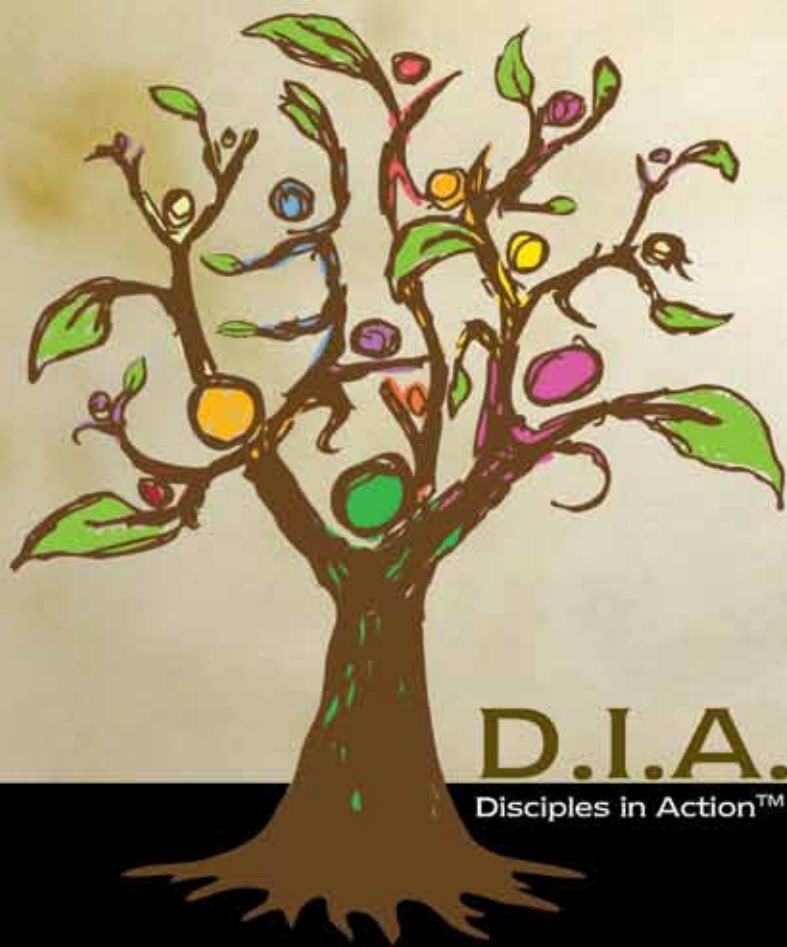


SERIES TWO
identity



D.I.A.
Disciples in Action™

GROW REFLECT REVEAL

THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST



participant's guide

second in a five series course to help you on your discipleship journey

P1

D.I.A.

Disciples in Action™

series 2

a five series course to help you on your discipleship journey

Produced by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists® Youth Ministries Department

Disciples in Action™ Participant's Guide. Series Two

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Project Director: Gilbert Cangy

Project Coordinator: Maria Dunchie

Cover Photos: JupiterImages

Cover and Interior Design: Maria Dunchie

Copy Editor: Erica Richards

Consultants: Bonita Joyner Shields and Debbonnaire Kovacs

Printed in the United States of America

CONTRIBUTORS

MICHAEL IKECHUKWE OLUKPE, West-Central Africa Division

ERIKA PERPALL, Inter-American Division

DEBBONNAIRE KOVACS, North American Division

TRACY MORGAN, North American Division

MARK McCLEARY, North American Division

contents

6	how to use this book
10	introduction
12	Session 6 developing an individual identity that is complete in Christ
36	Session 7: understanding that God is the source of life
49	Session 8: investing myself in the discipleship of others
58	Session 9: helping believers build Christ-like relationships
66	Session 10: debriefing
72	mentoring program
79	the evaluation
80	mentoring application
82	growing disciples inventory



how to use this book

The purpose of this guide is to provide you with some general instructions to meet your individual needs.

The main body is written like a conversation you would have with a friend. It is designed to assist you in your discipleship journey. While it is recommended that you follow the process as set out in the book, please feel free to reorganize the material to respond to and maximize your own circumstances and opportunities.

The *Together Growing Fruitful Disciples* (TGFD) framework, on which this curriculum is based, is the scope of learning. While it does not necessarily describe all the tools considered valuable for you in your spiritual journey, it identifies a core of learning that is essential for everyone. There are many different ways to approach this curriculum, but regardless of the approach, it will represent the beginning point of a discipleship journey! However, the completion of this book should not be viewed as the culmination of the discipleship process, but rather as an essential step in your ongoing discipleship journey. It should answer the questions, “What will life look like after this series?” “What is the expected outcome?”

The suggested length of each session is 90 minutes.

Growing Disciples Inventory (GDI): This suggested pre and post session activity can be found at www.growingfruitfuldisciples.org/gdi. This eighty-four-question inventory is aligned with the TGFD framework to aid in determining areas of growth that have taken place in a disciple’s life and areas in which one needs to grow. The online version includes a graphic representation of the inventory results as well as a Spiritual Growth Action Plan. For those of you who may not have access to the Internet or would like to allow others to experience the inventory without having to go through the entire online version, the “short form” version, available on page 82, is an excellent alternative.



connector

This is the Bible text: the power base of each study. Whether it is one verse or several chapters long, this will provide the link between the mind and the heart. (“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” 2 Timothy 3:16, NIV.)



themes

The themes for each session are derived from the indicators that are listed for each commitment.



big idea

This is one statement that sums up the essence of the session. It serves as the intersection between the themes and the topic.



journey (60 minutes)

- **Exploration** (30-40 minutes) is the biblical and philosophical exploration of the main ideas on which the session is built. Each session will include interactive learning to help lead the group in the most effective way possible. **Note:** The leader should make sure to make the interactive sessions exciting and natural. Feel free to adjust each exercise to the size of the group. Familiarize yourself with the “interaction” segments before the session and make sure to infuse excitement into each illustration.
- **Reflection** (10-15 minutes) should focus on helping the participant reflect and respond to the truths they have just discovered. Questions are included in this section.
- **Application** (10-15 minutes) shows how the lessons can be applied to everyday life.



dig deep

Dig Deep is optional and may not be found in all lessons. It provides informative sidelights that add insight to a particular passage, word, fact, or Core Belief. These can also provide insights on youth culture, current events, and philosophy throughout each study.



from the pen of Ellen G. White

Where appropriate, relevant quotes from the writings of E. G. White are included throughout each session.



disciples in action

This is where the writer pulls a challenge from the lesson for the participant to act on using what they have learned during this session.



mentors

Before beginning, identify someone you can trust and respect to be your mentor. Information on the mentoring program can be found on page 72, and the application on page 80.



leader's note

This is handy information that will help coach the leader throughout the meeting.



debriefing

This session intends to summarize and invite responses to the previous sessions and tie them all together. By this time you should have already been putting into practice some, if not all, of what was studied and suggested in the previous sessions. Now you can discuss what works and what does not work for you and examine if you are embracing the life changing habits or disciplines that have been presented and discussed.

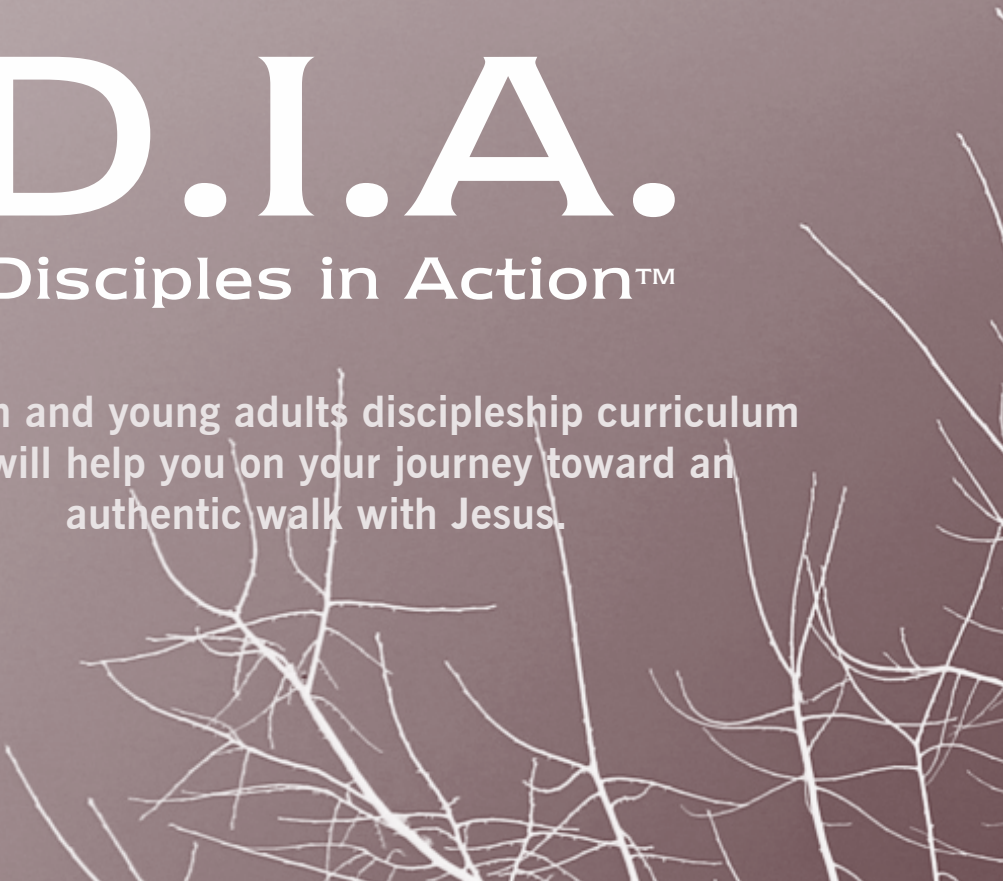
Plan the Work. Work the Plan!

Starting over
or just taking
a bold step?

D.I.A.

Disciples in Action™

the youth and young adults discipleship curriculum
that will help you on your journey toward an
authentic walk with Jesus.



introduction

“Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples’” (Luke 11:1, NKJV).

It’s often believed that being a disciple of Jesus is an “automatic” event. Once you’ve accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, all you have to do is read the Bible and pray and all will be well. Of course, those are imperative to the Christian journey. But *how* do we read the Bible? *How* do we pray? *How* do we best open our hearts and minds so that the Holy Spirit can do His work in us? That’s what *Disciples in Action* (DIA) is all about!

DIA is built on the Together Growing Fruitful Disciples (TGFD) framework. This framework is the foundation of a discipleship model designed to help us think more clearly and deeply about the spiritual growth and maturity of ourselves and others as disciples of Jesus Christ. It identifies four growth processes around which we believe the disciple’s journey occurs:

- **Connecting:** Growing in relationship with God, others, and self
- **Understanding:** Growing in knowledge of Jesus and His teachings
- **Ministering:** Growing in participation of God’s mission of revelation, reconciliation, and restoration
- **Equipping:** Growing in the body of Christ by walking alongside other disciples in order to support, nurture, and strengthen in love

All four processes in this model are centered on and accomplished through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Separating these processes may seem artificial, but it does allow us to bring clarity to vital aspects of discipleship that might otherwise be overlooked.

In this model, *commitments* for the growing Christian are articulated for each of the individual processes. Within each process, *commitments* are further divided into key aspects of spiritual growth called *indicators*. These *indicators* represent behaviors through which, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can grow and mature as disciples of Jesus Christ. They also represent a lifetime of following Jesus.

Spiritual Mentors (or Partners, Companions) are crucial in our discipleship journey, as revealed in the *equipping* aspect of this model. Actually, the support, nurture, and strengthening derived from our walking alongside each other in this journey is foundational. Thus, you'll find in this DIA curriculum that each participant is to be assigned a mentor right from the start.

