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In Step With Jesus is a series of four Bible study guides for new members of the Seventh-day Adventist family. It is prepared by the Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department, published by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, and printed by the Pacific Press® Publishing Association.

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST

New Members' Bible Study Guide

THE POWER OF LOVE: GROWING THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS

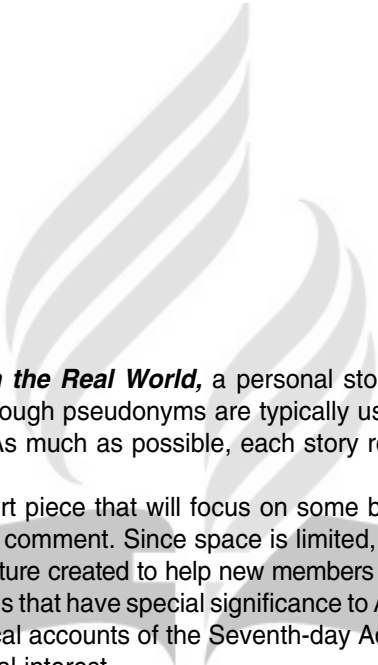
Some people are simply more likeable than others. Why is that? Is it their looks? Their personality? Their social status? Sociologists have been so interested in this question that they have undertaken research to find out. They discovered that the number one reason that one person will like another person is that the other person likes them. It's true. Love engenders love.

If we understood in a very real way that God loves us, how would we respond? Would we return His love? It's a vital question. When a lawyer came to Jesus and asked Him which command is the greatest, Jesus answered that it is to love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. He added that there is a second equal part: loving your neighbor as yourself. Everything Jesus commands of us, He supplies.

As we learn that God loves us with no strings attached, we will return that love to Him. Within the security of God's love, we are free to begin to understand who we are even with all of our sins and failures and to change through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Within the security of God's love, we are free to love others. In all these relationships, God is providing for our transformation into the persons He created us to be.

The lessons for this quarter are based on the Great Command (Matt. 22:37–39). In Lesson 1, we look at the life that God designed us to live. In Lessons 2 through 4, we learn the source of love and how to love God. In Lessons 5 through 9, we uncover the hidden part of the Great Command (“as we love ourselves”), consider how we define ourselves, how God identifies us, and how we grow in the church and by following the ways of Jesus. Lessons 10 through 13 explore the extent of the love that God expects of His people and how that love is expressed with different groups of people.



Walking With Jesus in the Real World, a personal story, will be found as part of Sunday's lesson. Although pseudonyms are typically used, all of the stories are from real experiences. As much as possible, each story relates to the topic of the lesson.

A Closer Look is a short piece that will focus on some biblical item that can use additional information or comment. Since space is limited, the focus will be brief.

Adventese is a short feature created to help new members understand the Adventist culture. It will define words that have special significance to Adventists. Occasionally, it also gives brief historical accounts of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and tells of current items of special interest.

Checking Up comes on Friday, after a week of study on a topic. This page continues the learning by using a quiz, a question, or an activity to relate the lesson to the student's personal experience, and an activity to extend knowledge.

