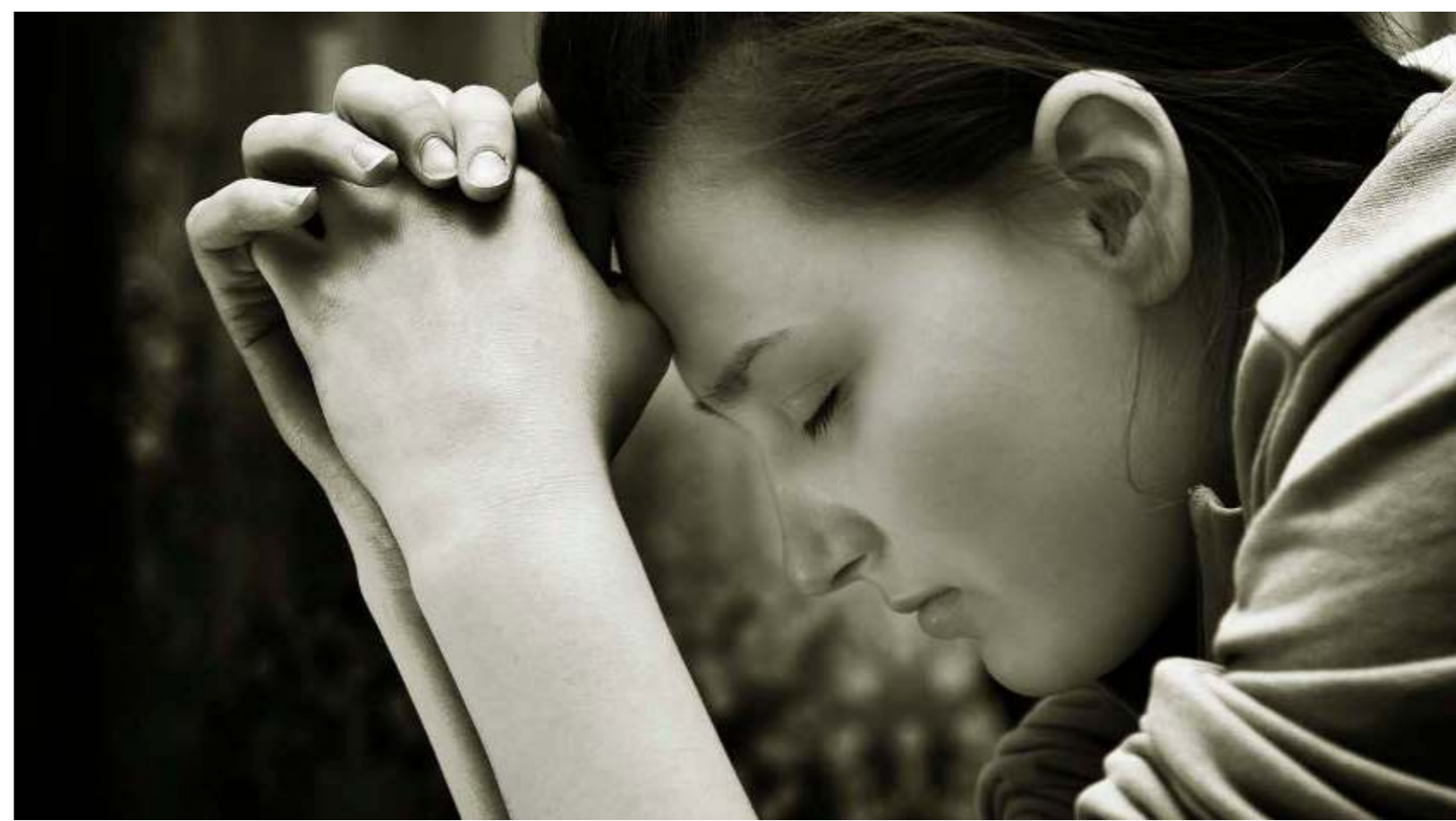
²Seventh-day Adventists believe: A Biblical exposition of fundamental doctrines. (2005). Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 229.

³Seventh-day Adventists believe: A Biblical exposition of fundamental doctrines. (2005). Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 231.

⁴*SDA Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., vol. 6, p. 746.

⁵ White, E. G. (1940). *The Desire of Ages*. Mountain View, CA, Portland, OR: Pacific Press Pub. Association, 656; 661.

^aGeneral Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church 28 Fundamental Beliefs (Abridged Version)* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2013). Retrieved from <http://www.adventist.org/en/beliefs>.



THE CONFESSION OF MY SIN AND GUILT

**COMPLETE ABSOLUTION—FINALLY FREE
OF ALL GUILT AND DEBT!**

The big question in the minds of the people during the Middle Ages was how to come to terms with guilt, and it probably hasn't changed that much today. We may not talk about it very much anymore, but we do burden the health insurance companies and doctors with our worries. Many illnesses have psychosomatic causes, which means that the fundamental causes lie more in our outlook on life than in the things that we could influence with a healthy lifestyle. For example, when problems arise we say: "I have a bad feeling in my stomach," or "that's robbing me of my sleep," and that could ultimately lead to stomach cancer or sleepless nights that we only seem to be able to fight with sleeping pills. Things that burden us pull us down and take away all our joy. One of such things is also guilt that we cannot forget.