Whether the person is much older or just a little older, the mentor should be someone who the participant can trust and look to as a role model for learning how to live the Christian life. Some qualities of a mentor should include:

- a willingness to share his/her walk with God.
- sincerity and honesty in sharing their faith stories.
- openness in communication.
- a willingness to provide support and encouragement by listening and giving honest feedback without trying to force change. (Spiritual accountability is not about giving up control. It is about allowing another person to help us accomplish spiritual goals that we have set for ourselves.)

Another element of growing is that of assessment. It answers the question, "How am I doing?" Of course, each person's journey is unique; the work of the Holy Spirit cannot be replicated in a lab as we do vitamins and pharmaceuticals! "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8, NKJV). However, it is possible to assess the direction of one's life. Thus, the DIA curriculum directs leaders to utilize the Growing Disciples Inventory (GDI), located at www.growingfruitfuldisciples.org/gdi. This eighty-four-question inventory is aligned with the TGFD framework to aid in determining areas of growth that have taken place in a disciple's life and areas in which one needs to grow. The online version includes a graphic representation of the inventory results as well as a Spiritual Growth Action Plan.

The inventory is also available on page 82 as a "short form" that contains only twenty questions. For those of you who may not have access to the Internet or would like to allow others to experience the inventory without having them go through the entire online version, the short form is an excellent alternative.

Scripture encourages us to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12b, 13, NKJV). While it is God's work in us through His Holy Spirit, the DIA curriculum is an excellent tool to help young people experience God's work in their lives and to assist them in trusting Him to that work.

SESSION SIX-A

by *Michael Ikechukwu Oluikpe*

developing an individual identity that is complete in Christ



Michael Ikechukwu Oluikpe graduated from the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies in the Philippines (AIAS) in 2012 with a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree, with an emphasis in New Testament Studies. His dissertation, *Armageddon as Divine War in the Apocalypse* (ISBN #**978-3-8473-2480-5**), is available in print from both Amazon and Barnes and Noble bookstores. Prior to attending AIAS, he studied at Babcock University in

Ilisan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria, where he earned both the bachelor and master of religion degrees.

Dr. Oluikpe also worked as a chaplain, youth pastor, and Bible teacher at Babcock University High School.

Fondly called “Pastor IK”, “Pastor lyke”, or “Pastor Mike” by his friends, family, and youth, Dr. Oluikpe is a young adult who hails from Nigeria (West Central Africa Division-WAD). He and his wife, Kiks (who is from the Philippines), are the happy parents of a baby girl, Jerimah Chinyere. Dr. Oluikpe says, “I love youth ministry, preaching, teaching and writing among a host of other things.”



theme

To develop an individual identity that is complete in Christ, I am:

- surrendering my heart and will to God.
- learning that God places infinite value on me.
- recognizing my continual need for God's forgiving and empowering grace.
- inviting the Holy Spirit to guide in my ongoing reflection and actions.



big idea

True identity is centered on God's point of view, not on that of human beings.



connector

Look: 1 Samuel 16:7

Memorize: "The Lord said . . . Do not consider his appearance or his height, . . . The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (NIV).



THE JOURNEY exploration

Who are you?

Read Jonah 1: 8 and John 1:22. What are the questions in these texts that are related to identity?

“Who are you? . . . What do you say about yourself?” (John 1:22, NIV). The question “Who are you?” goes beyond your name and home address. Though what you see when you look in the mirror can be an introduction and summary of who you are, it is not the whole picture. The answer to that question goes beyond all the information on your personal ID card, regardless of how many of those you have—national ID, student ID, worker ID, bank ID, driver’s ID, etc.. “Who you really are” has to do with your background, your abilities, and most importantly, your personality and character. It has to do with who you are inside—especially when people get to spend time with you to know you better.

The question, “Who are you?” can be summed up in words like “identity,” “self-concept,” “self-worth,” and “self-esteem.” The answer to this question is a function for success in life.

You determine who you are based on three main viewpoints: that of yourself, the people around you, and God. Apart from yourself, what people say about you and what God says about you are major influences on your personal identity. Most of the time you and I are more concerned about the first influence—the influence of people and what they think about us.

Many young people do not like themselves because of their looks, size, height, social relationships, and habits, among other things. Many feel worthless and unimportant, especially when they think they do not meet the standard set by their society and the world. They compare themselves with the super-models and artistes of the media world and do not fit in.

Apart from the influence of people through social media, there is the view of your parents, friends, and teachers about who you are. Many young people have a poor identity or self-esteem because these important people in their lives judge them based on their background, past performances, or deeds. Sometimes, in our personal lives, we are stuck between wanting to please these people and wanting to be ourselves. When we do not live up to their standards and expectations, they look down on us and that often leads to us feeling bad about ourselves.

Some youth feel they are not *American Idol*, *America’s Next Top Model*, or *America’s Got Talent* material, and this causes them to feel bad and inferior about themselves. Other youth feel that they qualify for one or all of the above and feel good and proud about themselves, feeling superior to those who do not qualify.

However, the real standard to measure and define who we are is God’s standard. He is the One who really knows, sees, and defines who we are—because no one else knows, sees, and defines us the way God does. He is the One who really knows who we are on the inside (1 Samuel 16:7). ***That is the part of our identity that matters the most.***

What do the following texts say about God's view of who we are? What is so special about our identity according to these verses?

- Genesis 1:26-28
- Psalm 139:13-16
- Psalm 8: 5
- Isaiah 43:1a, 7
- Psalm 100:3
- Acts 17:24-28

Evolution teaches by implication that human beings are nothing more than a chemical accident that happened by chaotic chance, therefore there is nothing special about our identity. But the Bible differs from this view of origin. The Genesis account presents a God who created everything—including human beings—by plan, order, and design (Genesis 1:1-31).

Your identity is rooted in your origins—where you come from. The Bible is clear that you are not a product of evolutionary chance but are intelligently designed by God, the Creator Himself. Because of this, you have a special identity as a child of God created in His image. God has made you so unique that there is no other person like you in the whole universe! The fact that every human being, even identical twins, has their own DNA, fingerprints, and unique anatomical features testifies to how special and unique you and I are in all creation. No one else shares the exact same traits with you.

In addition, you are also special by creation because, unlike all other creatures of God, human beings are created in His image. You have the impress of divinity in your being.

But what does it mean to be created in God's image? The Spirit of Prophecy states:



“Every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator – **individuality**, power to think and to do...It is the work of true education to develop this power, to train youth to be thinkers and not mere reflectors of other men's thought” (*Education*, p.17).

Your individuality is a central part of your identity. It is that part of you that shows you are created in the image of God. According to the quote above, God created you to be yourself in Him, and above everything else to follow His plans for your life, even more than following that of your parents, family, friends, teachers, or other human beings. When you live to fulfill God's plan and accomplish His purpose in your home, neighborhood, school, or workplace by being yourself, contributing your own positive and creative ideas, thoughts, abilities, skills, talents, and unique methods, you bring glory to Him and reflect His image. God recognizes that no one can do what He created you to do as creatively or as uniquely as you can. No one does it exactly as you do. Your individuality is special to God. It is a reflection of His image in you.

So who are you? By creation, you are God's child, made in His image with a special and unique personality and individuality that no one else has or shares.



dig deep a new you!

As mentioned earlier, apart from what others think about who you are, what you think about yourself is very important. One of the reasons why we do not like who we are is our sinful moral make up. The bad character traits in us, the wrongs we do, the mistakes we make, and the guilt we feel after a bad temper outburst, lies, lust, among others make up major reasons why we do not like who we are. In all of us, there is a mix of good and bad. We love the good, virtuous character traits in us and we hate the bad defects and deeds that we manifest. Sometimes these defects and deeds are seen by others and they hate who we are because of them. But even when people may not see the manifestation of the bad in us, we know how bad we are deep inside our hearts and consciences. It can be a pretty depressing struggle (Romans 7: 15-24).

The Bible explains that though human beings are created in God's image, the original sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, caused us to become sinners (Genesis 2:16, 17; 3:6;

Romans 5:12). This has marred the original image of God in us and, as a result, we are all born with a fallen and sinful human nature (Psalm 51:5; Romans 3:10, 23). Therefore, God's image, likeness, and divine character in us, which has been marred by sin, needs to be restored. We need a new moral identity—better than the fallen, sinful identity we had from birth.

What is God's solution to the negative character defects that make up our identity? (To be answered from the Bible verses/passages below. Try to involve all participants in this activity.)

- Psalm 32:1, 2 • Jeremiah 31:34 • Colossians 1:14
- Psalm 103: 12 • Micah 7:19 • Hebrews 9:14
- Isaiah 44:22 • Ephesians 1:7 • 1 John 1:9

Through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, God made forgiveness available to us to cover, cleanse, and purge us from our character defects and sins that lead to death. Accepting God's forgiveness personally by believing in and making Jesus Savior and Lord is a very important part of receiving a new identity in Christ (John 1:12,13).

Apart from God's forgiveness, which pardons and clears the guilt of our sins, God also makes available and possible a transformation process from our sinful human nature to the godly, Christ-like character He originally intended us to have. This begins with the new birth experience (John 3:3, 5, 8) and continues after baptism as sanctification. Sanctification is a daily, continual growth process that involves consciously permitting God, through His Holy Spirit, working through our choices, to give us victory over our sinful character defects. It involves doing away with old, sinful habits and character traits and spending more time investing in good, healthy, Christ-like character traits and habits. It is described as "putting off the old self—the old identity" and "putting on the new self—the new identity in Christ" (Ephesians 4:23-32; Colossians 3:1-17). This begins with a new "heart" (mind) given by God at the beginning of this process (Psalm 51:10-12; Ezekiel 36:26, 27; Psalm 40:8; Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10; 10:16) and results in "the transforming of the mind" as the process continues (Romans 12:1, 2).

The result is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)—a new person with a new orientation, perspective, and worldview on life. A person who no longer lives a life controlled by the natural impulses of the fallen human nature, but instead lives a life controlled by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:1-17; Galatians 5: 16-26). Through this process, God redeems our identity from its fallen state. Through the new birth and sanctification, we are redeemed and have a new identity in Jesus Christ.

The good news is that, even though sin has messed up your moral identity and continues to do so, God's plan of salvation has made provision to transform you and restore His original image in you. His grace is available to save you from the power of sin and to change you into an individual with a godly character. Though sin is part of who you are at birth and by nature, you are saved by grace and recreated for good works (Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 2:11-14). Through this available grace, you are accepted by God in the beloved and you are complete before God in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:5, 6; Colossians 2:9, 10, KJV). ***This is your new identity in Jesus Christ.***

Accepting God's plan of salvation through Jesus makes you part of a new community—the church, God's family on earth. Through Jesus Christ, you receive a new identity as one of God's saints, as part of His people, part of those who have accepted God's plan to restore us to His original image. You become part of His special people on earth to make known His light in this world's darkness through your character (1 Peter 2:9, 10). The church of God, where there is love and unity in diversity, becomes your new family (Galatians 3:26-28; Ephesians 2:19-22; 4: 4-6; Colossians 3:9-11). This new family becomes part of your new identity as well.

So who are you? In Christ, you are a redeemed saint—a sinner saved by grace in the process of transformation into a godly character and restoration to God's original image. You are a member of God's family, His church. You belong to God by redemption and recreation (Isaiah 43:1). This is your new identity.



dig deep

implications of identity

What do these Bible verses say about characteristics of a good, healthy identity? Match the letters with the appropriate options below.