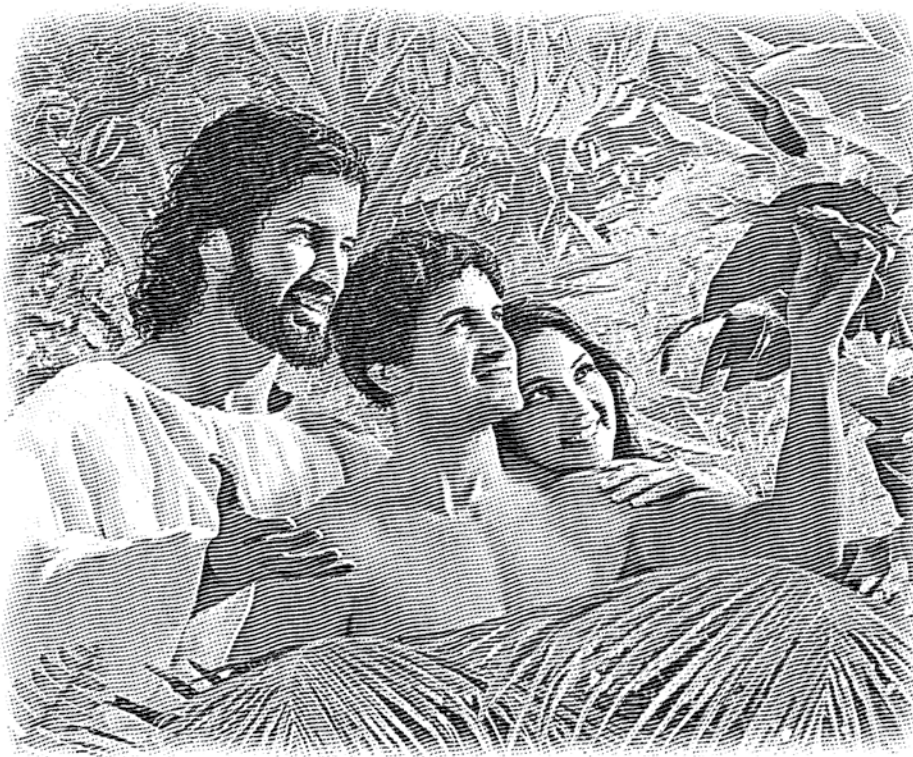
Consider This is a full-page column that is part of Friday's lesson. Usually, each week's "Consider This" piece will present nonbiblical information related to the week's topic. Information will come from the social sciences, history, and so on.

A valuable feature for both students and teachers is an online Web site, which offers a variety of resources. Because it is online, it can be updated and added to at any time.

As you faithfully study each week's lessons, may you catch a vision of what it means to follow Jesus and may you find joy on the journey.

THE LIFE YOU WERE MEANT TO LIVE

Key Texts: *Genesis 1:27, 28; 2:8, 9, 15–17; 3:1–13; Matthew 22:37–40; Luke 4:14–21; Philippians 2:5–7*



What kind of life did the Creator want for us?
In what ways do we want to change His plan?
What can we learn from Jesus about living life in a sinful world?
What kind of life—what purpose—does God have for me now?

This week's memory text: “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ ” (Matt. 22:37–39, NKJV).

Sunday

Several years ago a book titled *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be** focused on the “nature and dynamics of sin.” On the opening page, the author referred to Joseph Sittler’s observation on Psalm 23 that though we walk through the valley of death just once, we spend our whole lives in the valley of the *shadow* of death. If the lives we live now in fear of death and all its offspring is not the way it’s supposed to be, what did the Creator have in mind for us? And now that sin has entered, what kind of lives are we meant to live?

Walking With Jesus in the Real World

Step by Step

Debbie grew up in a conservative Christian home. She felt closed in by Christianity. By the end of her homeschool education, she was ready to experience more of the world.

Debbie left home to study for the veterinary technician program. At the university, however, she slowly let go of her conservative background. She met a career-minded young man named Brad. She was attracted to Brad because of his fun-loving personality and the good times that seemed to surround him. Oddly enough, he was attracted to her because, he says, “she had a purity of heart and mind.” She had been homeschooled and isolated from much of contemporary culture. When Brad asked her stepfather if he could marry her, the stepfather said that he wanted Debbie to marry someone of her own faith. “But,” he said, “if this is what she wants, I will give my blessing.”

Brad had become a nominal Christian through a campus group while a student at the university. “I felt closer to God, but I was not obedient to Him,” Brad said of his spiritual experience. “I would attend the Christian meetings, but lived like the world.”

After Brad and Debbie were married, he began to dig into things. Debbie told him that Saturday is the Sabbath. That shocked him. Other insights came as he observed her parents’ steadfast, simple lifestyle. As Brad began to know more, he saw the value in their practices.

“I saw that life is not just about doing what I want,” Brad says. “The longer I attended church, the more I saw how people cared for each other. I realized that life is not just about me.”

Brad became deeply attracted to the Bible and began to study it diligently. He even traveled to an Adventist college to study with instructors about certain topics of the faith.

“At first I thought Christianity was ‘stop doing this,’ and ‘don’t do that,’ ” Brad explained. “God reveals sin in my life and lets me know He wants me to change, but to do it through His grace. Eventually that message got to my heart.”