In the Middle Ages, guilt was often made public—people were humiliated publicly by being put in chains or in stocks. If their guilt could be proven, then this punishment meant being an outcast from society, at least for a certain time, if not for life. If you were “lucky,” you were “sentenced” to go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in Palestine. However, in many cases, that ended up being a death sentence. Yet others were marked for life as a result of the measures taken by the Inquisition. In any case, offenders or those who were believed to be such were branded as criminals. They were treated as outsiders in society, locked out of the security inside the city gates—there was no safety for them.

Historical background and interpretation of the [painting](#)

When Luther came to the Diet of Worms, he was already a fugitive. He had already been placed under a ban by the Pope, thus publicly declaring him to be a heretic who had forfeited his right to live. After he had testified at the Diet of Worms on April 18, 1521, the Emperor also condemned him as an outlaw and placed him under the imperial ban. That meant that anyone who met Luther could turn him in to the authorities, or even just kill him on the spot without it being considered a crime. Thus Luther also belonged to the outcasts of society. That's why he had to remain in hiding at the Wartburg Castle in the months that followed, so that the dust could settle a bit—at least that is what his supporter Prince Fredrick had hoped.

On the right panel of the Reformation Altar, there is a depiction of the forgiveness of sins. We see Johannes Bugenhagen, Luther's friend and successor as pastor of the church in Wittenberg, and as a reformer in Northern Germany, Pomerania and Denmark, kneeling in front of the pulpit. The pastor is kneeling before the whole church congregation and before God, together with another person who has humbly bowed his head. The scene seems to be showing a person making a confession, saying: "God be merciful to me, a sinner." Then the pastor can reassure him of God's promise of the forgiveness of sin, like it is described in Isaiah 43:25: "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins" (NKJV). But there is still more to see in the painting: Bugenhagen, the pastor, is holding a key over the head of the sinner who is repenting of his sins.

In the Middle Ages, that was a symbol for "the power of the keys" that was given to Peter. In connection with Matthew 16:19, it was believed the key to granting forgiveness and thus entrance to the Kingdom of God had been given to Peter and the popes, and that they alone had this authority.

But in the new Protestant church, the pope no longer had any authority. Here we see that those will receive forgiveness for their sins, who ask God for forgiveness with a repentant heart. Quite a contrast to the nobleman shown in right of the picture. The scowling expression on his face with the prominent brow and dark eyes makes it clear that he feels no remorse, and that forgiveness doesn't matter to him. That's why he is striding away from the altar, away from the congregation. He will not receive forgiveness. His burden of guilt will continue to weigh down on him.

The painter also highlights this difference with the colors. Yellow was considered to be the color of Judas—that's also how Cranach painted him in the scene on the middle panel—the color of heretics and sin. And here the nobleman with the dark scowl is also wearing a yellow undergarment. On the inside, he remains laden with sin. He doesn't experience the joy and freedom that forgiveness brings. And ultimately, he even leaves the church that could help him find a new beginning.

How Martin Luther experienced forgiveness

The question of forgiveness for sin and guilt was a central question in the Reformation. It was the issue that led Martin Luther to the pivotal insight that started the Reformation, and the question did not lose significance in later years. But when we experience how liberating it is to know that Jesus has forgiven our sins, that doesn't mean we now have a blank check to continue sinning in the future. That is why in Romans

6:12-15 we read, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!"

Luther knew that we have to struggle with sin every day. And even if we have been living with Jesus for many years, no one can say here and now that sin no longer has any influence in their life. And unfortunately, even if we have been living with Jesus for many years and are within the sphere of His power, the devil isn't dead yet. But please be encouraged, read what John says in 1 John 2:1-6 Amplified Bible (AMP):

My little children (believers, dear ones), I am writing you these things so that you will not sin and violate God's law. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate [who will intercede for us] with the Father: Jesus Christ the righteous [the upright, the just One, who conforms to the Father's will in every way—purpose, thought, and action]. And He [that same Jesus] is the propitiation for our sins [the atoning sacrifice that holds back the wrath of God that would otherwise be directed at us because of our sinful nature—our worldliness, our lifestyle]; and not for ours alone, but also for [the sins of all believers throughout] the whole world.

And this is how we know [daily, by experience] that we have come to know Him [to understand Him and be more deeply acquainted with Him]: if we habitually keep [focused on His precepts and obey] His commandments (teachings). Whoever says, "I have come to know Him," but does not habitually keep [focused on His precepts and obey] His commandments (teachings), is a liar, and the truth [of the divine word] is not in him. But whoever habitually keeps His word and obeys His precepts [and treasures His message in its entirety], in him the love of God has truly been perfected [it is completed and has reached maturity]. By this we know [for certain] that we are in Him: whoever says he lives in Christ [that is, whoever says he has accepted Him as God and Savior] ought [as a moral obligation] to walk and conduct himself just as He walked and conducted Himself.

For Luther, it was essential that everyone understands how important it is to ask God for forgiveness every day. In his own experience, he was aware of his constant shortcomings when it came to God's standards of obedience and righteousness, whether out of weakness or ingrained sinfulness.