- A.** Galatians 5:22,23; 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:22; 1 Peter 3:3, 4
 - B.** Romans 12:3; Phil 2:1-7
 - C.** Romans 12: 4-8; 1 Corinthians 12
 - D.** 2 Corinthians 10: 12; 13:5; Galatians 6:4
 - E.** Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 6:14,15; 7:12; 18: 35; 22:39, 40; Ephesians 4: 32; Colossians 3:13
 - F.** Jeremiah 31:34; Micah 7:19; 1 John 1:9; 2 Peter 1:3, 4
 - G.** Daniel 3:16-18; Acts 5:32
 - H.** Galatians 3: 26-28; Ephesians 2: 19-22; Col 3:11; 1 Peter 2:9
-
- ☐ Focusing on building /developing inner qualities (character/virtues) by God's grace
 - ☐ Identifying and celebrating spiritual gifts and talents—using them for God's glory and to build up /serve others, especially in the church
 - ☐ Positive peer pressure – belonging to and identifying with God's family, His people (the church), where there is the celebration of unity in diversity
 - ☐ Being humble and willing to learn from others in areas where they excel better than you – always willing to learn (humble yourself without feeling inferior)
 - ☐ Being patient, tolerant, and forgiving of others as Christ has been to you—loving others as God has loved you
 - ☐ Not afraid or ashamed of being different – of doing what God says even though it is against popular culture

- ❑ Depending totally on God's grace—accepting God's love and forgiveness when you fail or fall and receiving His power to rise out of failure and overcome
- ❑ Not comparing oneself to others—knowing that each one's style and story is different

Unhealthy Identity/Self-Esteem	Healthy Identity/Self-Esteem
Not comfortable in your own skin; not happy to be you. Always wanting to be someone else (feeling inferior)	Happy to be "you"
Hating yourself – magnifying your personal problems, seeing personality in a bad light, from a negative perspective (self-pity)	Loving and appreciating yourself; Always seeing yourself from a positive perspective
Negative peer pressure-following the crowd to do evil - bullying, drug addiction, sexual immorality, etc.	Positive peer pressure. Surrounding yourself with godly people who provide influence and support to do good
Depending on popular culture to determine true worth/self-image (people pleasers)	Depending mainly on God for true worth/self-image (God pleasers)
Fear and Cowardice	Faith and Courage
Pride, Arrogance, feeling superior, looking down on others	Humility – knowing one's limits
Miserable living	Abundant living
Surviving	Thriving
Bad health (Depression)	Good health (Celebration)
Failure	Success
Death (Suicide)	Life

After you have been recreated in Christ, the result is a healthy identity that is manifested in your relationships with others, especially by the way you treat them. Apart from the examples stated above, the key manifestation of a healthy identity in Christ is love for others. This love is manifested in a number of ways: humility, patience, tolerance, appreciation, and forgiveness towards others. The basic point here is that you treat everyone as God in Christ has treated you. God's love for you, which you have enjoyed, is shared with others. Your love for God is manifested in your love for others (Matthew 18: 21-35; Ephesians 4:32; Col 3:13; 1 John 4: 7-12, 19-21).

In addition, your view of your identity greatly determines and affects how you live your life. As seen in the examples above, a new identity recreated in Christ brings a lot of benefits in this life, while your old identity without Christ has a lot of disadvantages for life. ***When you have a healthy identity in Christ, you live a successful life, full of meaning, purpose, significance, and fulfillment.*** Most importantly, a healthy identity in Christ helps you to live the kind of life here on earth that God created you to live in the very beginning. Through this identity, you manifest, reveal, and reflect more and more the restoration of the image of God in you.



dig deep identity for eternity

You are so special to God because He created only one of you. There are no two identical people in the universe. Each one is unique. Imagine a mother with ten children. If she loses one of them in death, you cannot comfort her by saying, "Don't worry, you still have nine other children still alive with you." No matter how many other children she still has, she will always remember and treasure the uniqueness of her deceased child. Just as a mother knows each child, God knows all His children and appreciates them. Each one is so important to Him that He gave His life to redeem each one from sin. Even if there was only one sinner to be saved, He would still have died to redeem that special one. ***Yes, Calvary is the true cost of the soul. It shows God's infinite value of one soul.*** Here are some quotes from the Spirit of Prophecy:



“One soul is of infinite value; Calvary speaks of its worth” (*Messages to Young People*, p 207).

“He who gave His life to redeem man sees in every human being a value that exceeds finite computation. By the mystery and glory of the cross we are to discern His estimate of the value of the soul. When we do this, we shall feel that human beings, however degraded, have cost too much to be treated with coldness or contempt” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p.162).

“Christ gave Himself for sinners. With what anxiety for the salvation of souls we should be filled as we see human beings perishing in sin. These souls have been bought at an infinite price. The death of the Son of God on Calvary’s cross is the measure of their value” (*Testimonies*, vol. 8, 28).

“The value of a soul, who can estimate? Would you know its worth, go to Gethsemane and there watch with Christ through those hours of anguish, when He sweat as it were great drops of blood....At the foot of the cross, remember that for one sinner Christ would have laid down His life, you may estimate the value of a soul” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 196).

“If God cares for a sparrow...how will he care for the purchase of the blood of Christ? One soul is worth more than all the world. For one soul Jesus would have passed through the agony of Calvary that that one might be saved in his kingdom. ‘Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows’” (*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 3, 1892).

If God values your personality and individuality, what happens to it after death? The Bible clearly states that after death, the soul (person)—that special divine creation of dust and breath from God (Genesis 2:7; Psalm 139:13-16)—ceases to exist. At death, the dust returns to the ground and remains in the grave (Genesis 3:19; Ecclesiastes 12:7), and the life of the

person—all the activities and achievements on earth—ends (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6). The Bible is also clear that everyone who has died awaits resurrection in the grave (Job 7:9, 10; 14: 10-14). Since death is like a sleep (Ps 13:3; 2 Kings 2:10, John 11: 11, 14), resurrection is the judgment received after waking up from the sleep of death (Hebrews 9:27). At the resurrection, each one will receive judgment—a reward either to eternal life or eternal destruction (Daniel 12: 2; John 5:25, 28, 29). However, the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy make it clear that after resurrection, the personality and individuality of the resurrected person is preserved and restored. This is evident in the examples of resurrection in the Bible such as the widow of Zarephath's son (1 Kings 17:17-24), the Shunammite woman's son (2 Kings 4: 17-20, 32-37), Jairus' daughter (Mark 5: 35-42), the widow of Nain's son (Luke 7:11-17), and Lazarus (John 11:1-44). This is particularly clear in the appearances of Jesus after His resurrection. On the road to Emmaus, the disciples recognized Jesus by His usual way of blessing the food (Luke 24: 28-35). They touched and recognized His physical features and His kindly, gentle, and loving personality after His resurrection (Luke 24: 36-43; John 20: 10-21:17). **God values the special uniqueness of who you are so much that He preserves and restores it at your resurrection.** Even death does not destroy your personality and individuality—your identity.

Here are some quotes from the Spirit of Prophecy that support this fact:



“As Jesus arose from the dead, so those who asleep in Him are to rise again. We shall know our friends, even as the disciples knew Jesus. They may have been deformed, diseased, or disfigured, in this mortal life, and they rise in perfect health and symmetry; yet in the glorified body their identity will be preserved. ...In the face radiant with the light shining from the face of Jesus, we shall recognize the lineaments of those we love” (*Desire of Ages*, p. 804).

“Our personal identity is preserved in the resurrection, though not the same particles of matter or material substance as went into the grave. ... The spirit, the character of man, is returned to God, there to be preserved. In the resurrection every man will have his own character. God in His own time will call forth the dead, giving again the breath of life, and bidding the dry bones live. The same form will come forth, but it will be free from disease and every defect. It lives again bearing the same individuality of features, so that friend will recognize friend” (Manuscript 76, 1900 quoted in *SDA Commentary vol. 6*, 1093).

“As the wicked went into their graves, so they come forth with the same enmity to Christ and the same spirit of rebellion. They are to have no new probation in which to remedy the defects of their past lives. Nothing would be gained by this. A lifetime of transgression has not softened their hearts. A second probation, were it given them, would be occupied as was the first in evading the requirements of God and exciting rebellion against Him....In death these experienced no change. As they come up from the grave, they resume the current of their thoughts just where it ceased. They are actuated by the same desire to conquer that ruled them when they fell” (*Great Controversy*, p. 664).

Wonderful! So remember that you have a special identity in God’s sight—an identity that He will love to preserve for all eternity. If you refuse His love and salvation, He will miss you and your special individuality for all eternity. He will miss that special personality that He created and died for like a mother misses her deceased child.

reflection

who are you?

So who are you? What do you say about yourself? What is your identity?

Most of the time, we answer these questions by taking our cues from the people around us. We think we are what everybody else thinks and says we are. Apart from what you see in the mirror when you look in it, what the bio or info says about you on your ID, what you really say or think you are and what everybody else says about you, God sees and knows that there is more to who you are than all of the above. ***The true definition of your identity is found in what He thinks and says about who you are.*** He truly sees and knows the essence of your identity—who you really are inside.

So what does God say or think about who you are?

First, He sees you as special and unique because you are created by Him in His image, with a personality and individuality so unique that there is no one in the universe that is an exact match of you.

Second, He loves you so much that He gave His Son to provide forgiveness for your sinful deeds in order to gradually restore in you His divine character through His grace.

Third, because you are part of His church family, He loves you and longs to take you home with His people to spend eternity with Him when His plan of redemption is complete.

You may have had a terrible past filled with mistakes and sin. You may still have some sinful habits that you are not proud of. Sometimes these are obvious to people around you and cause them to hate who you are. These things make you feel bad about your identity and look down on yourself, and for good reason. Despite all of these, the Bible is very clear on what God thinks about who you are: You are His beloved, and that is the most important part of your identity. He loves you so much and He has done a lot to prove it (Isaiah 43: 1-4; Jeremiah 31:3;

John 3:16; 16:27; Romans 5:8; 1 John 4: 9, 10, 19). Though people around you may accuse, hate you, and look down on you because of your imperfections and defects, God's love reaches out to you in forgiveness, draws you to Himself, and sets you on the path to restoration from the destructive power of sin. This is what His grace does. As seen in the stories of the prodigal son (Luke 15:20-32) and the adulteress (John 8:1-11), though God hates sin, He loves the sinner, and His grace is greater than all sin. **NOTHING YOU DO CAN CHANGE WHAT GOD THINKS AND SAYS ABOUT YOU.** Nothing but your choice can separate you from His love, which is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:37-39). Even that choice wouldn't make Him stop loving you. But He loves you too much to force you to live with Him.

So who are you?

What do you say about yourself?

What is your identity?

Apart from all you see in the mirror, apart from all your bio info on your IDs and vital documents, apart from all that people say and think about you, do not forget to make central this part of your identity: **"I AM THE ONE WHOM JESUS LOVES."** This is the part of your identity that matters the most and that makes all the difference.

reflection

what do you think about the statement "image is everything"?

Discuss the implications of its importance in the world and then for the Christian.

Assume that evolution was true and there was no God, what are the implications for one's self-esteem? Would it make any difference in our identity? Would there be any other good reason to feel special apart from God?

What would the world be like if everyone had a healthy identity rooted, founded, and centered on God? Imagine and discuss.

application

- How do you feel about yourself? Why do you feel like this about yourself? Give three basic reasons. Do you see yourself differently after understanding what God thinks of you?
- Apart from the fact that you are God's creation and redemption, what other aspects of your life and person are you grateful to God for? What are the things you appreciate about yourself? You can share the answers in the areas of your gender, nationality, race, family background, spiritual gifts or talents, etc.



disciples in action

What are the things you do not like about yourself? Write them out on a sheet of paper. What things on the list can you change or improve upon? What things on the list cannot be changed? In your devotional and prayer time, think of what you can do to make the necessary changes on the things you can change and pray about these changes. Try to see the things you cannot change from a positive point of view.

This week find five or ten people, either in your home, neighborhood, school, college, office, or church, and tell them what you like about them. Compliment, appreciate, and encourage them. Try to do this especially for those whom people do not usually compliment or appreciate.



leader's note

The questions in bold print are to be answered from the Bible verses or passages supplied. Group members are to read these verses, which have the answers to the questions asked. Try to make sure that everyone in the group is involved in reading the Bible and finding the answers.

The fill in the blanks/matching activity above also involves reading the Bible to find the answers. Encourage all to participate.

