

A hand in a dark sleeve reaches down from the top of the frame, while another hand reaches up from the water below. The background is a vast, calm body of water under a cloudy sky. The text "DECISIVE ENCOUNTERS" is centered in the middle of the image.

DECISIVE ENCOUNTERS

YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER / 2019

"IF WE BECOME NEW PERSONS IN CHRIST JESUS, WE WILL HAVE THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT IN OUR LIVES. THEY ARE 'LOVE, JOY, PEACE, PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GOODNESS, FAITHFULNESS, HUMILITY, AND SELF-CONTROL' (GALATIANS 5: 22, 23). FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST WILL NO LONGER ACT AS THEY DID BEFORE. THEY WILL FOLLOW BY FAITH IN CHRIST'S FOOTSTEPS. THEY WILL SHOW HIS CHARACTER AND BE PURE, JUST AS HE IS PURE."

Ellen G. White in *Steps to Christ*



INTRODUCTION



I was born and grew up in an Adventist home. My father was a pastor. Throughout the first 18 years of my life there were moments when I was unsure of what path to take; how difficult it is to make decisions in life sometimes! But there was this one instance that led me to make a radical decision. It helped me answer the key question: "What is my purpose in life?" Everything changed the day I had a personal and authentic encounter with Jesus.

It is hard to imagine something more extraordinary than personally encountering Jesus. To feel His presence in your life, to hear His voice, to be aware of and enjoy His unfailing love every second...

In his book *Encuentros Decisivos*, Roberto Badenas takes us on a journey to the past. He helps us visualize some of the encounters Jesus had with people of different social backgrounds who faced diverse challenges in their lives.

These encounters were decisive in the lives of those who listened to His voice and felt His touch. They realised that for Jesus the most important thing at that precise moment was to be with them. Jesus knew what each person needed. He knows what you and I need too.

I invite you to have an open mind and an open heart this week. Allow Jesus to come into your life. He is aware of what you need, He knows what you are going through, He understands your suffering and your challenges. Allow His healing touch, His words of peace and His love to work within you.

The goal of reading the Bible is to find Christ in each book, in each chapter, in each verse. In his gospel, John recounts an intense experience between Jesus and some Jewish leaders. The exchange occurred after He healed the lame man in Bethesda on Sabbath. Jesus is trying to explain that the end of delving into Scripture is to discover Him: "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me." (John 5: 39).

We don't read the Bible with the objective of gaining eternal life. Rather, we read it with the purpose of getting to know Jesus and enjoying His company and His love.

It is my desire that this youth week of prayer is special to you. May you have a decisive and personal encounter with Christ. May your life be transformed. May this encounter with Jesus be perpetuated in your life, day in and day out.

JONATÁN TEJEL

YOUTH MINISTRIES DIRECTOR
OF THE INTER-EUROPEAN DIVISION
OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST® CHURCH



CONTENTS

P. 10

DAY 1

THE INVITATION

JOHN 1: 43-51

P. 18

DAY 2

THE WEDDING

JOHN 2: 1-11

P. 26

DAY 3

THE EMBRACE

MARK 1: 40-45

P. 34

DAY 4

THE LOOK

JOHN 9

ABOUT THE AUTHOR / 07

HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE YWOP / 08

CREDITS / 79

P. 42



DAY 5

THE LIBERATION

LUKE 13: 10-17

P. 50



DAY 6

THE STORM

MATTHEW 14: 22-33

P. 58



DAY 7

THE TOMB

JOHN 11

P. 66



DAY 8

THE PROMISE

LUKE 23: 26-48

BE THE
SERMON

adopt ...

MATTHEW 25:40

MARCH 2019

16 | GLOBAL YOUTH DAY #GYD19
16-23 | WEEK OF PRAYER #WOP19

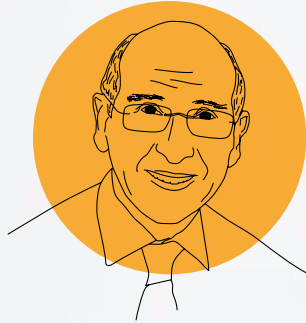
#GYD19



⁶
www.globalyouthday.org



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



ROBERTO BADENAS HOLDS A PHD IN THEOLOGY FROM ANDREWS UNIVERSITY (MICHIGAN, USA) AND HAS WORKED FOR MORE THAN 40 YEARS AS A PROFESSOR OF NEW TESTAMENT. HE HAS ALSO SERVED AS THE DIRECTOR OF THE EDUCATION AND FAMILY DEPARTMENTS OF THE FORMER EURO-AFRICAN DIVISION – CURRENTLY THE INTER-EUROPEAN DIVISION – OF THE SDA CHURCH, BASED IN BERN, BETWEEN 1999 AND 2010. THERE, HE ALSO LED THE BIBLICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE IN EUROPE.

He has three adult children and two grandchildren. He is currently retired, but continues to write, teach and give lectures at an international level. He is the author of the books *Meet Jesus*, *Memorable Encounters*, *Decisive Encounters*, *Knowing the Master in His Parables*, *Beyond the Law*, *Facing Suffering* and *El valor de los valores: importancia de su transmisión* [*The value of values: the importance of their transmission*], the latter, co-written with professor Raúl Posse.

HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE YWOP



TIP 1



PRAYER

This week is a week of prayer, so in addition to reading and talking about the text, spend some time alone in prayer. Establish a routine with God. Open up to Him like you would with a friend. Ask Him to make this week of prayer something significant in your life. Why don't you start a prayer journal as well? Then you will be able to look back and see how God has answered your prayers. You can search on Google for a zillion ideas on how to make your own prayer journal.