(This shall be what I believe, attributed to Martin Luther)

Because of inborn evil and weakness, it has been impossible for me to fulfill the standard of righteousness that God requires.

If I am not permitted to believe that God for Christ's sake forgives my shortcomings that I daily regret, then all hope for me is gone.

I must despair. But I refuse to do so. I don't do as Judas did and hang myself on a tree. I hang myself instead on the neck or foot of Christ, like the sinful woman. And even though I am worse than she, I hold fast to my Lord.

Then He says to His Father: "This thing hanging on me must also be allowed to pass through. Indeed it is true, it has kept none and broken all of your commandments. But Father, he hangs himself on me. What's the use! I died for him. Let him slip through."

This shall be what I believe.

As painful as it is when we realize that of ourselves, we can achieve nothing of merit before God, there is still one thing that remains: faith, to trust in Jesus. Because He died, we can claim His sacrifice for us. Nothing else matters in the eyes of God as faith alone (*sola fide*). Even after many years as one of the most important leaders of the Reformation in the 16th century, Martin Luther still had to confess that neither his knowledge, nor his experience, nor his courageous testimony at the Diet of Worms, nor all his years of teaching at the University mean anything in the eyes of God.

How we can live without guilt

It's natural for us to talk about our success and what we can do well; some of us are real experts at talking this way, and that's okay. Some people are so good that their achievements go far beyond the average. They have great chances of finding a well-paid job and soon living a life without too many worries. If only it was that simple! Despite all the insurance policies out there, money cannot buy the guarantee of a happy life, and no insurance company offers a policy covering that. So what can we do?

Just like it is when it comes to love, all we can do in faith is to have trust. It takes a lot of courage to admit our guilt and wrongdoings. We'd much rather try to give things a different spin. We are definitely experts when it comes to inventing excuses and white lies! Of course, someone else is always the real culprit, not us! It's so incredibly difficult for us to say, "Yes, it's my fault, not the others! No ifs, ands, or buts!" Not to speak of being willing to make amends for our wrongs, if possible. That is one of the most difficult things to do, but also one of the most beautiful experiences you can have as a child of God.

King David experienced exactly that in Old Testament times. He described it in Psalm 32. This Psalm is worth reading again and again, because it seems to be describing my own life. "Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, 'I will confess my rebellion to the LORD.' And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone" (Psalm 32:5, NLT). Finally, I am free, nothing weighs me down anymore. Then we're left with only one thing to do—rejoice! And all of heaven rejoices with each one of us that has this experience.

Our Legacy

The feeling of guilt is real. It must be necessarily apprehended by the feeling of liberation in Jesus. Yes, it is natural to feel guilty. True repentance and a contrite heart will deal with it. Ellen White affirms that Jesus took our guilt, "Upon Christ as our

substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted transgressor that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart...But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father's reconciling face. The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Savior in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt" (White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 753).¹ A good understanding of the ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary will help realize and discover the depths of Christ's Love.

"There is a sanctuary in heaven, the true tabernacle that the Lord set up and not humans. In it Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once for all on the cross. At His ascension, He was inaugurated as our great High Priest and, began His intercessory ministry, which was typified by the work of the high priest in the holy place of the earthly sanctuary. In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2,300 days, He entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry, which was typified by the work of the high priest in the most holy place of the earthly sanctuary. It is a work of investigative judgment which is part of the ultimate disposition of all sin, typified by the cleansing of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. In that typical service the sanctuary was cleansed with the blood of animal sacrifices, but the heavenly things are purified with the perfect sacrifice of the blood of Jesus. The investigative judgment reveals to heavenly intelligences who among the dead are asleep in Christ and therefore, in Him, are deemed worthy to have part in the first resurrection. It also makes manifest who among the living are abiding in Christ, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and in Him, therefore, are ready for translation into His everlasting kingdom. This judgment vindicates the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus. It declares that those who have remained loyal to God shall receive the kingdom. The completion of this ministry of Christ will mark the close of human probation before the Second Advent. (Lev. 16; Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:6; Dan. 7:9-27; 8:13, 14; 9:24-27; Heb. 1:3; 2:16, 17; 4:14-16; 8:1-5; 9:11-28; 10:19-22; Rev. 8:3-5; 11:19; 14:6, 7; 20:12; 14:12; 22:11, 12.)"²

Appeal

The Lord is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. There is nothing too vile and too large for God's grace. God's grace and love covers all. Come to the Lord with a contrite heart, He will liberate you. His yolk is easy and His burden is light.

Would you like to God to pardon you tonight?

Questions for you personally

Read 1 John 3:6: "No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen Him or known Him." What does this verse mean to you?

Discussion Questions

(Leaders: if there are too many questions for the allotted time, select those questions which will be the most beneficial to your group.)

Luther was driven by fears of hell and God’s wrath, and felt that life in a monastery would help him find salvation.

- 1. Discuss the impact fear of hell can have on your relationship with God.
- 2. Discuss I John 3:7-9

Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

¹White, E. G. (1940). *The Desire of Ages*. Mountain View, CA, Portland, OR: Pacific Press Pub. Association, 753.
²General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church 28 Fundamental Beliefs (Abridged Version)* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.adventist.org/en/beliefs>.



Baptism is by immersion in water and is contingent on an affirmation of faith in Jesus and evidence of repentance of sin.