SESSION SIX-B

by *Erika Perpall*

developing an individual identity that is complete in Christ



Erika Perpall is a wife and mother, a youth Leader, computer professional and Cradle Roll Sabbath school teacher. Born and raised in the Bahamas, she is the youngest of four girls. Erika attended Andrews University where she obtained a bachelor's degree in Computer Science. Her hobbies include reading, computer games, and traveling. She serves as secretary to the Pathfinder Corporation of the Bahamas and is a volunteer tutor at *Lets Read Bahamas*.



theme

To develop an individual identity in Christ, I am:

- surrendering my heart and will to God.
- learning that God places infinite value on me.
- recognizing my continual need for God's forgiving and empowering grace.
- inviting the Holy Spirit to guide in my ongoing reflection and actions.
- embracing cultural expectations that are aligned with God's Word (the Bible) and replacing those that are not.



big idea

To know that we are created in the image of God and that He sent His Son to die for us because we are of infinite value to Him. We should respond to this love by aligning ourselves with our Creator.

You are priceless because of the value God has placed on you.



connector

Look: Gen. 1:26

Memorize: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."



THE THE JOURNEY exploration

group activity:

(Skip this activity if you are using this book on your own.)

Have everyone write two or three phrases that describe themselves. Put all the descriptions in a box. Pick one and read it aloud to the whole group. Then ask everyone has to guess who the person is.



leader's note

You can have people volunteer to pick a description out of the box, read it, and guess who it is for a small group where everyone is familiar with each other.

If someone asked, “Who are you?” most of us would respond by giving our name. But you are more than just a name. You are more than just your mother’s child. You are more than just a young person. Do you know who you really are? I have never met you, but I know you. I know where you came from. It’s true. I can trace your origin. Let’s do it together!

What does the Bible say about the origin of humanity?

- Genesis 1:26
- Genesis 5: 2
- Jeremiah 31:34
- Malachi 2:10

So, we see that God did not just create people; He made us in His own image. And yet, that is only the beginning of your story.



“Man was the crowning act of the creation of God, made in the image of God, and designed to be a counterpart of God.... Man is very dear to God, because he was formed in His own image. “In order to understand the value which God places upon man, we need to comprehend the plan of redemption, the costly sacrifice which our Saviour made to save the human race from eternal ruin. Jesus died to regain possession of the one pearl of great price. . .” (*Lift Him Up*, p. 48).

Besides making us of such great value to Him, God made us of great value to the world. He gave us a purpose for being here. Again, what does the Bible say?

- Matthew 5: 13
- Matthew 5: 14
- Philippians 2: 15

The imagery Jesus uses is just powerful! What does salt do? It gives taste and it preserves. What does light do? It shatters darkness.

God has given us a great task and great potential. But how do we unleash this power? Consider a light bulb. It has the power to dispel darkness – but only if it is connected to the power source. Consider salt – if it has no savor, it is useless. So, how do **we** accomplish our purpose? This is the part where many of us get stuck. It's time to come out of the trance and fulfill our role. But first, “What is our power source?”

Search and Discover

- Exodus 15:2
- 1 Chronicles 16: 11
- 2 Samuel 22:33
- Psalm 18:1
- Psalm 18: 32

How do we tap into the power?

- We must be strong: Psalm 27:14
- We must wait: Psalm 86:16
- We must pray: Isaiah 26:4
- We must trust: Proverbs 10:29
- We must follow His way: 1 Peter 2:21, 3 John 1:11

Activity

Have your group members make a human maze. Blind-fold a volunteer and have him or her attempt to walk through the maze, following the directions of another volunteer. Then have another volunteer lead another blindfolded volunteer through the maze.



leader's note

You can vary the size and complexity of the maze based on the size of the room and the number of people. You may even use chairs or trash cans in the maze.

Life can sometimes bring some unexpected twists and turns, and we feel like we are walking blindly through a maze. Isn't it nice to know that we have our own personal guide leading the way?

reflection

Now that you know who you are, do you know where you are going? Things that are of great value require special attention. That is why God took the time to write us a love letter and, just in case you missed the point, He sent us the Spirit of Prophecy. He gives our lives direction and He provides sign posts along the way.

1. How do I know which way is God's way?
2. Am I following God's way?
3. Should there be exceptions to the rule? (e.g. cultural differences, personal taste, etc)
4. Where do you draw the line between "fitting in" and standing up for Jesus?

application

Without God, we are as valuable as the dirt on the ground. In God, we are worth the value of His Son. We are precious and protected. We are so precious to Him that He left detailed instructions to ensure our happiness. When you look in the mirror you should not only see blue eyes or brown eyes, or freckles or pimples. When you look in the mirror, you should see a child of God, made in His image; you should see the one He gave His life for. You should see the one He is counting on.

I know. It is mind-boggling to think that we matter to God. But we do. We matter so much that He even counted the strands of our hair. He plotted the course of our lives. The ball is in your court now. How will you play it? Here are some suggestions:

1. Begin each day with God

“Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him” (*Steps to Christ*, p. 93).

2. Study the Bible daily

“Search the Scriptures for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39, KJV).

3. Discover the joy of sharing Christ

“God might have committed the message of the gospel, and all the work of loving ministry, to the heavenly angels. He might have employed other means for accomplishing His purpose. But in His infinite love He chose to make us co-workers with Himself, with Christ and the angels, that we might share the blessing, the joy, the spiritual uplifting, which results from this unselfish ministry” (*Steps to Christ*, p. 79).



dig deep

God’s plan for our lives includes our mission – our ministry. He saved us so that we may serve Him and our fellow men. But He does not leave us to stumble around in the dark. Through Scripture and inspired writings, He gives us hope and comfort.

Read the following quotes from Ellen White and consider how they apply to your life.



Helping the Tempted

“The lost coin in the Saviour’s parable, though lying in the dirt and rubbish, was a piece of silver still. Its owner sought it because it was of value. So every soul, however degraded by sin, is in God’s sight accounted precious. As the coin bore the image and superscription of the reigning power, so man at his creation bore the image and superscription of God. Though now marred and dim through the influence of sin, the traces of this inscription remain upon every soul. God desires to recover that soul and to retrace upon it His own image in righteousness and holiness” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p.163).

“But Jesus did not bid the disciples, “Strive to *make* your light shine;” He said, “ *Let* it shine.” If Christ is dwelling in the heart, it is impossible to conceal the light of His presence. If those who profess to be followers of Christ are not the light of the world, it is because the vital power has left them; if they have no light to give, it is because they have no connection with the Source of light” (*MB* p. 40).

“For sinful men, the highest consolation, the greatest cause of rejoicing, is that Heaven has given Jesus to be the sinner’s Saviour. . . . He offered to go over the ground where Adam stumbled and fell; to meet the tempter on the field of battle, and conquer him in man’s behalf. Behold Him in the wilderness of temptation. Forty days and forty nights He fasted, enduring the fiercest assaults of the powers of darkness. He trod the “winepress alone; and of the people there was none with” Him (Isa. 63:3). It was not for Himself, but that He might break the chain that held the human race in slavery to Satan” (*Our Father Cares*, pp. 209, 210).

SESSION SEVEN

by Debbonnaire Kovacs

understanding that God is the source of life



Debbonnaire Kovacs has been writing since she could hold a pencil and sold her first story to Junior Guide when she was eleven years old. By her twenties, she recognized that writing and speaking were not just what she loved to do, but what God wanted her to do. She has written off and on for most of her life, but has been writing full time since 1990, having written fourteen books including the first, second, fifth, and sixth grade Bible textbooks used in Adventist schools in North America, and more than 150 stories and articles for all ages. She speaks at camp meetings, women's retreats, and other events, and also does copyediting. She urges everyone to take their dreams to God and see whether they are more than just dreams. They may be assignments from the King of Heaven.

You can reach her at debbonnaire@debbonnaire.com or on the Web at www.debbonnaire.com

preamble

First Causes

Creation is a hot topic these days. There is a range of beliefs—from no creator at all to some vague “life force” (possibly intelligent, possibly not) working in or through everything, to some form of creator who seeded the primordial soup and left, to theistic evolution, in which a real Creator God made everything but used endless periods of time to do it and is doing it still, to simple, biblical six-day creation by the one and only, most high, triune God. Most of these beliefs are held passionately and more or less rigidly, leaving little room for even hearing what others believe, let alone actually listening respectfully to them.

As far as possible, attempt not to be drawn into debates or arguments on the subject; however, if arguments arise, Christians need to remember to be Christ-like even in our disagreements. We can listen to each other with love, respecting the person and his or her right to disagree with us, even if we cannot truthfully respect the belief stated. Rather than arguing ways and means, we can focus on the most important truth of all—a real God made all of us, and how we live our lives matters to this Creator. People who fully accept secular evolution have a long way to go before accepting God’s existence, let alone His Creatorship, but those who at least believe that God *is* can usually be reached by focusing on the spiritual challenges He brings to our lives: What does it mean that God made me? What blessings, what challenges, what demands does that put on my life? As a person draws nearer and nearer to the Source of all life and the Source of one’s own life, the power and love of the Creator become more and more overwhelming, until the concept that He crafted all this miraculous life and love deliberately, lovingly, recently, and in six actual days seems perfectly feasible after all.

It’s always safe to concentrate on the love! It really does bring all other things in its train.



“The physical organism of man is under the supervision of God, but it is not like a clock, which is set in operation, and must go of itself. The heart beats, pulse succeeds pulse, breath succeeds breath, but the entire being is under the supervision of God. ‘Ye are God’s husbandry; ye are God’s building.’ In God we live, and move, and have our being. Each heartbeat, each breath, is the inspiration of Him who breathed into the nostrils of Adam the breath of life—the inspiration of the ever-present God, the great I AM” (*The Review and Herald*, November 8, 1898).

New Creation

John 1 says that Jesus was the active force in creation, though of course all three Persons of the Godhead were actively involved and are clearly shown as present in Genesis. When it comes to re-creation, Jesus is again the active agent. Again, of course, all three are active. God the Father made the decision and sent His Son. The Spirit was extremely involved throughout Jesus' life on earth and is in some senses even more active now than Jesus is, bringing and managing our daily New Life. However, Jesus was the one who "put a face on God." One of His important roles as incarnate God was to make God visible to us. John made the point both in John 1 and in 1 John 1 that he was speaking of something he himself had seen, heard, and touched. This is the reason one of Jesus' favorite titles for Himself was Son of Man. He is our brother in a way that could not be possible before His birth, and now we can "see, touch, even taste" God in ways that would not be possible had He not visited us.

This is the major focus of this study. It's one thing (and very important!) to understand that God is the Source of life in the sense that He was the one who first created the planet, the light, air, plants, animals, and us. It's even more important to understand that God is the immediate Source of *my* life, that He is working daily, momentarily (with or without my cooperation), in an attempt to guide me into His paths.

Most important of all is to understand that He is the Source of *new life*, that I am His child, "born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:13, NIV). This is a Source I cannot do without, any more that I could do without the breath He created for my lungs and created my lungs for, any more than I could do without the water He made for me and made me out of, any more than I could do without the love and touch He made people to give me and made me to give to others.



"The mind devoted unreservedly to God, under the guidance of the divine Spirit, develops generally and harmoniously. The weak, vacillating character becomes changed through the power of God to one of strength and steadfastness. Continual devotion and piety establish so close a relation between Jesus and his disciple that the Christian becomes like him in mind and character. After association with the Son of God, the humble follower of Christ is found to be a person of sound principle, clear perception, and reliable judgment. He has a connection with God, the source of light and understanding. He who longed to be of service to the cause of Christ, has been so quickened by the life-giving rays of the Sun of Righteousness, that he has been enabled to bear much fruit to the glory of God" (*Christian Education*, 199).



theme

To understand that God is the Source of life, I am learning that:

- God is the creator and sustainer of the universe, including all people created in His image.
- God is a triune God consisting of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- God reveals Himself to us in many ways, but most clearly through His Son, the incarnate Word.
- God is love and He desires from me a response of love for Himself and for others.
- the God-given purpose of humanity is to glorify God through daily life, work, and relationships with others.



big idea

The great Creator God had a purpose in creating this world, and He has a purpose for my life.



connector

Look: John 1:1-5; 1 John 2:7-11

Memorize: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it” (John 1:1-5).