As a high school student, Brad had enjoyed making pottery, and now he sees that process as an analogy of what is happening in his life. “When I would start with a lump of clay on the potter’s wheel, it was totally out of shape. As the wheel turned, I had to press it and press it further until it was centered. So now when I see that my behavior is not bearing fruit, God keeps pressure on me. When I surrender to God, He molds me to be in harmony with His perfect will.”

Brad and Debbie have committed themselves to being faithful to God and His church. Step by step, life event by life event, the Holy Spirit is leading Brad and Debbie into the lives they were meant to live.

* Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 1.

THE ORIGINAL PLAN

Scientists are slowly discovering what it takes for human beings to be physically healthy, though they sometimes draw false conclusions from their research and have to change their advice. The same process is true for those who study mental and emotional health. Getting to the ultimate source of health and wholeness requires revelation, not science. We need to find out what the Creator had in mind when He created human beings and pronounced them “ ‘very good.’ ” We have an example of Jesus appealing to God’s original plan when He was discussing a current situation that was tainted by sin—marriage and divorce. Read Matthew 19:1–6 and the sources Jesus quoted from, Genesis 1:27; 2:24.

By quoting from God’s original plan, what do you suppose Jesus wanted to accomplish?

If we want to find out the kind of lives we were meant to live, we, too, should begin at Creation. With only a few brief but profound statements in the first chapters of Genesis to inform us, we will have to consider their far-reaching application. To begin with, we just read that human beings were created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27).

- What does that statement alone tell us about God’s intentions for us?
- What clues do we have about God’s plan to interact with us? (Read Gen. 2:2, 3; 3:8, 9.)
- What clues do we have about God’s plan for social relations among people? (Read Gen. 2:18.)
- What authority and work did God give to human beings? And how do that authority and work apply to people today? (Read Gen. 1:28; 2:8, 9, 15.)
- To sum it up, if someone were to ask you to explain God’s original plan for human beings, what would you tell them?

John Ortberg begins his book *The Life You’ve Always Wanted* describing how disappointed he is with himself. He’s disappointed that he is so ordinary, that he is not the best father he could be—or the best husband and neighbor, that he still loves God so little and sins so much. Reflecting on his disappointment, he writes, “Where does this disappointment come from? A common answer in our day is that it is a lack of self-esteem, a failure to accept oneself. That may be part of the answer, but it is not the whole of it, not by a long shot. The older and wiser answer is that the feeling of disappointment is not the problem, but a reflection of a deeper problem—my failure to *be* the person God had in mind when He created me. It is the ‘pearly ache’ in my heart to be at home with the Father.”*

* John Ortberg, *The Life You’ve Always Wanted* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1997), p. 15.

OUR SUBSTITUTE PLANS

God provided everything for Adam and Eve, our first parents. They had life without fear of sickness and death. They had a relationship with each other without selfishness or hatred. They had purpose in life and work to do without fear of failure. But all this perfection and joy came with one string attached: they had to acknowledge that they were created beings and that the Creator was their Sovereign Lord.

- What was the simple test to indicate that they were being submissive to the lordship of the Creator? (Read Gen. 2:8, 9, 15–17.)

The tragic story of the serpent's temptation and the fall of human beings is told in Genesis 3:1–7. Read these verses carefully. List all of the things that Eve hoped to gain by eating of the fruit. How many of these things appeal to you?

- Compare Eve's list of desires with the list of desires that Lucifer wanted when he rebelled against God in heaven (Isa. 14:12–15).
- Since God created human beings in the image of God, what is the problem with Eve wanting to "be like God, knowing good and evil"?

A CLOSER LOOK

Two Trees

In the middle of the Garden of Eden grew two special trees, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve's continued lives depended upon their eating of the fruit of the tree of life. God did not give human beings unconditional eternal life. After Adam and Eve sinned, they were banned from the Garden to avoid immortalizing evil (Gen. 3:22–24).

Because it was God's plan that human beings be persons with the freedom of choice to obey or disobey Him, God gave the simplest of tests: of all the trees in the Garden, don't eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But Adam and Eve doubted God. They interpreted the prohibition as denying them something good—the wisdom of God, happiness, and a higher state of being. Behind the simple eating of the fruit stood the sins of doubting and disobeying God.