DAY 7

BAPTISM—A NEW COVENANT WITH JESUS

Just anybody, or child of the King?

We all want to show that we belong. If you don’t have what’s in, you may feel like a nothing. And if you don’t have lots of friends on the social networks, you may be considered to be outdated by many. Those who want to belong are often subject to lots of peer pressure, whether they like it or not. You have to post your likes for what others have liked, so that everyone sees what a cool person you are. We all know that strong fish swim against the current, but in reality that’s really hard to do. If you want to be in, you have to go with the crowd. Sometimes that doesn’t make it easy to openly share your belief in Jesus. Some might think: that’s a private matter and doesn’t belong on my public profile. Telling someone in a conversation that you go to church on Saturday can also be difficult. As a result, it can be difficult to find where you belong. On the one side there is the group you want so much to belong to, and on the other, there is the church.

Historical background and interpretation of the painting

In Europe at the time of the late Middle Ages, it was through baptism that you became a part of society. If you had not been baptized, you had no rights. Such persons—like the Jews, for example—had to live in settlements outside the city walls. These were the areas where trades were carried out that were very bothersome for others—for example the tanning of animal skins to make leather, which smelled terribly. But the worst thing was that those who had to live outside the city did not have the privileges of citizenship and could only seek protection inside the city walls in exceptional cases. You were counted as a lawful citizen if you had been baptized immediately after birth, and had been given a Christian name according to the calendar of saints.

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Review Herald

Baptism was thought to provide special protection against all evil. However, it did not automatically last forever. If you blasphemed against God, or expressed some other heretical idea, you could be expelled from the church, or excommunicated, and would lose the right to be buried on holy ground, which was the cemetery directly beside the church. If you weren't buried there, you could only expect eternal punishment. Thus, the church possessed a very profound instrument of power, and often used it. For example, someone who criticized any unchristian behavior of the popes was in danger of being branded as a heretic. Then you were excluded from the fellowship of the Church and from eternal life. That's why baptism and obedience to the church were so important.

A baptism is depicted on the left panel of the Reformation Altar. Perhaps it was even a baptism in the church in Wittenberg, where Luther had preached and where this Reformation Altar was later installed. The person baptizing the child is well known. It is Philipp Melanchthon, Luther's best friend and collaborator. He was not an ordained priest, but simply a professor of biblical languages at the University of Wittenberg. The fact that he is baptizing demonstrates how important it was for Martin Luther that all persons are equal in God's eyes. To his left we see the painter himself, Lukas Cranach, one of the most wealthy and influential men in Wittenberg. He is holding the towel to dry off the newborn baby. To the right of Melanchthon we see another church member holding an open Bible. You could almost think it is Luther himself as "Junker Jörg." All this is happening in the context of the church. This is the place where the Word of God is found. And it is the Word of God that gives baptism its meaning. After all, by what authority is Melanchthon, who isn't even a

pastor officiating a baptism? It's not by the official authority of a church trying to assert its power, but alone by the authority of God, and the mission to which He has called us, which is given to us in the Holy Scriptures.

However, this does raise some questions. We can read of the necessity of baptism in Mark 16:16, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." So the Bible says belief is necessary for baptism. Did Martin Luther see things differently?

How Martin Luther understood baptism

His dream was a church with voluntary membership where all had personally experienced what the Gospel means for our lives. Thus, besides the regular church services with the whole church and additional sermons in Latin for the educated and as training for students, he also suggested a "third service," that is, a third liturgical form for worship. His idea was for a kind of home Bible study group:

Those, however, who are desirous of being Christians in earnest, and are ready to profess the Gospel with hand and mouth, should register their names and assemble by themselves in some house to pray, to read, to baptize and to receive the sacrament and practice other Christian works. In this Order, those whose conduct was not such as befits Christians could be recognized, reproved, reformed, rejected, or excommunicated, according to the rule of Christ in Matt. xviii. Here, too, a general giving of alms could be imposed on Christians, to be willingly given and divided among the poor, after the example of St. Paul in 2 Cor. ix. Here there would not be need of much fine singing. Here we could have baptism and the sacrament in short and simple fashion:

and direct everything towards the Word and prayer and love. Here we should have a good short Catechism about the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. In one word, if we only had people who longed to be Christians in earnest, Form and Order would soon shape itself.^{1,2}

Martin Luther wanted to have a church in which each individual lived out his or her faith wholeheartedly and served others in the church and society. A church to which you would voluntarily decide to belong and join by a profession of faith. That would have been a really vibrant church. But Luther's dream didn't come true. He was not able to establish a church made up of voluntary members. Therefore, he relied on the help of the state to build up the new Evangelical Church. Among other things, that meant that each newborn child would be baptized directly after birth and would thus be a member of the church. But because an infant cannot yet believe, Luther was of the opinion that at baptism, the godparents should promise to help raise up the child in the Christian faith. And later as a youth, at the Rite of Confirmation, the child should then confess that he is a child of God.