TIP 2



JOURNAL

Use a journal or notebook to write down the thoughts and ideas that come to you as you read or listen to the topic. You can also use it to write your own prayer requests or to thank God for what He does in your life. It is important that you open your heart to the influence of the Holy Spirit and that you write (or draw!) what He inspires.

TIP 3



QUESTIONS

At the end of each text we have included a few questions for reflection. They can be useful both individually and in a group setting. Make sure you ask God for wisdom and a clear mind as well as a sensitive heart so that you can truly make the most of them.

When you answer the questions in a group, remember to be respectful towards others. Help to establish a dialogue by having a positive attitude and the willingness to listen to other people's opinion without judging them.

TIP 4



PERSONAL CHALLENGE

We want the thoughts for each day to be more than just thoughts. That is why the personal challenge has the goal of helping you to implement and put into practice a key idea from the text. It won't always be easy, and you will have to be proactive, but only then will we be able to pass from idea to action.



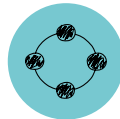
TIP 5



GO DEEPER

Perhaps you are left with a desire for more after you read the text. So, we have included a section with a few proposals for you to dig deeper in the topic. The suggestions include: reading some Bible verses or a chapter from a book as well as some thought-provoking quotes. The list is not meant to be exhaustive, so we encourage you to make it the beginning of something more. Talk and learn more about the topics that you are most interested in.

TIP 6



ACTIVITIES

We have included a few optional activities every day. These can be used in a group setting as icebreakers (and don't need to be limited to the week of prayer!). Make the most of them not only this week but also in youth activities, on field trips, or wherever you can! And adapt them as needed!

TIP 7



NOTES FOR LEADERS

If it is your responsibility to prepare the week of prayer, make sure you set aside enough time in advance to pray and to read the text thoroughly. Ask God to help you prepare each day, and always have your youth group in mind. He knows, better than anyone else, what we are going through, so lean on His presence and leading so that this week is a great impact for everyone involved.

Every day includes several sections (Bible text, Ellen G. White quote, main text, questions, personal challenge, go deeper and activities) to help you prepare. Choose the questions you want to answer in your group (they can be all or simply a few; you can also add your own questions, or ask the questions in a different order) as well as the activities that are useful to you (remember they are all optional).

The purpose of this week of prayer is to gather you around a story of the Bible, so that each person in the group has a special encounter with Jesus. So, make sure you plan the day as best as you can so that this goal is fulfilled.

DAY

1

THE INVITATION

KEY TEXT: JOHN 1: 43-51

"THE FOLLOWING DAY JESUS WANTED TO GO TO GALILEE, AND HE FOUND PHILIP AND SAID TO HIM, 'FOLLOW ME.' NOW PHILIP WAS FROM BETHSAIDA, THE CITY OF ANDREW AND PETER. PHILIP FOUND NATHANAEAL AND SAID TO HIM..."

John 1: 43-45 (NKJV)

THE TRAVELLERS ARRIVE AT BETHSAIDA WITH THE HOPE THAT THE MASTER—WHO IS ON HIS WAY TO GALILEE—WILL STAY AT LEAST ONE DAY TO INTRODUCE HIM TO THEIR PEOPLE.

The Galilean is an adventurous companion. A free spirit. His open approach to teaching contrasts with the ways of the teachers from his land. Every proposal seems to be a challenge, or an act of protest. To Him, freedom is not the possibility of doing whatever you please, but rather the opportunity of choosing the best option.

The Teacher aspires to change the world, transforming people one by one, as if He were trying to create a new human being. He's neither naive nor mad. He is as realistic as life itself. That's why He inspires his disciples with confidence and respect. He sees a difference between giving lectures and being a teacher. The doctors of the law from Israel want to teach, but with the Teacher, you always want to learn.

It's surprising that He accepts such unprepared followers. He transmits the thought that even the most uneducated can grasp his ideas. He distrusts the arrogant and snooty scholars, who are incapable of learning anything new. He reproaches them for having the key to open the door of the Kingdom of God, yet not knowing how to use it, nor letting anyone else.

He doesn't need a classroom for His lessons, nor does He need a temple to have an encounter with God. He teaches them anytime and anywhere; on the road, among palm and olive trees, in the mountains, and in such a way that they feel closer to heaven.

At home, Andrew and John feel the need to follow this exceptional Teacher day and night. His school is open to all. There are no classrooms or schedules and no other manual but revelation and

nature. There are no exams or tests other than those that our existence entails. There are no diplomas, because in the school of life you never graduate.

The enthusiasm of these disciples is such that they cannot stop sharing their discovery with their friends and families. Andrew transmits his joy to his brother Simon and introduces him to Jesus. They spread the word one to another. This is how Jesus finds Philip. Shortly after seeing him, with that look that goes beyond the eyes, He invites him, "Follow me!"

It seems Jesus does not see people the way they are, but the way they can be.

The new disciple, dazzled by Jesus, runs in search of his friend Nathaniel. He wants to share the joy of his find. Overwhelmed with excitement, he tells him the news:

"I think we have found the Messiah. He's like no other Rabbi." Philip summarizes his impression in one phrase: He must be the One sent by God, the One that the prophets promised. Even though the people know Him as "the Nazarene", because He is the son of Joseph, the carpenter of Nazareth, His name is Jesus, in other words, "saviour."