THE LIFE JESUS LIVED

Adam and Eve wanted to change gods—to dethrone the Creator God and to crown “the sovereign self” as God. In the process, they lost everything, even their own lives. This same choice of whether to serve the Creator God or the self as God is one that every person makes on a daily basis. Because we live in a culture in which independence and the freedom “to pursue happiness” are core values, we would have no idea what kind of life is best for us without the example of Jesus. He modeled what it means to live a life of purpose and power while totally depending on God, His Father.

Instead of longing for more than He had, what did Jesus give up in order to save us and to show us how to live? (Read John 1:1, 14; Phil. 2:5–7.)

John, the writer of one of the Gospels, had much to say about the relationship between Jesus and His Father in heaven. What does each of the following texts tell us about this relationship and about Jesus’ dependence on His Father?

- About what Jesus does? About the Father-Son relationship? (Read John 5:19, 20.)
- About Jesus’ authority? (Read John 12:49, 50; in the NIV, if available.)
- About love and obedience? (Read John 15:9, 10.)
- About Jesus’ life work? (Read John 17:4.)
- About accepting suffering? (Read John 18:11.)

In what ways is your relationship with Jesus similar to Jesus’ relationship with His Father? In what ways is it different? Who is on the throne of your life—Jesus or self?

In what ways do the cultural values of independence and self-sufficiency undermine the kind of life that God intends for you or help you to live it?

ADVENTESE*

Adventist World Radio (AWR), founded in 1971, is the worldwide radio ministry of the Adventist Church. AWR’s mission is to broadcast the Adventist Hope in Christ to the hardest-to-reach people groups of the world in their own language. Using AM, FM, shortwave, satellite, podcasting, and the Internet, it broadcasts in 77 major language groups with a potential coverage of 80 percent of the world’s population.

Your Story Hour, founded in 1949 by Stanley Hill, is a global, interfaith radio program for children that presents dramatized Bible stories and character-building stories of historical figures. With regular radio stations and satellite broadcasts, the combined English, Spanish, and Russian programs can be heard on more than 3,000 stations. It is completely funded by private donations.

* “Adventese” is an invented word that means words or expressions with unique meanings in the Adventist community of believers.

Thursday

GOD'S PURPOSE FOR YOUR LIFE

The Gospel writers frequently recorded that the people were “astonished” or “amazed” at the teachings of Jesus. What He taught them was so different from what their religious leaders taught. The simplest stories He told carried profound meaning. The religious leaders and other well-educated people would sometimes challenge Him with a difficult question. To every question, He responded with an answer or comment that cut through surface matters and got to the real issue. On one occasion, an expert in the law “tested” Jesus with this question: Which is the greatest commandment in the Law? Read Jesus’ response in Matthew 22:37–40.

- How would you summarize this greatest commandment?

Jesus’ choice of “the greatest commandment” may not surprise you, but it would have astonished the people who heard Him say it. He did not choose one of the Ten Commandments. Instead, He combined two commands from different books in the Torah and said that on these two commands, the entire Old Testament is built (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18).

“Loving God” was central to the Jewish faith, but Jesus raised “loving others” to the same level. This new insight was shocking because it defined a new way of living.

In the Great Command, Jesus gives purpose to every life. How each person lives out the Great Command will differ from everyone else. On several occasions, Jesus talked about the purpose of His life.

In what way does His purpose demonstrate the Great Command? (Read Luke 4:14–21; John 12:27; 18:37.) When Jesus and the disciples were in the upper room, He again spoke about the Son of Man being glorified, referring to His imminent death (John 13:31, 32). On the same occasion, He repeats His command to His disciples.

- What is this command? (Read verses 34, 35.)
- If the disciples obey this command, what will it indicate?

“The glory of Jesus ([John] 13:31, 32) is His death, resurrection, and ascension (12:27–32, 38–40; 17:1–5). The mission of His life (glory) is His revelation of the loving character of God to His disciples (1:14–18). The disciples’ mission to the world, on the other hand, is not described in terms of glory; it is described in terms of love (13:34, 35).”*

The life God intends for you is to live out the Great Command.