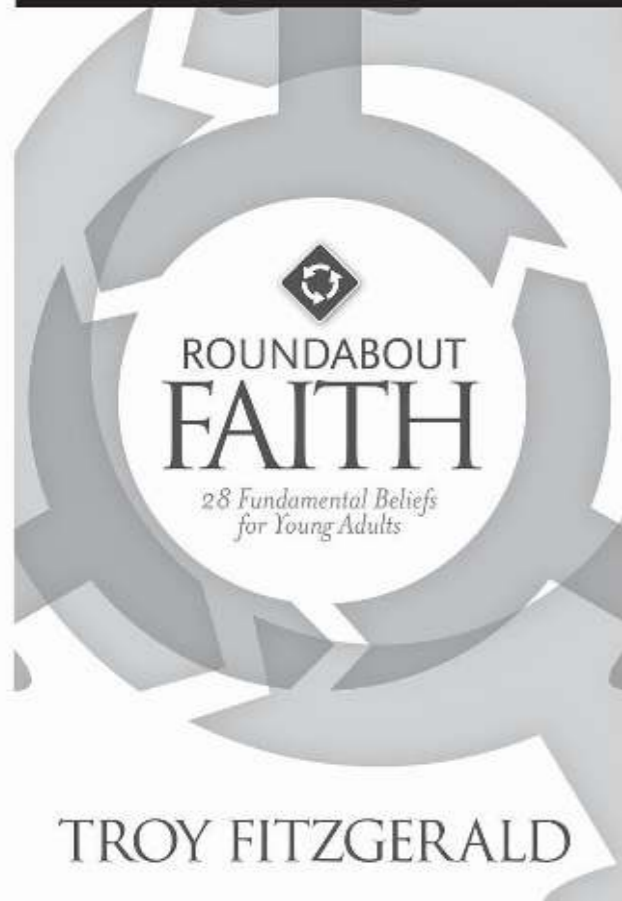
But where is the freedom of choice and the personal decision of faith in all that?

In this respect, the Protestant Reformation remained half-hearted and depended on the authority of the state. Soon Christians that believed differently in individual points of teaching were also put under strong pressure or even persecuted by the Protestants. Therefore we should never forget the men and women of the Reformation who sought to live out this understanding of baptism and voluntary church membership and paid for it with their lives. That is also a part of the Reformation, but it is often simply forgotten.

The example of the Anabaptist movement

Besides Wittenberg in Saxony, there was a second center of the Protestant Reformation in Switzerland, led by Huldrych Zwingli in Zurich. Among his friends, there were also families who in the question of baptism and in their fundamental beliefs wanted to follow the biblical model at all costs, and who therefore refused to allow the prescribed infant baptism to be conducted. They parted ways after a public dispute with each other. One group, gathered around Konrad Grebel, Felix Manz, and Jörg Blaurock, went underground and conducted the first baptism upon confession of faith on January 21, 1525. That provoked a storm of indignation from the Protestant city council in Zurich and other authorities. The so-called Anabaptists wanted not only to practice believer's baptism, but also understood the church as a brotherhood according to the model of the Bible, which they tried to interpret as literally as possible. Among other things, they demanded religious freedom, including the separation of church and state, and they tried to realize the ideal of sharing all possessions, practicing non-violence, and trying to remain separate from the world and all evil. In less than five years, the Anabaptist movement became subjected to severe persecution by the local and imperial authorities, as well as from the other Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church. At the Diet of Speyer in 1529, the princes (the Protestants together with the Catholics) pledged to carry out the death penalty on all who upheld believer's baptism. Martin Luther also agreed with this death penalty pledge, even though the Anabaptists only wanted to live as true children of God as children of the King.

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Are you already a child of the King?

“By baptism we confess our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and testify of our death to sin and of our purpose to walk in newness of life. Thus we acknowledge Christ as Lord and Saviour, become His people, and are received as members by His church. Baptism is a symbol of our union with Christ, the forgiveness of our sins, and our reception of the Holy Spirit. It is by immersion in water and is contingent on an affirmation of faith in Jesus and evidence of repentance of sin. It follows instruction in the Holy Scriptures and acceptance of their teachings. (Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 2:38; 16:30-33; 22:16; Rom. 6:1-6; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12, 13.)” (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe...*, p. 211)³

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’” (John 3:3)

Baptism is an outward sign that someone has accepted Jesus as their savior, is declaring their new faith in Christ, trusting in His forgiveness, and being baptized. Whatever you may have done in your life and everything that had been pulling you away from God now belongs to the past. The Bible refers to baptism as the moment of identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus. In a real way you die to your past life as a sinful person and you are resurrected to a new way of life through the power of the Holy Spirit. You now begin a new kind of life, the Kingdom life, through the Holy Spirit, who now comes to dwell in you to transform you, to equip you for service, and to abide in you as your permanent counselor. You now want your whole life to belong to Jesus.

Baptism is like a wonderful wedding sealing the bond with the partner of your dreams, for upon the confession of your faith you are baptized in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The King of the universe declares you to be His own child and heir. That’s hard to imagine. But in the instant when you’re immersed in the water (the Bible speaks of the watery grave), a new person emerges and comes up out of the water: you are now a royal child, you have the King of the universe standing behind you, you

enjoy His special care and attention, and He will never forsake you. All His promises are meant for you, without restrictions. From now on you can know: *I will never be alone again. I don’t need to be afraid anymore. I can depend on the King—forever.* It’s the chance of a lifetime, so why not take hold of the opportunity and choose to be baptized and become a child of the King!