THE JOURNEY

Exploration

God is the Source of Life

You can probably say Genesis 1:1 from memory: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” You may have been able to say this when you were a small child. What does it mean? Are there new thoughts to be found in this small text?

Of course you believe God is the Creator. If you pay any attention at all to the daily miracles of life on this planet (the sun comes up exactly when and where we expect it every single day, no matter what, for one of millions of examples), then you have no trouble believing that such a God could have created everything in a moment, let alone six days, and could also have made everything look as old or as new as He chose. But you could believe all this without actually *knowing* this Source of life. In fact, you could believe all this just because somebody told you so, without ever having examined it for yourself.

If you read on in Genesis 1, you find that the Spirit of God “moved upon” (KJV), “was moving over” (NASB), “was hovering over” (NIV), “was moving, (hovering, brooding) over” (Amplified), or “brooded like a bird above” (*The Message*) the

waters. What's all this about? Well, it gives a whole new feeling to the bare statement of fact of verse 1. Have you ever seen a chicken or other bird on a nest? The bird goes into an almost trancelike state. She gets up only briefly once a day to eat and drink. The rest of the time, 24/7, she gives herself entirely to the all-important task of keeping her eggs warm, turning them regularly, and waiting for them to grow. Nothing else matters to her. Mother birds have been found dead, spread over eggs or babies (often still alive and safe) after a fire or other disaster. The lives of their babies mattered more to them than life itself. This word "brooding," in English, is the one the author chose to describe what the Spirit of God did at the beginning of time.

Reading further, you find that God speaks into existence light and lightning bugs, galaxies and grasshoppers, tides and tigers and tiger lilies and, by the way, the space/time continuum. But not people. This hovering, maternal-sounding Maker bends down and scoops up dirt (which He made not long before) and water (ditto) and carefully sculpts a person "in Our image and likeness" or, as *The Message* puts it, "in Our image, . . . reflecting our nature."

1. What thoughts and feelings arise in you when you think of the phrase "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"?

2. What thoughts and feelings arise in you when you consider the Spirit brooding like a mother bird?

3. What does it mean to you that humans were created in God's image and reflecting His nature? What are some ways we can still see that likeness today? What are some ways we can no longer see that likeness?

4. What choices do you make on a daily basis that determine how much or how little you reflect God's likeness?



dig deep

God the Three-in-One

Good luck understanding or explaining this one! You've probably heard several analogies—a three-ply cord, an apple (skin, flesh, core), an egg (shell, white, yolk), the three states of water (liquid, frozen, steam). They help. Maybe. Some. The fact is, we don't *get* the idea of a three-personality person! We either tend to think of them as three different, separate Gods, which gets us in trouble with the whole doctrine of monotheism, or we think of one God with three different faces, which gets us in trouble with. . . well, to Whom, exactly, was Jesus praying? And Who did He say was coming after He left?

Fortunately, we don't have to understand fully in order to love fully, or we'd all be in trouble, because who fully understands their spouse or child? We get that the Father/Maker/Defender is, as the Old Testament commonly puts it, "God above all other gods." King of Kings. "That without which there would be nothing at all."

We get that the third Person of the Godhead is Spirit—all-pervasive, all-encompassing, all-knowing, all-loving—the one who “lives in us” while at the same time in whom “we live and move and have our being.” Okay, we don’t exactly *get* that, but we accept it. And thank God for it!

Most of all, we thank God that He gave Himself a face. Jesus, we get. Mostly. He was a man, a Jew, probably tanned and bearded, probably dark-haired. Maybe long-nosed. He had hands and feet and a smile that embraced the world and eyes that you could drown in.

And He loves us. He/They love(s) us. This we know!

1. What are some of the analogies that help you try to understand or explain the Trinity?

2. How much does it matter to you how well you understand this concept? What helps you to love anyway, without fully understanding?

reflection

“If you’ve seen Me, you’ve seen the Father.”

We’ve already studied many ways to know God. He reveals Himself to us in nature, in each other, in His Word, in music and art, and the inexplicable peace that comes when we simply point our hearts toward His and open them. But we know that one of the most important ways God reveals Himself is in the fact that He came and lived among us. There are unnumbered lessons in the incarnation. Here are three important ones to consider.

- **He came.**

This is a pretty amazing fact, all by itself. The very idea that an infinite God could step into His own creation is kind of like Mary Poppins and the chimney sweep stepping into their sidewalk art—only, even less believable. How did He do it? That, we’ll never understand. Why did He do it?

Ah, now *that’s* the truly amazing thing! Because He didn’t just chalk a picture on the sidewalk and then decide to care about the little cartoon chalk beings. He didn’t make toy robots in His lab and then decide to enter their mechanical little world. He didn’t even make pets, with actual personalities, and then fall in love with those. *He made beings “like Himself” and fell in love with them.* He invented people with minds and hearts, and the capacity to stare into a sunset with awe. He gave us, if you can believe it, a little spark of His own creativity, so that we can take bits of the “stuff” He left around for us to play with and make paintings and create dances and name babies and write silly rhymes and invent tiny little devices that can hold thousands of those paintings and songs and dances and pictures of the babies.

So, when these beings started using their creativity to talk to snakes and make weapons and hit babies and dance to demons, **He came.**

- **He saw.**

One of my favorite names of God in the whole Bible is the one Hagar gave Him—“the God who sees me” (Genesis 16:13). Jesus saw—really saw the people around Him. He saw the

truth Nicodemus didn't want Him to notice. He saw the desperate need in the heart of the woman at the well. He saw the value of a leper and the love of children and the longing of the adulterer and what the demoniac really wanted to say.

- **He conquered.**

He lived the life, never deviating from love. He endured the sarcasm and sneers and the misunderstanding. He answered the questions and touched the untouchable and cried when He rebuked the unrepentant. He fought the devil with Scripture and with His own unbounded love, and when the time came, He died the death. You know. *The* death. The one that's supposed to last forever, and which would have swallowed our entire race if He hadn't thrown Himself in the way.

He conquered *that* death.



dig deep

1. What have you learned about God by looking in the face of Jesus?

2. How would you tell the story of Jesus "coming" into your own life?

3. What has He conquered for you? How are you helping or hindering His work?

application

love: a round trip

1 John 4:19 reminds us that we only love because God loved us first. Love is like air and water—it has to flow, and it abhors a vacuum. Where there is low pressure, wind forms, to move air to fill that low pocket. If you push an upright, empty cup down into the water, as soon as the water can get over the rim, it will rush to fill the hole. Love is like that. When someone is in desperate need of love (that would be us), God’s love rushes even faster to fill the vacuum and pours all over us. If we are living in that love, it will not only pour all over us, it will overflow all around us. When we see someone who is particularly “unlovely” (as we tend to put it, and that’s the polite term!), our first reaction will be to long to pour love all over that person.

We’re never as good at it as God is, of course. We may embarrass or hurt someone when all we meant to do is love. But people can tell when love is real, even if it’s a little inept. They tend to forgive clumsiness that comes from true, heart-deep love.

But what if we don’t respond? What if we put up our spiritual umbrellas when God’s love comes pouring down on us? What if we scrunch up our scroogy hearts, frown ferociously, fold our arms tightly, and refuse to accept the love of God?

Well, it’s not possible for us to stop the flow of God’s love. But it is possible for us to dam up our own hearts so that we’re stones in the river instead of life-giving pumps, passing on the water of life. The water will still flow around us, but there will be ripples and distortions and white water.

Love has to be a round trip to really fulfill its destiny. It has to flow both to us (from God and others) and away from us (to God and others).



dig deep

1. Name three ways God's love has flowed into your life lately.

2. Name three ways God has used His other children to pour His love into your life lately.

3. Name three ways you would like to pour out some of that love on someone else this week.

reflection

God didn't just sit down one day and decide it would be fun to make a universe and see what happened. He had a plan. He had a plan for this world, and He has a plan for His children. Jesus put it the most succinctly and simply:

"Love God.

Love everybody else.

Do it with all you've got."

That's a free paraphrase, but you get the point.

If you have a journal, here are some things to reflect on, or you could discuss them with your friends or with your group.

- What does it really mean, deep in my heart, that God is the Source of all life, and of my life? What difference does it make to me?
- In what ways can I make the face of God visible to those around me through my own life in this world?
- When I get up in the morning, what is the first thing I do to remind myself of and bask in God's love?



disciples in action

Having reflected on these things, challenge yourself to find ways to make them real and visible in your daily life.

- How do I order and plan my day to show God's love to others?
- What could I do differently to be more intentional about this?
- When was the last time I felt the impulse to show love to someone who was not immediately appealing to me?
- What happened?
- What would I do differently another time?

SESSION EIGHT

by Tracy Morgan

investing myself in the discipleship of others



Tracy Morgan lives in Holly, Michigan with her husband and their two sons. She is the author of *Bathsheba: A Story of Sin and Redemption*, and *Samson*, as well as several articles that have been published in *Women of Spirit*, *Signs of the Times*, and *Primary Treasure*.



theme

To invest myself in the discipleship of others, I am:

- willing to be mentored by maturing Christians and accountable for my spiritual growth.
- willing to be humble and honest when sharing my walk as a disciple.
- committing time and effort to mentoring growing Christians.
- working intentionally to train fellow believers to disciple others.



big idea

As Christians, we are not only committed to developing our own relationship with God, but also to helping train and mentor others in their faith.



connector

Look: Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:7-10, Acts 2

Memorize: “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’” (Matthew 28:18-20, NIV).



THE JOURNEY exploration

The long-awaited appointment had finally arrived. Jesus told His eleven remaining followers to meet Him on the mountainside of Galilee so He could give them further instructions before His final departure. The men who had been closest to Him for three and a half years gathered together with hundreds of other curious new believers, waiting in anticipation to see their risen Master. When Jesus finally appeared to them, they fell to their knees and worshipped Him. Many in the crowd had seen the miracles and wonders performed by Jesus during His ministry, but something about seeing this God-Man who had escaped the chains of death standing before them caused them to tremble in reverence.

When Jesus spoke, He explained to His followers that they now had a special work to do. He gave them the authority to make disciples of the people of all nations. He told them to baptize new believers and teach them everything He had shared during His time on earth as well as everything that had been written in the Scriptures. This was a huge undertaking for this small group of uneducated, unpopular misfits, but He ended His commission with words of encouragement. He knew their journey would not be an easy one, but He promised to be with

them through all of their trials (Matthew 28:18-20, *Desire of Ages*, pp. 818-828).

A short time later, He met again with the eleven near Bethany. He gave His closest followers a special blessing and told them again that His Holy Spirit would come soon to fill them with power. When He finished speaking, He ascended into heaven right before their eyes. As they stood staring into the sky, two heavenly beings broke the awed silence by reminding the men that Jesus would be back again. The disciples knew they had an urgent work to do, so they returned to Jerusalem to watch and wait for the power of the Holy Spirit to come and help them finish the work that had to be completed before Jesus' return (Luke 24:50-51, Acts 1:8-10, NIV).

Just days later, the disciples and other members of the new faith were gathered together to celebrate the day of Pentecost. While they were together, the promised Holy Spirit came to them and filled them all with God's power. This allowed them to witness to the crowds gathered in the city of Jerusalem. In that one day, three thousand new believers were converted. These new believers then went on to share what they had learned with everyone they came in contact with.

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 and the story of Pentecost in Acts 2 remind us that when Jesus gives us directions, and we follow them for His glory, He can use us to do amazing things, both then and now. Every single member of the body of Christ has the privilege and responsibility of sharing in this work. Our most urgent desire should be to share our faith and win souls for the soon coming Kingdom.

This may seem like an intimidating endeavor. Perhaps you don't feel you have the necessary gifts. Maybe you think that because you aren't a natural preacher or teacher, that you have no part in this commission, but everyone has a part to play. Whatever your calling or profession in life, you can minister to God's children. This can be done by being a Christ-like witness to those around you. Comfort the hurting, feed the hungry, share God's love with everyone you meet. When they believe, they can then teach others, just like the converts at Pentecost.