Nathaniel replies, with a mocking gesture of distrust:

"Another Messiah? Don't you think we have enough disappointments already? Can anything good come out of Nazareth? How can you believe in a Galilean "saviour"? Look in the Scriptures and you will find that no prophet has ever come from Galilee."

Nathaniel's prejudice hurts Philip, an idealistic and earnest Jew, but he refuses to argue with him, and resorts to an irrefutable argument:

“

The Teacher aspires to change the world, transforming people one by one, as if He were trying to create a new human being.”





“

My presence will put you in direct contact with heaven.”

“Come and see. Come out from under your fig tree and follow me. You yourself will be convinced.”

Nathaniel follows him unwillingly. When he finds himself before Jesus, his disappointment is evident. The bearings of the young Rabbi don't match his image of a Messiah. It is difficult for him to even see a teacher worthy of trust. He seems to be a poorly dressed and simple traveller.

Jesus observes Nathaniel as he draws closer reluctantly, half sceptical. He exudes self-sufficiency. With an intriguing smile, Jesus says to him,

“You don't even see me as a good Jew and yet I see you as a true and truthful Israelite.”

It's like saying, “I like your sincerity but don't trust appearances.”

Nathaniel exclaims, “Where do you know me from?”

“Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you,” he answers. He was praying; it is difficult to surprise a young person praying, they prefer to boast about being a sceptic...

Nathaniel flushes. He feels as if he can't hide anything from the penetrating look of the Teacher. He now suspects that his friend, Philip, is right. After observing Jesus and listening to His sharp declarations, something divine pushes him to confess, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (John 1: 49).

Jesus—happy—answers, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.”

And He said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.” (John 1:50-51) With this He was saying, “My presence will put you in direct contact with heaven.”

“The angels ascending and descending” remind us of Jacob's ladder in Bethel, when he fled from home, overwhelmed by his brother Esau's threats. To Jacob, Bethel was “the house of God and the gate of heaven.” To Nathaniel, it was the fig tree. To us, any place where we look for God is our Bethel: “the house of God and the gate of heaven.” Nathaniel could say, and we can too, “Jesus has seen me under the fig tree and He knows more about me than I know myself, more than what a psychoanalysis session could ever reveal.”

The fact is that the Teacher has the rare ability of seeing beyond appearances. He can detect the presence of the divine in the human and the heavenly in daily routine. With Him, we learn to see old things with new eyes and to stop looking at new things with the same old eyes. His capacity to love allows Him to glimpse radiant butterflies in the ugliest caterpillars and admirable saints in unworthy sinners. That's how it was with Nathaniel and that's how it can be with us.

There are teachers who teach by guiding their students like horses: step by step. Others teach by developing the good they see in their disciple. The new Teacher uses both methods: guiding His disciples step by step and motivating each one.

After encountering Jesus, these young people have a new perspective. They become great spokesmen of the unusual Teacher who transforms men and women into new individuals, full of incredible possibilities.

Many of us admire achievements and great characters. Many have dreams of greatness, but the majority of us end up “being just one of the rest of them”.

Economic hardships, ignorance, injustice, the difficulty of studying or finding a job, can all undermine the optimism and idealism of adolescence. Adulthood is complicated. Many give up, avoiding reality, to produce dull and conformist lives. Inertia forces us to just “keep going,” when many could reach excellence.

Jesus surpasses other teachers. He preaches a simple way of life, arouses elevated ideals and teaches a profound philosophy of our existence. His character radiates “a sense of power that was hidden, yet could not be wholly concealed.”¹ His enemies confess, “No man ever spoke like this Man!” (John 7:46). He asks them to “be perfect” (Matthew 5: 48), that is to say, to reach their full potential with the power of divine grace!

“

A good believer is someone who lives in communion with God and treats other people with the empathy and solidarity with which they would like to be treated.”





“

As the flower turns to the sun, that the bright beams may aid in perfecting its beauty and symmetry, so should we turn to the Sun of Righteousness, that heaven’s light may shine upon us, that our character may be developed into the likeness of Christ.”

E. G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 68.2.

The young Jesus who spent his youth as a carpenter building houses, and cultivating fields is **now determined to build a better world using new tools to cultivate fruits in our hearts, both for now and for eternity.**

He doesn’t like how the majority of His people live their spirituality. However, instead of abandoning them, He starts to build a community that He calls His “church”. He wants to teach them how to practice true religion: “to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” (James 1: 27). In other words, a good believer is someone who lives in communion with God and treats other people with the empathy and solidarity with which they themselves would like to be treated.

“Rabbi,” Nathaniel called Him, that is to say, my Teacher. Even though the *tephillim* or phylacteries don’t hang from His forehead or His left arm, His spirituality is authentic: **He teaches to think, to be, to live, and consequently, to live together, that is to say, He teaches to love.**¹ And He does it at the margin of the religious institutions of His time: the Temple and the Synagogue. He asks them to be reflective in their day to day, to discipline their minds and bodies, to take pleasure in their work, to show respect to everyone.

The Teacher knows how to fill with enthusiasm, correct with tactfulness and motivate. He does it with patience, firmness, and affection. Through stories, images and His example, He teaches how to understand Scripture, to see reality, to listen to nature, to not fear death, and to live one’s existence with dignity. To pray intelligently, to practice forgiveness. To suffer before making someone suffer. In other words, **to live positive lives, that transform their surroundings into a better world.**

The lives of John, Andrew, Simon, Philip, and Nathaniel will go on to reflect their Teacher’s. Their existence becomes exceptional simply by following Him. As they advance along that steep and thrilling road, they are led from the world of human mediocrity to the heights of the divine realm.