Our Legacy

“By baptism we confess our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and testify of our death to sin and of our purpose to walk in newness of life. Thus we acknowledge Christ as Lord and Savior, become His people, and are received as members by His church. Baptism is a symbol of our union with Christ, the forgiveness of our sins, and our reception of the Holy Spirit. It is by immersion in water and is contingent on an affirmation of faith in Jesus and evidence of repentance of sin. It follows instruction in the Holy Scriptures and acceptance of their teachings. (Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 2:38; 16:30-33; 22:16; Rom. 6:1-6; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12, 13.)”⁴

Appeal

Are you tired? Are you despondent? Are you feeling lost? Do you want a new life in Jesus? Do you want to study more about the saving grace of the Lord? Do you want to repent? Do you believe in Jesus?

You don’t have to be perfect to accept Jesus into your life. It doesn’t matter what anybody thinks of you. This is your day. If you choose to make Jesus your personal Lord and Savior, please raise your hand, I would like to pray for you. (Have prayer and be sure to get the contact information of everyone who raises their hand.)

Discussion Questions

(Leaders: if there are too many questions for the allotted time, select those questions which will be the most beneficial to your group.)

1. When do you become a child of God, at baptism or the moment you accept Christ in your life?
2. Read and discuss John 3:3; Hebrews 10:23; and Hebrews 13:5).

¹Kidd, B. J. (1911). *Documents illustrative of the Continental Reformation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 193-202.

²Luther, M. (1854). *Deutsche Messe und Ordnung des Gottesdienstes 1526*. Frankfurt a.M. u.a.: Heyder u. Zimmer. Retrieved from <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/luthserv.html>.

³Seventh-day Adventists believe: A Biblical exposition of fundamental doctrines. (2005). Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 211.

⁴General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church 28 Fundamental Beliefs (Abridged Version)* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.adventist.org/en/beliefs>.



CHRIST IS RETURNING TO BRING SALVATION AND JUDGMENT

Waiting can be so exciting!

Do you remember what it was like when you had to wait several months, or even several years for someone who had become very dear to your heart? Your thoughts keep turning to the dear person again and again. You have probably taken advantage of every possibility to keep in touch with that person. Whenever you had the chance, you sent some kind of message, maybe even pictures. And if it wasn't too expensive, you probably talked on the phone as much as possible. But that only made the longing get even stronger, but in particular also the joyful expectation of seeing each other again. Certainly, you did everything you could to get ready for the moment of reunion, and to make it really special! You spared no expense, and perhaps bought the most beautiful flowers you could find, and some small, thoughtful gift. Of course, something that you knew the other person would really appreciate. And then as you were waiting in the arrival hall of the airport, everyone could tell by the eager expectation on your face that there was a lot of love involved.

Historical Background and interpretation of the painting

The world standing on the verge of the Protestant Reformation was a world full of fear. Life was uncertain, and the average life expectancy was probably only about 40 years. Many children died before reaching adulthood. Outbreaks of the plague kept arising again and again, and no one could explain why. Almost no one could ever escape this and many other diseases. It was fruitful ground for superstitions, and many took advantage of the fears of others to make a profit. In addition to all of that, wars also claimed many victims. There were hardly any social welfare systems to provide support in personal emergencies. The traditional worldview no longer provided any certainty after Constantinople, the capital of the Christian Byzantine Empire, fell to the Islamic Ottoman armies in 1453. And a whole new world was found as America was discovered in 1492. The world seemed to be falling apart, and life was uncertain. Since the renowned German astronomer and mathematician, Johannes Stöfler, predicted the end of the world for February 2, 1524, based on a special constellation the stars, many believed they were facing their final hours.

Since the influential church father Augustine had taught that the Kingdom of God is already fully manifest in the church, the biblical understanding of the Second Coming had become fundamentally changed. There was nothing left to look forward to, because the end would only bring the judgment of God. And that was something you had to be afraid of. So every aspect of life was full of fear. It is only against this background that we can begin to understand Martin Luther's preoccupation with the fundamental question that started the Reformation: *How can I receive the grace of God?* Why was he so worried about whether God would accept him? It was the fear of being rejected by God at the last judgment. So our question about Martin Luther's understanding of the Second Coming of Jesus is very closely connected with the central message of the Protestant Reformation.

The Reformation Altar also bears a depiction of the final judgment. It is found on the back of the predella. There we see a scene—somewhat faint and in drab colors—depicting the two groups of people that will be found at the Second Coming of Jesus (Matthew 25:31–46). On the left there are the saved. They are up to their necks in water, but they are looking to the uplifted snake—and thus to Jesus Christ. Thus they are saved. On the right, there are the lost. They still look cheerful, and are lively and busy. There's a lot of action going on, but all their business is without meaning or purpose. And if you look closely, you can almost imagine how they have their last cry on their lips. They are lost. It seems as if the painter himself was a bit disquieted by the scene. That's why there are no bright or contrasting colors. And Luther's contemporaries also couldn't really appreciate the scene because it touched on their own fears. *How can you ever be certain that you will be among those who are saved?*

If you look closely, you will see that this panel of the Reformation Altar is covered with writing and dates—more on the left than on the right. Since about 1555, the students of the theological faculty at the university immortalized themselves here after their final exams. Those who had passed could count themselves among the saved and write his name on the left side. But those who did not pass could only find a place for their name among the lost, who now had to face the final judgment. We may smile at this custom, but it clearly documents how the contemporaries of Martin Luther, but even more so the following generations, had not been able to communicate the reformer's liberating understanding of the Second Coming of Christ to their children.