Jesus' commission tells us to take His message all around the world. But what if circumstances prevent us from traveling abroad?



Ellen White tells us, “While we may not be called to be missionaries to foreign countries, we can still reach souls right at home. We need not go to heathen lands, or even leave the narrow circle of the home, if it is there that our duty lies, in order to work for Christ. We can do this in the home circle, in the church, among those with whom we associate, and with whom we do business” (*Steps to Christ*, p. 81).

Start with your own family, neighbors, and co-workers. Find ways to show unexpected love and compassion. Tell them what Jesus has done for you. Let them see the changes in your life. Share God’s Word with them. Like a stone tossed into a still pond, you will see the ripple effect as each new disciple goes off to make new disciples. The results of our thoughtful care and ministry toward others will only be fully realized in heaven.

It was Jesus who spoke the world into existence (John 1:1-4). He possesses the power to send beings more powerful and holy than ourselves out to complete the work of spreading His message to the world, but instead, He has entrusted us with this task.



“In His infinite love He chose to make us co-workers with Himself, with Christ and the angels, that we might share the blessing, the joy, the spiritual uplifting, which results from this unselfish ministry” (*Steps to Christ*, p. 80).

Jesus knows that by allowing us to work with Him, not only will we be a blessing to others, but our faith will continue to grow and mature as well.

- Who do you know that needs to hear the Good News?
- How have you witnessed to people in the past?
- How do we grow when we teach others?

reflection

When the believers met together in Jerusalem for Pentecost, they had put away all of their differences and were of one mind and mission. Jesus had promised the Holy Spirit would come to them and that they would be given the ability to win souls.

They waited eagerly, but not idly.

“The disciples prayed with intense earnestness for a fitness to meet men and in their daily intercourse to speak words that would lead sinners to Christ” (*Acts of the Apostles*, p. 37).

We now labor to hasten the day that Jesus will come again in the clouds to take all believers into His kingdom (John 14:2-3). Jesus will come again and everything around us tells us it will be very soon. While we wait, we cannot be idle. It is Jesus’ desire that all should be saved and it is our responsibility to give everyone the opportunity to know of the love and sacrifice that He made for us all.

- Why is it important to build relationships within the church?
- Can you think of a time that your church family was united to complete a task? What was the outcome?
- What can you do personally to help unite fellow believers in your community?

application

As a follower of Jesus, we are called to spread God’s message to everyone, but in order to be a successful witness we must allow ourselves to be mentored by others. Our church communities are full of like-minded Christians who have experience and wisdom that can be invaluable to growing believers. Get to know these seasoned saints and learn from them. Humble yourself and share your experiences with them. If you’re struggling in your walk, tell them about it. Maybe they’ve had similar struggles and they have learned how to find success in Jesus. Not all lessons have to be learned the hard way.

Even if you feel you have a lot to learn and a long way to go before you are an “experienced” Christian, you still have an obligation to help train new believers. How many times did Jesus heal and convert a lost soul who immediately ran off to share the story? Take the time to reach out to others. Tell them what Jesus has done for you. Try leading out in a Bible study. You don’t have to be a scholar or theologian. There are plenty of easy-to-follow study guides available to help you guide others through God’s Word. If you pray for the Holy Spirit to fill you as He filled the believers at Pentecost, you will be given

the wisdom and courage to complete this work. And don't worry, Jesus promised to be with you always!

- Who at your church can be a mentor to you? Who can you mentor?



dig deep

In a world of social media such as Facebook and Twitter, it is easy to share our thoughts with hundreds of people instantly. Most of us update our status several times a day without much thought as to how it will be received by our friends. Occasionally, you may be asked to re-post a status in order to pass a message along to as many people as possible. Perhaps it's about ending a disease such as cancer or diabetes. Maybe it's to find a lost pet or to advertise for an upcoming event. Whatever the cause, there are always a few who are willing to participate. Imagine if we dedicated the same time and energy into making new disciples. If we share God's message to the people living in the end times, and we ask them to pass it on to everyone they know, how many people could be reached?

What can we possibly say to reach the people in our lives? It's really not as difficult as it might seem.



Ellen White tells us in *Christ's Object Lessons* that "Thousands can be reached in the most simple and humble way. The most intellectual, those who are looked upon as the world's most gifted men and women, are often refreshed by the simple words of one who loves God, and who can speak of that love as naturally as the worldling speaks of the things that interest him most deeply.

"Often the words well prepared and studied have but little influence. But the true, honest expression of a son or daughter of God, spoken in natural simplicity, has power to unbolt the door to hearts that have long been closed against Christ and His love.

"Let the worker for Christ remember that he is not to labor in his own strength. Let him lay hold of the throne of God with faith in His power to save. Let him wrestle with God in prayer, and then work with all the facilities

God has given him. The Holy Spirit is provided as his efficiency. Ministering angels will be by his side to impress hearts" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 231).



disciples in action

- Think of a way you can share Jesus with someone in your life and try putting this into practice. Contact your accountability partner during the week to talk about your experiences.
- Start a Bible study or small group with the goal of training and mentoring others who are growing in their faith. Ask your accountability partner to assist you in getting the group started.

prayer time

- In your prayer time remember to ask for help and guidance from the Holy Spirit.
- Pray for the members of your church community so they will be united in sharing the Gospel message.
- Ask God to open doors and provide witnessing opportunities.



leader's note

Activity Idea

Have each person in the group take out their cell phone and write down the names of the ten people they talk to the most. If someone doesn't have a cell phone, it should be easy enough to come up with a list of names from memory. Point out that each person on the list could be considered either a mentor or someone who needs to be mentored.

Now have them look at each name individually, and write down two people that person knows, who could in turn be reached by them. When this has been done for everyone on the original list, you will have thirty names on the paper. You could repeat the exercise as many times as necessary to make the point that

each one of us touches many different lives. Reiterate the fact that if we minister to those closest to us (and allow them to minister to us), they will then go out and continue the work in their own lives.

For encouragement, read:



“The humblest and poorest of the disciples of Jesus can be a blessing to others. They may not realize that they are doing any special good, but by their unconscious influence they may start waves of blessing that will widen and deepen, and the blessed results they may never know until the day of final reward. They do not feel or know that they are doing anything great. They are not required to weary themselves with anxiety about success. They have only to go forward quietly, doing faithfully the work that God’s providence assigns, and their life will not be in vain. Their own souls will be growing more and more into the likeness of Christ; they are workers together with God in this life and are thus fitting for the higher work and the unshadowed joy of the life to come” (*Steps to Christ*, page 83).

SESSION NINE

by Tracy Morgan

helping believers build Christlike relationships



Tracy Morgan lives in Holly, Michigan with her husband and their two sons. She is the author of *Bathsheba: A Story of Sin and Redemption*, and *Samson*, as well as several articles that have been published in *Women of Spirit*, *Signs of the Times*, and *Primary Treasure*.



theme

To help believers build Christ-like relationships, I am showing others how to:

- assess themselves, acknowledge defects of character, and invite God to remove them.
- work with God to care for themselves and live a balanced life.
- cherish, respect, and nurture family members as children of God.
- be disciplined by other believers in the body of Christ.
- resolve conflicts within the home, church, workplace, and community.



big idea

Being part of the body of Christ means we must build and nurture relationships with other believers and work together in unity.



connector

Look: Romans 12:4-5, 10-13,
1 Samuel 12:1-25

Memorize: “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Romans 12:4-5, NIV).



THE JOURNEY **exploration** **you are the man!**

King David sat on his throne, half-heartedly listening to the cases brought before him. His mind wandered as the complaints against neighbors seemed to go on and on. He thought about the wars waging in the nations surrounding his lands. He thought about the people God had given him to govern. He thought about his growing family, and then he thought about her – Bathsheba. She was his newest wife and she was about to give birth to her first child. Whenever he thought about her, he felt a pang of grief and regret. He had first seen her less than a year earlier. She was bathing on her roof top while her husband, Uriah the Hittite (one of David's mighty soldiers), was off waiting out the besieged city of Rabbah. If only he had stayed with his men...

When David saw the beautiful young woman, he thought he had to have her. Even though he already had seven wives and ten concubines, he sent for her. Like a loyal subject, she came to him, and he took advantage of his power and position.

A few weeks later, Bathsheba sent word to him that she was expecting a child. David knew immediately that he was the father. After all, he was the one who had kept the troops, and her husband, away from home so long. Everyone would wonder how Bathsheba's child was conceived while Uriah was away. It wouldn't take long for people to start talking about the palace guards who were sent to her house. Surely people noticed her coming to his quarters. Maybe even her grandfather, who was one of his advisors (2 Samuel 11:3; 23:34; 1 Chron. 27:33), would start to question him.

In order to cover his sins, he tried to convince the woman's husband to go home to spend time with her, but Uriah would not go. He was a loyal, God-fearing man who did not think it was right to spend time with his wife when the other soldiers (and the Ark of the Lord) were still on the battlefield. David did not miss the subtle rebuke to himself in Uriah's refusal.

When all attempts to send the man home failed, David made arrangements to have him sent to his death on the battlefield. Sure, people were suspicious. It was a siege after all. There was no reason to send the man so close to the walls, but he was desperate. Besides, he was the King of Israel. If he wanted to take the woman as his wife, he had every right to her, didn't he?

With Uriah out of the picture, David took Bathsheba into his home and now she was days away from giving birth to their child. He should have been happy, but he was miserable.

Just then, a familiar face walked into the court room and interrupted his dark thoughts. It was his old friend, Nathan, the prophet of God. David focused all his attention on the case Nathan brought before him.

Nathan told him of a poor man who had nothing but a little ewe lamb. He loved the lamb like a child and he even fed it from his table. There was also a rich man who had great wealth and countless flocks of sheep. One day, the rich man stole the lamb from the poor man. He killed the pet and fed it to his guests.

David was irate when he heard the story. Surely the rich man could have used one of his own lambs. What a horrible crime this man had committed! "As surely as the Lord lives, the man

who did this deserves to die!” he exclaimed (2 Samuel 12:5b). That’s when Nathan looked him squarely in the face and said, “You are the man!” (2 Samuel 12:7).

David felt as if all of the wind had been knocked out of his body. He knew Nathan was referring to the crime he had committed against Uriah the Hittite. He was just a poor soldier with only one beloved wife, and David took her from him. He knew it was time to end the spiral of wrongdoing. It might have been easier to get angry at the prophet, but David knew in his heart it was time to take responsibility for what he had done. The only real solution was to admit that he had sinned. As soon as he confessed, he felt the forgiveness of God. There were still consequences to be faced, but he knew the Lord was merciful and just.

- How does the Bible show God’s mercy in this story? (Read Psalms 32 and 51.)

reflection

David’s great sin is generally looked at from the perspective of the king. We often overlook Nathan’s crucial role in the story. Try to imagine what it was like to walk into the throne room of the most famous warrior-kings of all time and tell him he was wrong. Discuss the following questions as a group.

- What thoughts do you think were going through Nathan’s mind when he stood before the king?
- Why do you think he chose to use a story to illustrate the sin to David?
- What would you do if you saw a friend doing something wrong?
- If someone sees something wrong in your life, would you want them to talk to you about it or keep it to themselves? Which would benefit you in the end?

application

When Jesus came to earth, it was His prayer that His followers would work as one (John 17:11). We are to be like one body working together for a common goal (Romans 12:5). In order to do this successfully, we must be willing to help our fellow believers acknowledge defects of character. This is the only way true forgiveness can be acquired. Knowing this, we have to also be willing to allow others to guide and mentor us. This can at times be a sensitive issue. No one wants to point out another person's flaws, and we certainly don't want others pointing fingers at us. But as Christians, it is crucial that we help each other grow in a loving, respectful way. If one of our brothers or sisters is sinning and we don't do anything about it, there will be division among the believers. If we allow conflicts to divide us, we won't be able to complete the work Jesus has given us to do as His disciples.