And they will follow His path so closely, that the members of their growing group will be known as “those of the Way”. //

1 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 137.4

2 cf. Enrique Rojas, *Vive tu vida [Live your life]*, Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 2013, p. 83.

 QUESTIONS

1. “To Him [Jesus], freedom is not the possibility of doing whatever you please, but rather the opportunity of choosing the best option.” Do you agree with this definition of freedom? Why?

2. Instead of dwelling on theological discussions, Philip invites Nathaniel to meet Jesus for himself (“Come and see”). From this text, what can we learn about how to share our faith and present Jesus to our friends and family members who do not know Him?

3. In Matthew 5: 48, Jesus calls us to be perfect. Badenas explains this calling as an invitation to everyone to “reach their full potential with the power of divine grace”. What does the mandate “be perfect” mean to you? How can we be “exceptional people” in this world? Give 1 or 2 examples.

4. “With the calling of John and Andrew and Simon, of Philip and Nathanael, began the foundation of the Christian church.” (E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 141.2). The word “church” (*ekklesia* in Greek) means assembly of people who have responded to an invitation (Matthew 16: 18). What is the church for you? What are or should be its characteristics?

5. Read James 1: 27. What does true religion (“pure and undefiled”) consist of? In what ways do you or can you put true religion into practice, both individually and as a church?



PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Badenas summarises Jesus' proposal as living "plainly positive lives, that turn their surroundings into a better world." Think about how you can use your words, your time, your talents, your music, your social media and even your sports skills to make this world a better place. Put your ideas into practice over the next 21 days (remember, a habit is gained in 21 days).



GO DEEPER

- › John 1: 43-51
- › 2 Corinthians 5: 17-21
- › Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, chapter 14 "We Have Found the Messias," pp. 132-143.
- › Roberto Badenas, *Decisive Encounters*, Madrid: Safeliz, 2018, chapter 2 "The Invitation."
- › The questions that have to do with Jesus: "Why does a believer believe his salvation is found in Christ?", as well as other equivalent questions: 'who do you say that I am?', can only be answered personally [...] because the question and answer are only possible if there has previously been a non-transferable experience: the experience of the encounter." (Martín Gelabert, *Salvación como humanización [Salvation as humanisation]*, Madrid: Ediciones Paulinas, 1985, p. 13).
- › "...the special truths for this time are found, not with the ecclesiastical authorities, but with men and women who are not too learned or too wise to believe the word of God." (E. G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 79.1).
- › iCOR: <https://icor.church>. iCOR is an instrument of the Seventh-day Adventist Church for value-oriented church development and growth. It is based on 10 values: connecting, caring, participating, worshipping, teaching, serving, reconciling, mentoring, training and leading.



ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1. KNOW YOURSELF

Materials: 1 sheet of paper per person, 1 pencil/pen per person

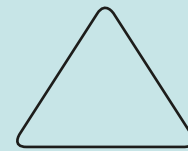
Activity Description:

- › Ask everyone to draw the outline of their hand on the paper.
- › Now ask everyone to draw—without looking at the palms of their hands—the lines of their hand from memory, trying to be as accurate as possible.

It is not easy to draw the lines of your hand from memory, right? Sometimes we pride ourselves on how we know ourselves better than anyone else, and how we know exactly what we need. Yet, we are not even capable of accurately drawing a part of our bodies that we see every day. However, God knows the number of our hairs (Luke 12: 7). He really knows us better than anyone. That is why the advice He gives us to be happy is perfectly tailored to our real needs. Now spend some time in prayer. Ask God to help you be sensitive to His advice.

ACTIVITY 2. THE PRIORITY PYRAMID

Materials: 1 pencil/pen per person, 1 diagram of a pyramid or a triangle per person



Activity Description:

A. Maslow was an American psychologist who developed a famous theory about human needs. A pyramid is often used to represent the five hierarchical levels of human needs. We are going to use this same hierarchical pyramid to reflect on **five needs the church** has nowadays.

- › Use the diagram to write—from bottom to top—the five elements that you feel are essential for the church to be healthy today.
- › Share your five elements with your group.

ACTIVITY 3. REACH YOUR POTENTIAL

Activity Description:

- › Make groups of two or three people of the same height.
- › We are going to do a jumping competition. Each person in each group must jump as high as possible.
- › After everyone has jumped, ask a member of the group to lift their arm up while the rest of the group jump again. The arm will serve as a reference to help them jump higher than before.

Application:

It is a lot easier to reach our potential when we have a clear reference. God helps us set goals in our lives that will keep us motivated and help us overcome our current situation. If we keep God as our reference, we will be able to grow and develop in ways that we cannot even imagine. Spend some time in prayer to thank God for the vision He has of you and your potential.

DAY

2

THE WEDDING

KEY TEXT: JOHN 2: 1-11

"ON THE THIRD DAY THERE WAS A WEDDING
IN CANA OF GALILEE, AND THE MOTHER OF JESUS
WAS THERE. NOW BOTH JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES
WERE INVITED TO THE WEDDING."

John 2: 1-2 (NKJV)

THE SMALL VILLAGE OF CANA IN GALILEE IS CELEBRATING A MARRIAGE. EXCITEMENT IS IN THE AIR. FOR THE COUPLE, THEIR RELATIVES, AND FRIENDS, IT IS A HUGE PARTY, ONE OF THE BIGGEST OCCASIONS OF THEIR LIVES. THEIR EUPHORIA PROMPTS THEM TO EVEN INVITE THOSE WHO ARE PASSING BY.