Martin Luther's joyful expectation of the Second Coming

Towards the end of his life, Luther reported that as a young man, he had a terrible fear of the judgment day. That was what his parents had taught him, and in general, that was the way most people felt about it. That's why he was so anxious about it later on as a monk, and why he tried so hard to live without sinning, so that he would not be rejected in the judgment and end up in hell or have to suffer a long time in purgatory. It seems that his tower experience, where God gave him a new understanding of justification by grace alone, also resulted in a new perspective on the Second Coming. Again and again he talked of the Second Coming, especially in his Christmas sermons, but there were no longer any traces of fear. On the contrary, anyone who reads them senses a deep joy in anticipation of the greatest day in the history of the world. That's why Luther could now pray: "Come, dear last day!" By describing the last day with the word "dear," the ring of fear no longer resonates in it. I need not fear something that has become dear to me.

That's what he preached again and again.

How did Martin Luther come to this conviction?

Two interpretations played a significant role. First, there was the dispute with the church in Rome and especially with the pope. Luther had been condemned as a heretic, and at a political level, a growing alliance was also forming against the countries of the Reformation. On July 1, 1523, Johann Esch and Heinrich Voes, two Augustinian monks from Antwerp in Belgium, had already been burned at the stake in Brussels for preaching Reformation doctrines. The whole Reformation was surrounded by enemies, who wished nothing more than to see the end of all who were involved. Luther could only interpret all this as the great power of the antichrist that was to arise shortly before the coming of Jesus. And then there was the fact that he was living at a time when Central Europe and thus all of Christendom had been threatened by the Islamic Ottoman Empire for decades already. In the fall of 1529, the armies of Suleiman I laid siege to the important capital city of Vienna. Fear and terror spread across Europe. Only a great united army put together by countries that were otherwise so often at conflict with each other was able to avert the danger, aided by the fact that the Ottoman troops withdrew to their home country at the face of the coming winter.

The developments in these two areas were such significant signs for Luther that he believed they were the last events in the history of the world, and that Christ would soon return. That gave him the courage to defend the Reformation and joyfully look forward to the day when all affliction would cease.

But he didn't succumb to the temptation of naming an exact date for or final event signaling the immediate coming of Christ. However, in the town of Lochau, only a few kilometers from Wittenberg where Luther lived, one of Luther's colleagues named Michael Stifel calculated that the world would end on October 19, 1533, at eight o'clock in the morning. That caused many people to panic, and Stifel was supposed to be arrested. But Luther put in a good word for his colleague. Luther wrote that Stifel's calculation was only a "little temptation" (*kleines Anfechtlein*) for him, and that he himself would rather wait for Jesus soberly and not overdo it with the anticipation.

But of course he also would have liked to know when Jesus would finally come. In his later years, Luther tried to calculate when the history of the world would come to an end. He used a scheme that had arisen in early Judaism in which the history of the world was conceived as a great week of creation lasting 7,000 years. He undertook extensive historical calculations, which he published under the title *Supputatio annorum mundi* (A Summary of World Chronology). The result of his calculations: Jesus Christ is coming back soon! Preferably during my lifetime. Just how important these thoughts were in his eyes is clearly demonstrated by the fact he published a second edition in the year of his death, 1546. When he was asked why he invested so much time and effort thinking about the return of Christ, he answered with the Latin words "*per otium*," which means so much as: "It's my hobby"!

How I can make joyful anticipation of the Second Coming my hobby

I like the Reformer's attitude: *my hobby is thinking about the Second Coming and the joyful anticipation of the new earth*. You don't always have time for a hobby, because work and education have priority. And that's a good thing. But whenever you can spare some time, you gladly spend it doing what you enjoy doing so much. Some people join a club in their area of interest. Others keep working on learning as much

as they can and getting better and better at whatever their hobby consists of. It's amazing how some people become real experts concerning their hobbies. For them it's like when people are in love. As often as time and circumstances allow, their thoughts are with that special person. All of the sudden, you see the world differently. What used to be difficult becomes easy, because you have a new motivation that wasn't there before. Your life now looks so different. That must have been what it was like for Luther concerning the Second Coming. The older he got, the greater his joyful longing for the "dear last day" became. You don't have to wait until are old—start today because waiting can be so exciting!

Our Legacy

"The second coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church, the grand climax of the gospel. The Saviour's coming will be literal, personal, visible, and worldwide. When He returns, the righteous dead will be resurrected, and together with the righteous living will be glorified and taken to heaven, but the unrighteous will die. The almost complete fulfillment of most lines of prophecy, together with the present condition of the world, indicates that Christ's coming is near. The time of that event has not been revealed, and we are therefore exhorted to be ready at all times. Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 5:1-6; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; 2:8; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:28; Rev. 1:7; 14:14-20; 19:11-21."