So what do you do if you know someone has an issue that needs to be pointed out? Go directly to the words of Jesus: "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector" (Matthew 18:15-17, NIV). It is important to point out here that Jesus loved pagans and tax collectors, but He did not embrace their sins.

It's never easy to confront someone, but if it is done in a prayerful, loving, respectful way, it can help the person grow. Even if our initial instinct is to talk to our friends about the problem or to just bury it and hope it goes away, we have to remember that biblical council was given to us in order to help us grow as disciples.

- Have you ever had to witness a fight between friends or family members? How did it make you feel?
- How can we prevent hard feelings when we "rebuke" someone else's sin?
- How should we react if someone points out our sin?



dig deep

In the New Testament letters that Paul wrote to the early churches, we see several examples of conflict resolution that we can learn from. In 1 Corinthians, for example, Paul talks to the church about several issues, beginning with rumors that the church was divided and arguing among themselves. He tells them directly, “I appeal to you brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought” (1Corinthians 1:10, NIV). Paul wanted the new believers to respect and nurture one another as children of God. He encouraged them to resolve their disagreements and to be united. He often acknowledged his own defects of character and asked God to give him the strength to overcome and remove his own sins. In doing so, he led others by his own example.

We too can be examples to other believers. When we prayerfully assess our own character flaws and pray for God to help us remove them, we are giving a silent witness to those around us. Your friends, family, and co-workers will see the changes God makes in your life and they will long for the same peace. When we work with God to take care of ourselves and others and we strive to live a peaceful, balanced life, others will be drawn to our message.

- What are some examples of conflict in the Bible? How were they resolved?

prayer time

- In your prayer time, ask God to help you see your own defects of character and to remove them from your life.
- Pray for the members of your church community so they will be able to put aside hurt feelings and move forward in unity to spread the Gospel message.
- Ask God to help you build Christ-like relationships with others and to lead others to do the same.



disciples in action

- Journal some of the changes you would like to see in your own life. During your prayer time, ask God to help you with these issues. Document the results.
- Think of ways you can show your friends and family members that you cherish and respect them as children of God. Contact your accountability partner during the week to talk about your experiences.
- If you have had a past grievance with someone within the church, talk to your accountability partner about the best way to resolve the issue.

discuss

After reading the story of Nathan's rebuke in 2 Samuel 11, read Psalms 32 and 51 and Matthew 1:6.

- Discuss with your group David's repentance and forgiveness.
- Why do you think God sent Nathan to David?
- What might have happened if one of David's friends, brothers, or sons had confronted him with his sin?
- Why do you think God allowed David to live and continue ruling Israel?
- What does Matthew 1:6 tell us of God's forgiveness?

SESSION TEN

by Debbonnaire Kovacs

debriefing sessions 6 - 9



Debbonnaire Kovacs has been writing since she could hold a pencil, and sold her first story to Junior Guide when she was eleven years old. By her twenties, she recognized that writing and speaking were not just what she loved to do, but what God wanted her to do. She has written off and on for most of her life, but has been writing full time since 1990, having written fourteen books including the first, second, fifth, and sixth grade Bible textbooks used in Adventist schools in North America, and more than 150 stories and articles for all ages. She speaks at camp meetings, women's retreats, and other events, and also does copyediting. She urges everyone to take their dreams to God and see whether they are more than just dreams. They may be assignments from the King of Heaven.

You can reach her at debbonnaire@debbonnaire.com or on the Web at www.debbonnaire.com



debriefing sessions 6 - 9

Time: 90 minutes. *Try to spend approximately 15-20 minutes discussing each section below, leaving time for small group prayer and commitment at the end.*

Who am I?

Who are you?

Most importantly, who is God?

Everything, from life on earth, to our personal existence, to our daily dose of New Life starts and ends with the Creator God. Father, Son, and Spirit created us, redeemed us, and are working to rebuild us. We have one idea about ourselves and who we are. Our family has another, our friends still another, and our work or school associates yet another. But only God, who designed us, really *knows* who we are, and more than that, who we are meant to be.

In Sessions 6 - 9, we have explored the concepts of personal identity and self-esteem, God as source of all, and then how that understanding will impact our relationships inside and outside the body of Christ. We have recognized that if we truly find our identity in God, we will want that same peace and security for others, and will invest ourselves in helping others make that connection with God and their deepest, truest selves. We will seek daily to build strong relationships and to honestly and lovingly resolve conflict when it threatens to undermine either someone's self-image or the health of the group.

Here is an overview of the four big ideas we explored in sessions 6-9:

1. (A) True Identity is centered on God's point of view, not on that of human beings. (B) You are priceless because of the value God has placed on you.
2. The great Creator God had a purpose in creating this world, and He has a purpose for my life.
3. As Christians, we are not only committed to developing our own relationship with God, but also to helping train and mentor others in their faith.
4. Being part of the body of Christ means we must build and nurture relationships with other believers and work together in unity.

During Sessions 6a and 6b, we looked at what it means to have a self-identity that is founded in God rather than in others' or our own opinions.

- What are some of the ways you have identified yourself in the past? Have you had a problem with low or unrealistically high self-esteem? Did these lessons help? If so, how?
- What does it mean to you to center your identity in God's view of you? What do you think He thinks of you? If you are worried about God's opinion of you, for example, if you see Him as angry or vindictive because of your failings, how does this impact your self-identity?
- Did your group try the exercise of writing descriptions of yourself or others and then trying to guess who was being described? How did it work? Why were you able or not able to recognize someone from their description?
- What are five unique things about you that make you different from another child of God?

- How does your sense of being fallen and sinful affect your sense of self? Do you feel comfortable and secure in the knowledge and experience of God's forgiveness? If not, what can you do? What do you need from your friends and group?

In Session 7, we considered with awe and wonder the living Source of all that is.

- Have you always known God created you, or did you learn this recently? Share the differences among the group and what difference this has made in self-esteem issues.
- God not only created physical life, He has offered new spiritual life as well. What are three specific signs of new life you see in yourself? In the person sitting next to you?
- What are three things you love about your new life in Christ?
- How has He “come, seen, and conquered” in your own life? Share a story that illustrates this. Have you also shared this story with someone who is curious about God and Jesus and the spiritual life? How did he/she respond?
- What have you learned about God by looking at Jesus?
- Did you journal about things you'd like Him to conquer in your life? What has happened so far in that area? What praises and prayer requests do you have?
- Have you tried to increase your ability to reflect God in your daily life? What has changed?
- Did you experience the outpouring of God's love, and have you seen that overflow on to others? What has been the result?

In Session 8, we explored the Great Commission and how it relates to us. We learned that it covers more than just the standard definition of “witnessing,” it includes a life of unity and friendship in the body of Christ, the church.

- What are some methods of witnessing you have tried? Which ones did you like or not like, and why? Of those reasons, as you discuss with the group, try to decipher which reasons are simply because of different personality styles and gifts, and which might be actually more or less effective witnessing tools and methods. Do these things change over time and in different generations?
- The lesson spoke of ministering and being ministered to. Why are both necessary? What is the danger in seeing ourselves only as those who *give* God’s love and truth, rather than also as those who need it and can receive it in many different ways? Can you find examples of Jesus being ministered to?
- The lesson mentions an accountability partner several times. Do you have one? Have the two of you experimented with different ways of ministering and being ministered to?

In Session 9, we explored the thorny and difficult issues of building relationships and resolving conflict when those relationships falter.

- This lesson talked about developing relationships. This could take two forms: developing relationships within the church, centered around witnessing and mission, and building relationships outside the church, for the purpose of spreading God’s love. What are some of the differences, and why do you think this is important?
- What is the difference and interrelationship between witnessing and mentoring? Are both important? Why?

- Discuss the difference between the role of a prophet like Nathan or an apostle or church leader like Paul in confronting sin, and the role of a single person who needs to talk to a friend about something that's wrong. Do you think we are ever called to confront sin in another even if it has no immediate bearing on our own relationship?
- For example, if Shari has hurt Lisa's feelings, it is certainly up to Shari and Lisa to get together and try to heal this relationship. Lisa may have to go to Shari and prayerfully, tactfully tell her the truth: "When you said _____, I felt _____, because I thought _____." But if Shari sees that Lisa is going out with a man she thinks is an unhealthy influence on Lisa's life, then what are her responsibilities? What if they see someone in the church who is not a personal friend, but who is doing something that they see as hurtful to the congregation as a whole? Then what are their responsibilities?
- When was the last time someone pointed out a sin to you? What was your reaction? Why? What would you do differently? What do you wish the other person had done differently?

To sum up, answer this question:

What do you see as the single most important factor in building healthy, whole relationships, both with God and with each other?

encouraging youth to be disciples of Christ and mentors to others



Pastor Mark McCleary began his pastoral career in 1974 after receiving his Bachelor of Arts in theology and a minor in history from Oakwood University in Huntsville, Alabama. He earned his Master of Divinity degree in 1978 from Andrews University Theological Seminary and his Doctor of Ministry degree from Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1998. He is currently pursuing a doctorate in Conflict Analysis and Resolution from NOVA Southeastern University.

Dr. McCleary continued to gain experience in spiritual leadership through the years, beginning in 1974 as an associate evangelist in Kansas City, Missouri and Kansas City, Kansas. He now serves as the senior pastor of the First Seventh-day Adventist Church in Washington, D.C.

Dr. McCleary is affiliated with the Faith-Based Community Association Partnership (FBCAP) and the Metro Area Ministerium of Seventh-day Adventists. He has written several publications, “A Guide to Discovering Your Spiritual Gifts”, “Gospel Presentation,” “A Comprehensive Study Guide: Back to Basics,” and “A Study Guide and Workbook: Daniel and Revelation.” These are available online at <http://www.firstsdachurch.org/pastor/books.html>.

Pastor McCleary is the loving husband of Queenie and their union has been blessed with two sons, Brian and Michael, and a daughter, Michelle. Pastor McCleary says his sincere goal is to be a role model of Christian values in order to inspire positive lifestyle transformation in others.



DISCIPLESHIP—MENTORING FOR YOUTH

By Dr. Mark McCleary

objectives

- To encourage youth to be disciples of Christ and mentors to other youth
- To provide basic understanding of discipleship and mentoring as correlating endeavors
- To inspire youth to be productive stewards in view of social well-being and Kingdom building

big idea

As a youth, you are uniquely wired to reach other youth with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Scriptural Connection: Matthew 28:18-20; 1Timothy 4:12-16

the journey

The following guide has been produced primarily, but not exclusively, for youth and young adults. It comprises a format that focuses on discipleship and mentoring of young people on their journey toward an authentic relationship with Jesus.

I want to highlight the congruence between the concepts of discipleship and mentoring. Discipleship involves following a teacher as Peter, James, John, and the others followed Jesus. On the other hand, mentoring highlights the role of the teacher or coach toward his followers, such as a basketball coach to his players or someone with a particular expertise to his or her student/mentoree. Thus, this guide emphasizes the dual roles of following and leading—discipleship and mentoring—in the context of youth-to-youth interaction.

how can I benefit from a discipleship-mentoring experience?

- Start with family members (i.e., parents, guardians, siblings).
- Seek same-sex role models who have demonstrated their effectiveness in discipleship and/or mentoring.
- Practice discipleship and mentoring with youth who want your involvement.
- Learn what discipleship or mentoring ministries are available at your church.
- Research successful discipleship and mentoring programs.

what can I do to help someone begin the discipleship journey?

Why not use a functional tool like my *Gospel Presentation* guidebook? This booklet consists of twelve steps for leading someone to a conscious relationship with Jesus. This method is more directed and purposeful in its approach to making disciples of Jesus. Of course if another approach works better for you, feel free to use that method. But we must go beyond the notion and practice of merely leading an individual to complete a set of Bible lessons and pass an oral examination in order to be baptized and voted as a member of a congregation.