Among the guests are Mary, Jesus—still known as “the carpenter from Nazareth” or “the son of Mary”—and some of His disciples, who already call Him Rabbi.

The Teacher has come to bring “abundant life” and He feels happy at this party. If God’s dream is to make us eternally happy, He cannot help but want our happiness here and now.

The wedding ceremony is short and simple. The groom’s friends have erected a white chuppah, which the women have decorated with flowers. The bride sits on what represents a throne, to the right of the groom’s seat of honour. She waits clothed in her wedding dress, and wears shiny golden jewellery—either her own or borrowed. It’s just like the Psalm states, “at Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir.” (Psalm 45: 9).

When the groom arrives with his entourage, he lifts the maiden’s veil. He has hardly seen his bride since their betrothal. She walks around him seven times before sitting down on her seat of honour again.

It is now time for the *kiddushin*—the wedding ring ceremony—with the exchanging of vows and promises. The young people give and “devote” themselves to one another. In the expectant silence the groom, overwhelmed with emotion, tells his bride, “You devote yourself to me and I to you with this wedding ring according to

the law of Israel.” The bride replies, “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine.” (Song of Solomon 6: 3). Directly after, the groom signs the *ketubah*—or prenuptial agreement—where the couple’s responsibilities are listed. He reads it out loud and hands it to his bride for safekeeping. Now relaxed, the pair listen to the seven ritual blessings, spoken by their Rabbi or an old man from their families.

“Blessed be the One who created human beings in His image and likeness, and has provided for their procreation and happiness...

Blessed be the Creator of groom and bride,
of joy and party,
of merriment and rejoicing,
of pleasure and delight,
of love and brotherhood,
of peace and friendship...
Lord, allow this couple to be very happy,
like you made your creatures happy in the garden of Eden.”

“Come and see. Come out from under your fig tree and follow me. You yourself will be convinced.”

The blessings culminate in a final prayer, with everyone coming together, “Bless you, Adonai our God, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine. Because there is never enjoyment without wine...” The pair drink a sip of wine from the same clay cup. The groom then throws it on the floor and breaks it with a stomp, as a reminder of how fragile human joy is.

The ritual concludes with applause as everyone sings *Mazal tov* to wish the couple happiness. The musicians play the flute, tabors, and tambourines...

“

If God’s dream is to make us eternally happy, He cannot help but want our happiness here and now.”





“

[Jesus] found pleasure in scenes of innocent happiness, and by His presence sanctioned the social gathering. A Jewish marriage was an impressive occasion, and its joy was not displeasing to the Son of man. By attending this feast, Jesus honoured marriage as a divine institution.”

Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 151.1.

The bride and groom now turn their eyes on each other, nervous and impatient, because the time has come to be alone. They must withdraw without delay to their bedroom to consummate their marriage. The bride receives Rebecca’s blessing, chanted by the women:

“Our sister, may you become the mother of thousands of ten thousands; and may your descendants possess the gates of those who hate them.” (Genesis 24: 60).

The groom receives the blessing of men, “The Lord make the woman who is coming to your house like Rachel and Leah, the two who built the house of Israel; and may you prosper in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. May your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring which the Lord will give you from this young woman.” (Ruth 4: 11-12).

Everyone waits for the bedsheet to be shown as proof that the matrimony has been consummated, to avoid any objections. As soon as this is done, the party begins.

It is time for eating, drinking, talking, singing, dancing...

Then something strange happens. The servers get nervous. Mary, being close to the wedding couple, becomes aware of the looming drama. She approaches Jesus and tells him:

“They have no wine.”

Rural weddings usually take place in Autumn, after the harvest of the crops and the end of the grape harvest. Wine is abundant. The absence of wine signifies poverty or lack of provision. For it to run out is considered serious, because drinking is essential.

In the Bible, wine often represents joy. It is pleasure and life. If the wine was finished, the party was finished. It is a bad omen because the juice of the vine represents the blessing.

If the announcement is made: “The wine is finished!”, drama is served. A lack of wine is considered an unacceptable offense. Indeed, even though there is a shortage of wine, there will be no shortage of derision. The pair will blame one another and their respective parents. Joy will turn into bitterness, and the idyllic atmosphere will disappear. Thankfully the wedding in Cana did not end like this because someone remedied the grave situation.

This story is reproduced today in the lives of many couples. A man and a woman love each other and decide to start a life together. They expect to be happy. They express their love with attention, gestures of affection and gifts. Until, in a moment, something essential disappears. No one should forget the empty cup—fallen on the floor—that the husband broke with a stomp. Human provisions of happiness, like the wine reserves in Cana, are not inexhaustible.

In life there are moments in which “there is no more wine”. Health, work, money, patience, charm, the desire to stay together, vanish. Like in the wedding in Cana, first the good wine is served and then the worst or worse still, none. Enthusiasm and attention diminish and there comes a day when they run out. What started with love and kisses, ends with indifference, weariness and even a break up.

We can't live on our own reserves indefinitely. Our provisions of love and understanding are limited. The rations in our pantry run out if they are not replenished, as does affection if it is not renewed.

At the wedding in Cana, **three secrets** are revealed that served to overcome the couple's first problem. The three are still key today for the attainment of a happy home.

The first: the couple had **invited Jesus**. Having Him present makes the blessings that abound in Him possible. Only He who is Love is capable of creating love. When we make Him a permanent guest in our home, He is there to generate love and happiness even in the worst of circumstances.