Appeal

Jesus is coming soon. The times are telling it all. People are looking for peace. The joy of the reality of the Second Advent is abundant. I want to be part of the number that shall meet the Lord in the air. Would you like to be part of that number?

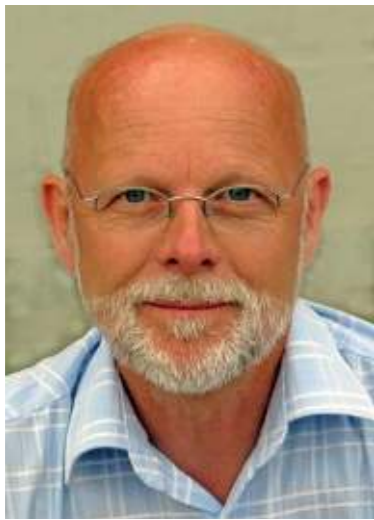




Discussion Questions

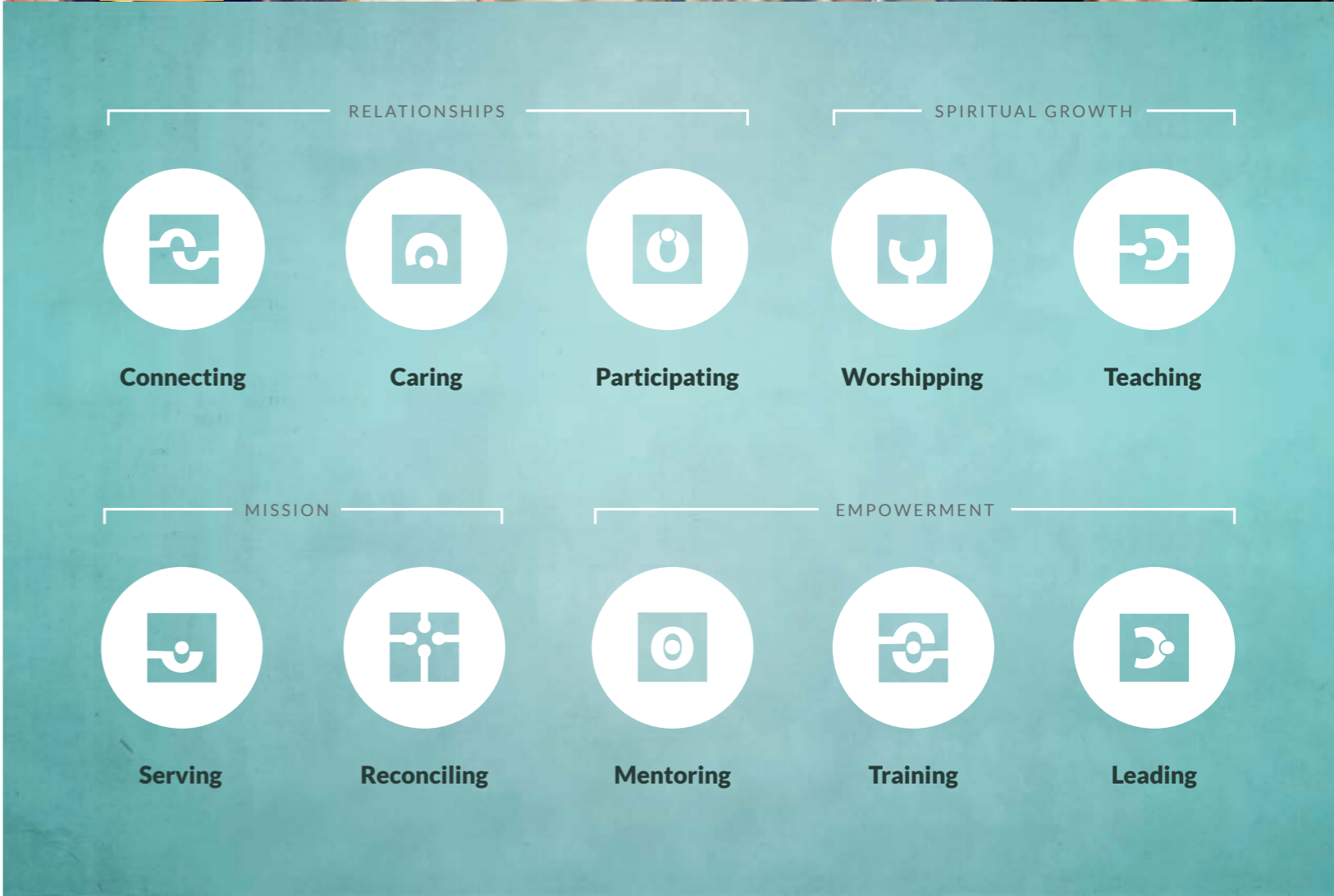
(Leaders: if there are too many questions for the allotted time, select those questions which will be the most beneficial to your group.)

- 1. One of Luther's biggest fears was whether we can ever be certain that we will be among those who are saved when Jesus returns. Is this something you worry about?
- 2. Luther's courage to defend the Reformation came in part from his belief that the world was about to end and Christ was about to return.
- 3. Do you feel a sense of urgency about defending your faith?

¹General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church 28 Fundamental Beliefs (Abridged Version)* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.adventist>.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

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