Rehearse the steps (on page 65 of the *Gospel Presentation* guidebook) and reflect on their key phrases and intent. They comprise a tool for helping you lead other unsaved youth to a relationship with Jesus Christ. Memorize these twelve guidelines, listen actively, and you will become a youth-fisher of men and catcher of born-again individuals, many of whom will be youth like yourself. Is not this the essence of discipleship? The fulfilling of Jesus' Great Commission in a one-to-one approach.

the youth-mentor

"Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country," stated the 35th President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, during his inauguration speech. He was challenging Americans to seek to work and live for the common good and not by an ethos of rugged individualism that espoused personal interest by any means necessary at the expense of others.

It might seem ironic to exhort youth to be mentors because often they need the same themselves as they mature into productive adulthood. Nevertheless, their personal need for mentoring does not negate the need for youth fulfilling the same for other youth. Someone said, "When you learn, teach," and "When you receive, give." Both statements are indicative of mentoring. In fact, the best mentors are those who learn and receive from others and in turn share their life lessons with their peers during informal and formal times of giving and teaching.

Gospel Presentation Steps:



1. Obtain permission to enter the other person's space.
2. "May I share something with you?"
3. If "Yes" to # 2, "Do you have the assurance of eternal life?" (1 John 5:11-13)
4. Check up question, "If God asked you, 'Why should I let you into heaven?' What would your response be?" (Ephesians 2:8,9; Romans 5:15-17)
5. "Why do you think it is a free gift?" Use an illustration of breaking the law (eg. traffic)—establish guilt.
6. Bible references for human guilt (1 John 3:4; Romans 3:23; 6:23)
7. "Could I/you pay our sin-guilt penalty?"
"Yes—consequences?" "No, Alternative?" (John 3:16)
8. Accepting Jesus' sacrifice pays our debt. It justifies us before the Father and reconciles our relationship with Him.
9. "We need more than Jesus' death" (Romans 5:10,19)
10. "Do you want to accept Jesus' provision for you receiving eternal life?" By faith and prayer of confession and acceptance.
11. "Welcome!" (John 1:12; 6:37)
12. Caution:
 - "Don't look to your goodness—legalism; Pharasism (Ephesians 2:9; Titus 3:5)
 - "Don't look to your badness—discouragement (Hebrews 12:2; 4:14-16)

(McCleary, 2006: 31, 32)

For information on getting a copy of the *Gospel Presentation* guidebook contact the author, Dr. Mark McCleary, at QMacbmm@aol.com.

how can a youth take advantage of mentoring opportunities?

- Begin by forming genuine friendships with other youth.
- Connect with another youth by suggesting and scheduling a Bible study session.
- Suggest and establish, with pastoral blessing, a youth prayer ministry (i.e., group meeting or prayer line).
- Start a youth book reading group.
- Coordinate a discipleship training ministry for youth to use *The Gospel Presentation* tool to lead other youth to a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

to the discipleship and/or mentoring leaders

It is likely your church does not have nor ever has had a ministry specifically focused on youth fulfilling the roles of discipleship and/or mentoring. Well, “To be or not to be, ah, that is the question,” according to Macbeth. In other words, dare to be a youth discipler or mentor like explorers Lewis and Clark, who blazed a trail to the Northwest United States; or Booker T. Washington, who walked 100’s of miles to attend Hampton University and eventually began Tuskegee University; or James Naismith, who invented the game of basketball at a youth recreation facility so boys and girls could develop their physical, mental, and social skills; or Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who invested all she had into His formative training so that He might “increase in wisdom and stature and in favor of God and man” (Luke 2:52). She disciplined and mentored Him so well, He one day commissioned His disciples and mentors to “Go into all the world and do likewise” (Matthew 28:19, 20).

practical ways to lead out in discipleship and/or mentorship training

1. Recruit youth disciples via public and private media.
 - Use church announcement periods, bulletins, bulletin boards, and flyers.
 - Use face-to-face, email, phone, or other electronic media.
2. Determine a meeting schedule that is best for the group of trainees.
 - Distribute, collect, analyze, and report the individual group member’s multiple meeting options.

- Use the same media options for recruiting and announcing the meeting schedule.
3. Maintain an updated roster of all disciplers and mentors (i.e., name, address, phone, email). Use this list for mass communication.
 4. Use this roster for your prayer list also. Without their personal information, share this list with your prayer ministry leaders and group for systematic intercession.
 5. Establish a meeting format—this can be at church, home, or other informal settings. Meetings should not last more than 45-60 minutes—one half for discipleship and the other half for mentoring. Leave about a third for actual practice, questions, and answers.
 6. Maintain summary records of meetings and activities to report to pastor, assigned or elder-sponsor, youth ministry, and church board and business meetings.

discippler/mentor connecting with disciple/mentoree

1. Invite disciple/mentoree to church or church-sponsored event with you (Hebrew 10:25).
2. Encourage disciple/mentoree to enroll in Sabbath school class or other church-sponsored youth activities that appeal to their interest (2 Timothy 2:15).
3. Delegate disciple/mentoree to proactive, hospitable, and Christ-centered individuals.
4. Encourage disciple/mentoree who would like to be baptized after completing the Gospel Presentation and/or Bible studies to respond to the appeal for baptism (Acts 2:41).
5. Offer to accompany disciples/mentorees who are ready for baptism as they make their public response to accept Jesus as Savior and join His church (Acts 2:47).
6. Encourage and offer to educate disciples/mentorees of the importance of continuing in prayer (1Thessalonians; Matthew 17:21).
7. Encourage the disciple/mentoree to practice the habit of reading God's word for knowledge and growth (2 Peter 3:18).

reflection

1. What do you think about yourself as a disciple and/or mentor?
2. What do you think others might say are the primary factors that make you suitable as a discipler and/or mentor?
3. What would others say are your major priorities that make you suitable or unsuitable as a disciple and/or mentor?
4. What do you think it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?
5. What do you think it means to be a mentor?
6. What factors might prevent you from being a good disciple and/or mentor?

application

As a growing young man in my neighborhood, I used to hear people say of a hot issue or during a confrontation, “Talk is cheap.” In other words, what we say needs to be backed up by what we do. Our actions need to be where our mouth is. Researchers make a distinction between one’s “espoused theory” and one’s “theory in use.” This analysis is similar to my previous two descriptions above. My point is that all that has been shared concerning discipleship and mentoring is espoused theory, profession, or talk unless you apply it, move beyond profession to action, and put it to use.

Ask God to help you and guide you to fulfill your call to discipleship and/or mentoring. The following are questions you might ask yourself to express such help and guidance:

- How can you change your schedule to ensure proper discipleship and/or mentorship training?
- What and who are positive influences in your life that are helping you develop into a productive disciple and/or mentor?
- What is the single most important factor for increasing your success as a disciple and/or mentor?
- How, when, and where is it best for focusing on God’s grace for electing and empowering you as a disciple and/or mentor?

personal prayer time

- Thank God for expressing His love to you by calling you to faithful stewardship as a disciple and/or mentor.
- Pray that God will give you discernment to avoid pitfalls and take advantage of opportunities to fulfill your discipleship and/or mentorship.
- Ask God to use you to effectively and positively reach other youth to His glory, for social edification, and the Devil's horrification.

REFERENCE:

McCleary, Mark (2006). *The Gospel Presentation: A Step-by-Step Guide on How to Lead Someone to Jesus*, Burtonsville, MD: McCleary Publishing.

THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The development of an effective curriculum is a multi-step, ongoing, and cyclical process. The process progresses from evaluating what we are doing now, to designing an improved program, to implementing a new program and back to evaluating the revised program. Your honest review and analysis of the information provided, its impact on lives (yours and others), as well as on people's perception of its strengths and weaknesses will help form the foundation of future curriculums and resources as we look forward to developing other curricula to assist in the discipleship process of our youth and young adults.

Please send your comments or concerns to dunchiem@gc.adventist.org or write to:

Youth Ministries Department
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists®
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904

APPLICATION FOR A MENTOR



Participant, if you would like to work with a mentor during the period of these discipleship sessions, please fill out this form and send it as an attachment to _____

(Name and phone number of facilitator/contact person)

Your Contact Information

Name	
Street Address 1	
Street Address 2	
City, State & Zip Code	
Preferred Phone	
E-Mail Address	

How can your mentor help you?

Please check any of the following topics that you would like your mentor to specifically address.

<input type="checkbox"/> To begin a relationship with Christ	<input type="checkbox"/> Managing my resources (stewardship)
<input type="checkbox"/> Healthful living	<input type="checkbox"/> Prayer (can be for yourself, family members, friends, etc.)
<input type="checkbox"/> Understanding the Bible	<input type="checkbox"/> Understanding my relationship with myself and others
<input type="checkbox"/> Time management (stewardship)	<input type="checkbox"/> Understanding my relationship with God
<input type="checkbox"/> Transforming my devotional life	<input type="checkbox"/> Developing positive relationships outside the church
<input type="checkbox"/> Leading others to Christ	<input type="checkbox"/> Embracing the mission to bring others to Christ

<input type="checkbox"/> Learning to trust God	<input type="checkbox"/> Recognizing the needs of the less fortunate
<input type="checkbox"/> Discipling others	<input type="checkbox"/> Committing to live by biblical standards of sexual morality
<input type="checkbox"/> Understanding biblical truths	<input type="checkbox"/> Understanding that God forgives sin and restores brokenness

What is your primary motivation for attending these discipleship sessions?

Please describe how a mentor could best assist you.

Do you have any special requests for a mentor?

How would you prefer to communicate with your mentor?

<input type="checkbox"/> Email	<input type="checkbox"/> Facebook
<input type="checkbox"/> Phone	<input type="checkbox"/> Skype
<input type="checkbox"/> IM	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

Commitment as a Mentee

Participants who wish to have a mentor are asked to carry on a regular conversation with the mentor. Mentees should try to respond to a mentor's emails at least once a week. This regular contact helps to build the relationship between the mentor and the participant. Persons in the mentor program should contact the session facilitator/coordinator or their pastor if they need assistance beyond the help of their mentor. If a participant no longer wishes to participate in the program, or does not feel their mentor is the right match, then the participant should contact the facilitator to make them aware of the situation.

Take an Inventory of your spiritual walk today. Here's how: Respond to the 20 statements below. Score your answers. Ask the Holy Spirit and Christian friends to guide you. Serve and equip others using the two processes you score higher in. Plan to grow in the two processes you score lower in.

How often is this true of you? Circle one number for each commitment.	Rarely /Never	Not Often	Quite Often	Regularly /Always	Write the number you circled in the white space.
I am developing a dynamic relationship with God.	1	2	3	4	
I am learning more about what it means to be a growing Christian.	1	2	3	4	
I am seeking opportunities in all my daily activities to minister to others.	1	2	3	4	
I am teaching others how to build Christ-like relationships.	1	2	3	4	
I am discovering who I am in relationship to Christ.	1	2	3	4	
I keep learning more about who God is.	1	2	3	4	
I am helping one or more friends to grow in their relationship with God.	1	2	3	4	
I am helping others to study and obey God's Word.	1	2	3	4	
I am developing Christ-centered family relationships.	1	2	3	4	
I keep learning more about the human fall from God's original plan	1	2	3	4	
I volunteer to serve in my community without reward, outside my family.	1	2	3	4	
I am showing others how to live as committed, healthy Christians.	1	2	3	4	
I am developing Christ-like relationships with church members.	1	2	3	4	
I keep learning more about God's grace and plan of salvation.	1	2	3	4	
I am supporting my church's ministries with my time and/or money.	1	2	3	4	
I am helping others discover where God is working in their lives and world.	1	2	3	4	
I am developing positive relationships with those who are not part of my church or family – at work, in my community.	1	2	3	4	
I keep learning more about how God has provided everything needed to restore me to His image.	1	2	3	4	
I am helping my church tell the story of Jesus e.g. friendship evangelism.	1	2	3	4	
I am teaching others how to use spiritual gifts in God's work.	1	2	3	4	
TOTALS	To score, total each column →				
Processes: C=Connecting; U=Understanding; M=Ministering; E=Equipping Learn more: growingfruitfuldisciples.org Full GDI: inventory.growingdisciples.info			C	U	M E

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