Mary—who knows her Son well—formulates the second secret. Alarmed by the prospect of a failed party, she goes to Jesus for help, “They have no more wine,” and confidently tells the servers:

“Whatever He says to you, do it.” (John 2: 5).

This is a wise procedure for a serious situation. When we are willing to do whatever Jesus says, we are not far from the solution to our problems. John tells what happened, “Now there were six waterpots of stone,” (John 2: 6) each with the capacity to hold about 100 litres. They were the kind that were used by the Jews in their purification ceremonies.

Jesus told the servers:

“Fill the waterpots with water.”

They filled them to the brim.

“Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast,” Jesus told them. (John 2: 8).

“

To love is to desire to make the other happy.”





“
 Good relationships—whether of
 marriage or friendship—are built and
 strengthened by giving the best of
 yourself every day, in acts of service,
 when the other needs it.”

And that is what they did. The master of the feast tried the water turned into wine unaware of where it came from. So he called the husband aside and told him:

“Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.” (John 2: 10 NIV).

What a surprise for the young husband, who had no idea of the problem! What a surprise for those who had seen the miracle! What a surprise for His disciples! The first public action of their teacher, the first miracle, is to bless a couple and to do a great wonder on behalf of the family! When the party is about to end in disaster because of the lack of wine, Jesus provides a surplus of wine and the party is a success.

The third secret is revealed by the Teacher when He says:

“Serve right now.”

Jesus knows we need more love than we deserve. **If we want to make our loved ones happy, let us not wait until their expectation cups run empty and they grow thirsty. We must serve them immediately, without delay.**

When the crisis arrives we must not procrastinate, expecting the situation to fix itself. When something fails in your relationship with one of your beloved and no one does anything to fix it, attempt to resolve it yourself. **Good relationships—whether marriage or friendship—are built and strengthened by giving the best of yourself every day, in acts of service, when the other needs it.** To love is to desire to make the other happy. To wait is to run the risk that they will look to quench their thirst in other fountains. When your advice, a hug, a kiss or a gesture is needed, give it immediately; tomorrow may be too late.

Now that the party is over, the lesson the disciples learn is clear: when life gets difficult and the wine reserves are empty, God has the same power—wherever you are—that He had in Cana. He is capable of giving unimaginable solutions to human dead-end situations. When we start to see the bottom of our empty jars, He can refill them until they overflow. What would have been a bitter honeymoon, will turn into the first day of a new existence. //

 QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree with the statement: “The teacher has come to bring ‘abundant life’... If God’s dream is to make us eternally happy, He cannot help but want our happiness also here and now”? What does it mean in our daily lives that Jesus came to give us “abundant” life (John 10: 10)?

2. Are you surprised that Jesus’ first miracle was at the wedding in Cana? How do you picture it? What does this miracle say about Jesus and His interest in the common things of our daily lives?

3. Badenas draws three secrets from the miracle at the wedding in Cana for us to be successful in our relationships. Which are they? What do you think of these three secrets?

4. “To love is to desire to make the other happy.” How would you define what it is to love?

5. In every relationship, difficult moments arise, expectations are unfulfilled and hearts are broken. What steps can you make to take care of relationships and solve possible conflicts, both at a personal level and at church?



PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Think about your personal relationships: with your parents, your siblings, your love partner, your spouse and your friends. Do you have a conflict with anyone at this time? Have there been any misunderstandings or has the relationship simply grown cold?

If your answer is yes, wait no more: take the first step and dedicate this week to finding a solution. Remember Paul's words, "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men." (Romans 12: 18).

If your answer is no, think about what you can do this week as an act of service to show at least 2 people that they are important to you.



GO DEEPER

- › John 2: 1-11
- › 1 Corinthians 13
- › Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, chapter 15 "At the Marriage Feast," pp. 144-153.
- › Roberto Badenas, *Decisive Encounters*, Madrid: Safeliz, 2018, chap. 4 "The Wedding."
- › Someone who went through the tough experience of a break up wrote the following, "Oh, had I known that passion is nothing but a feeling, and that love is a decision! Had I known that what I expected to receive is what I should have given. Had I known that you only reap what you sow. Had I known that love, like a fragile plant, can die of thirst beside a fountain... Had I known that the longest distance in the world between two people can be found within the same bed. Had I known that passion is fickle whilst love is strong and patient, capable of blooming endlessly as long as it is watered and nurtured. Oh, had I known...!"
- › "At the touch of love everyone becomes a poet." (Plato).



ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1. THE FIRST STEP

Materials: 2 old newspapers

Activity Description:

- › Make two groups and give 1 newspaper to each group.
- › We will do a short race (10 m long). Participants can only move forward by stepping on newspaper pages. The team that reaches the goal the quickest is the winner.

Application:

Coping with life can sometimes be as complicated as trying to move on newspapers. In fact, personal relationships can be as fragile as the sheets we have just spread out on the floor.

God knows how important people are for us in our lives. He recommends that we help our friends and family members (Proverbs 17: 17), and that we treat them with care because of their inherent value as unique human beings.

Think of a situation in which someone treated you kindly and take some time to thank God for that moment.

ACTIVITY 2. A SPECIAL GIFT

Materials: 1 pencil and 1 sheet of paper per person

Activity Description:

There is nothing more special than telling the people close to us how much we care about them. So, in this activity, each person of the group must write their name on a sheet of paper. Then hand over your sheet to the rest of the people in the group. Each person must write a positive message about you on your sheet of paper.