ADVENTESE

The Voice of Prophecy, founded by H. M. S. Richards in 1929, is one of the longest running radio broadcasts in the world. Since 1942, it has offered free Bible study guides, some of which are now available in more than 40 languages.

* Jon Paulien, *The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier: John* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1995), p. 216.

CHECKING UP

Circle all the letters that apply to each question.

- When Christians want to learn about God's plans for them, why do they sometimes go to the opening chapters of Genesis?
 - Because Genesis is the first book in the Bible.
 - Because these chapters explain God's original plan for human beings.
 - Because Jesus sometimes quoted statements from these chapters to show what is best.
 - Because the story of Adam and Eve is so dramatic that people will remember it.
- For which of the following things did Jesus depend on His heavenly Father?
 - Love
 - What to say
 - What to suffer
 - His purpose in life

Extend Your Learning

When David wrote Psalm 8, he was recognizing the fact that the Creator God had given authority to human beings to rule over the things of nature. Read this beautiful psalm and consider carefully David's attitude toward God as he pondered what God had given. How does David's attitude speak to our present relationship with the earth? Note the first and last verse of this psalm.

Examine Your Own Experience

If the life Jesus wants you to live is based on loving God and loving others as you love yourself (or as Jesus loves you), how are you doing? Use this simple chart to reflect on where you need to grow in order to become more like Jesus. Place a ✓ under all the categories that apply for each type of love.

Type of Love	Need God's grace and power	Need help of others	I don't know
Loving God			
Loving Self			
Loving Family			
Loving Friends			
Loving Strangers			

More resources on this topic can be found at <http://InStepWithJesus.org/love>.

Consider This

Desiring Happiness

When church groups from “economically affluent” countries go to “developing” countries on short-term mission projects to help build a church or school or to do some other work, they often return saying, “The people have so little and yet they are so happy.” Even Westernized Christians cannot understand happiness apart from possessions or from having enough money to do whatever they want to do.

In the early 1990s, “sixteen of the world’s foremost photographers traveled to 30 nations around the globe to live for a week with families that are statistically average for that nation. At the end of each visit, photographer and family collaborated on a remarkable portrait of the family outside of their home, surrounded by all of their possessions—a few jars and jugs for some, an explosion of electronic gadgetry for others. . . . [This collection of photographs] illuminates the crucial question facing our species today: Can all 6 billion of us have all the things we want?”¹

And if we could, would these things bring us happiness?

Researchers have found that after basic needs are met, additional wealth and possessions add little to happiness. As people earn more money, their expectations and desires rise along with their salary. More money does not produce a permanent gain in happiness. People adapt to their circumstances. If a middle class family moves into a bigger, finer home, at first the newness brings them happiness. But soon they adapt or become adjusted to all the nicer features of the house and it simply becomes their home. In order to feel the same kind of happiness they experienced at first, they will need to keep adding something—maybe a deck or a luxurious bathroom for a master bedroom.

People who depend on material possessions for happiness cannot get off this treadmill. That is, they have to work hard just to maintain the same level of happiness.

Instead of possessions correlating with happiness, scholars agree that the quality of people’s relationships correlates strongly with their happiness. These relationships include one’s relationships with people and with God.

An important way to improve the quality of one’s relationship with God is to partner with Him in His great work of redeeming and restoring all that was lost when sin entered this world. Bruce Wilkinson says that everyone was born to be a living link between heaven and earth and to be sent by God on miracle missions.² He uses bold, dramatic language to make the point that God’s plan for our lives includes the privilege of extending God’s grace to other people. As we are close to God and open to doing His will, He will providentially bring us into contact with people whom we can help by means He provides. This relationship with God brings us into relationship with other people.

In Jesus’ last talk with His disciples before the Crucifixion, He urged them to abide in Him, to be as close to Him as the branch is to the vine. And then He immediately gave them the new command to love each other as He loved them. It is interesting that between His instructions for a continuing relationship with Himself and His instructions to love one another, He said, “ ‘These things I have spoken to you . . . that your joy may be full’ ” (John 15:11, NKJV).

¹ Peter Menzel, *Material World: A Global Family Portrait* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1994), from the cover blurb.

² Bruce Wilkinson, *You Were Born for This: 7 Keys to a Life of Predictable Miracles* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Multnomah Books, 2009).