Write down positive aspects or values, for example, "Mary, I admire your fortitude when facing difficult situations."

The message should be concrete, specific and tailor-made for the person you are writing it to; generic messages should be avoided.

Application:

The next time you don't feel good about yourself, or you have a problem, or you are going through a difficult time, take your sheet of paper to remember all the great qualities you have. Thank God for these positive qualities in you.

DAY

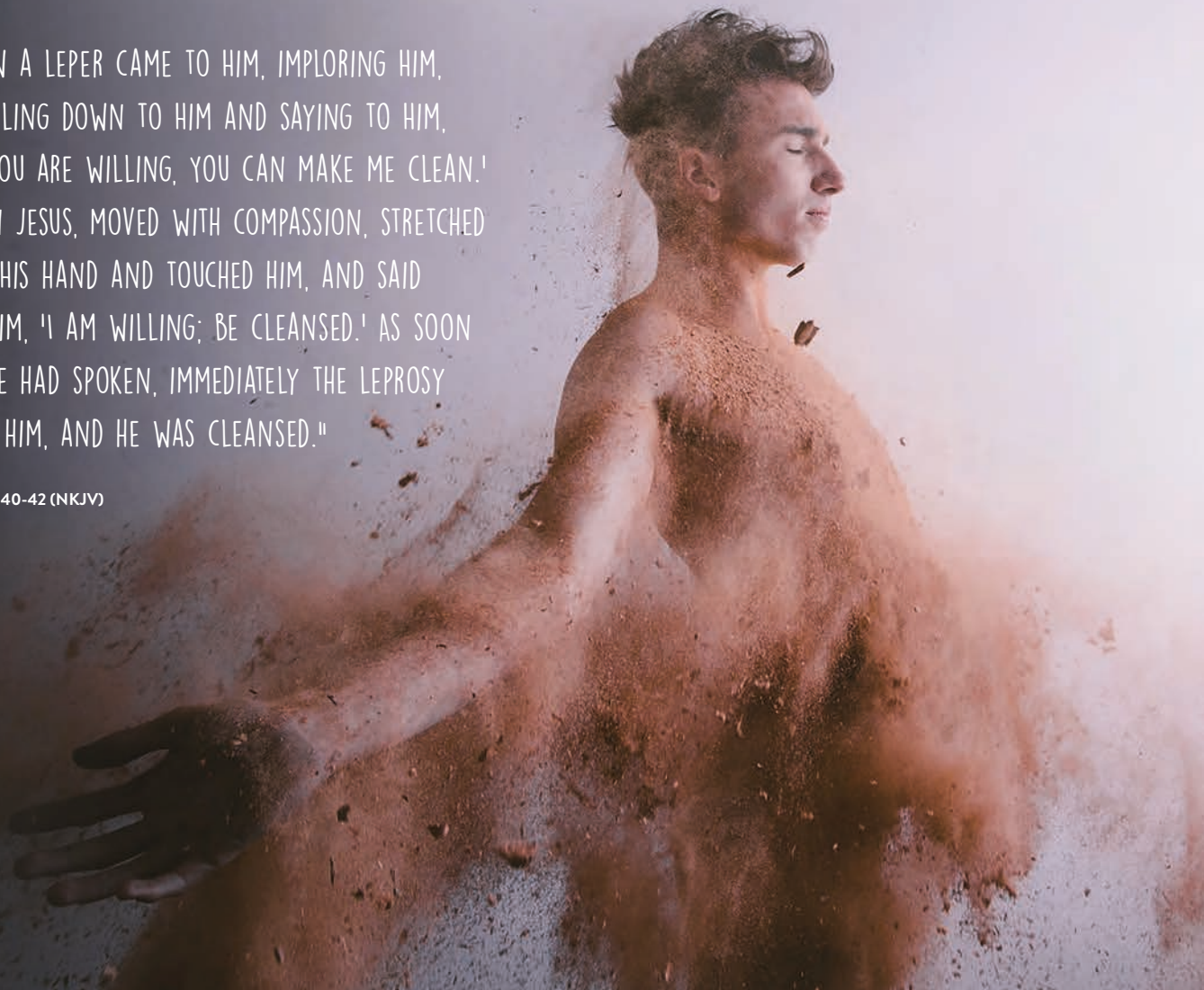
3

THE EMBRACE

KEY TEXT: MARK 1: 40-45

"NOW A LEPER CAME TO HIM, IMPLOING HIM, KNEELING DOWN TO HIM AND SAYING TO HIM, 'IF YOU ARE WILLING, YOU CAN MAKE ME CLEAN.' THEN JESUS, MOVED WITH COMPASSION, STRETCHED OUT HIS HAND AND TOUCHED HIM, AND SAID TO HIM, 'I AM WILLING; BE CLEANSED.' AS SOON AS HE HAD SPOKEN, IMMEDIATELY THE LEPROSY LEFT HIM, AND HE WAS CLEANSED."

Mark 1: 40-42 (NKJV)



HE IS CONSIDERED BY ALL TO BE THE EMBODIMENT OF DEATH, AND YET, HE REFUSES TO LOSE SIGHT OF HOPE. NO OTHER SICKNESS REDUCES A HUMAN TO SO MANY YEARS OF SUCH REPULSIVE MISERY.¹

The priest's verdict had been unappealable: "Leper!" And that was not all. Forced to abandon his life, he had been forever banned from his home, his family and his people. He was condemned to walk through the "cemetery of the lepers..." It was the same in the Middle Ages. The priest—dressed in his clerical habit, crucifix in hand—led the leper to the church and performed a funeral ceremony. From that moment on, he was considered dead. He had to wear a black cloak and live in a lazar house.²

Leprosy incited terror. Depending on the type of leprosy, ulcers would eat away at your hands and feet, which would eventually fall off. It was a gradual death of the body. The leper became repugnant to others and to himself.

He must now learn to accept—although he cannot quite grasp why—that what covers his skin is in fact a curse, one that is a mystery to him. It is a curse that, until this day, had gone unsuspected by others. Now, however, all claim to see it so clearly. This verdict marked a turning point in his life. It became the beginning of another life in which he stopped being himself to become a leper. Those who encounter him hide their faces, even fleeing from his shadow.

Against all odds, the leper of the gospel breaks away from the "world of the dead" to find release—even if only for a few hours—by peeking into the world of the living, hoping for the miracle.

That feeling of suddenly becoming a menacing danger hurts more than his new condition as a leper, which in reality inflicts him no pain. He suffers because he feels expelled from his world, never again to return. The horrible death that awaits him is less fright-

“

Every act of Christ's ministry was far-reaching in its purpose. It comprehended more than appeared in the act itself. So in the case of the leper. While Jesus ministered to all who came unto Him, He yearned to bless those who came not.”

Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 265.





“

It looks like He [Jesus] wishes to get close to those considered to be the farthest from God: the broken, the outcast, the abandoned, the cursed.”

His world, his face, his body has changed. Deprived of all that was his, the deepest part of him refuses to let go of his dreams. He is reticent to imagine what his life could have been like but...

In the painful solitude of his inner being, he cannot give up the hope of becoming whom he once was, of being accepted again. He longs for the day when he can embrace those who said good-bye to him without daring to touch him. Since then, he lurks in the shadows once in a while recognising some of his own by the road. When this happens, he covers his face to avoid being spotted.

When someone gets close, the shouts of “Unclean! Unclean!” break the silence. At times, travellers toss an obolus, a loaf of hard bread, or the leftovers the dogs have disregarded, from their carts. The lepers then throw themselves onto the ground and, if they manage to get any food, they lift their hands up to the sky, saying blessings for the gift. If any leper gets too close to the horsemen or the carts, they are greeted by whips that hit their backs and hands.

The harvest is almost ready. As he hides among the ears of corn to avoid being seen, a flock of sparrows takes flight. He easily recognises them, for they are the birds needed for the cleansing ceremony of lepers. The path that winds to the leper house leads away from the roads busy with people and animals. The leper slowly makes his way. He has lost several toes already, and he cannot even feel those he has left.

He has been on the lookout for the Master for some time now. He has heard about His miracles. Today—finally—he recognises Him and decides to approach Him.

ening than the outcast life he is already leading. He is no longer a “person” to anyone, he is a leper. However, his memory still clings to the places from which he was banished and to the people he still loves. They still live with him in the memories of a past reality, a reality which seems unbelievable now.

The torment of seeing his body falling to pieces is accompanied by the suffering of wondering, “What offence am I paying for? What have I done to deserve this? How is it possible that Heaven would send me something like this?” Social and emotional rejection are accompanied by spiritual marginalisation. He believes he is cursed by God.

The leper knows that Jesus wanted to purify the temple of unworthy merchants, but he never heard it said that He could purify the ways of the lepers. However, it looks like He wishes to get close to those considered to be the farthest from God: the broken, the outcast, the abandoned, the cursed. The lost inspire in Him the most precious tenderness; people who do not fulfil the rules of purity, whether guilty or not.

The Master moves forward, leaving looks of terror behind. He is determined to meet the leper, as if He were aware of his inner wishes. Jesus knows love is the means to approach others fearlessly, both the heart of the most miserable, and the heart of God.

The leper does not hesitate. In the gaze of the Master he finds a magnet that pulls him in. He walks toward Jesus, falls on his knees and tells Him, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." (Mark 1: 40).

The Master then continues towards him and... touches him, or rather embraces him. **He touches the untouchable without the slightest trace of fear.** The embrace comes before healing, to a body full of ulcers, mutilated and repulsive. Had He healed him at a distance, He would have reinforced the idea of revulsion the leper is tired of seeing in the faces of people.

The Master knows the laws; if He touches a leper He becomes unclean. **But Jesus is not only unafraid of the risk or the rules; He knows this man needs both the healing and the embrace of God.** We need to feel accepted, cherished, loved, and even embraced. It is very difficult to develop a balanced and solid personality if you don't have enough self-esteem; this is only effectively communicated through physical contact.

Once he is healed, Jesus sends him to comply with the legal requirements for his cleansing. He urges him to present himself before the priest in the temple, before word gets out that a leper has been cured by Jesus. Thus, unprejudiced, the authorities will limit themselves to give him his healing certificate, and he will be accepted again by his family and community.

“

It is very difficult to develop a balanced and solid personality if you don't have enough self-esteem; this is only effectively communicated through physical contact.”



“

With His example, Jesus teaches to give our all, not our leftovers. To fight for justice, not be content with a bit of charity. To dignify and reintegrate the marginalised.”

The Master warns him not to say He has healed him, but that is impossible. It is like asking the sun to stop shining.

The ex-leper runs towards the temple to get the coveted document. He threads his way around the slaves pulling loaded donkeys and the loud prostitutes next to the Roman soldiers' barracks. Finally, he reaches the atrium where he will buy his offering in the corner of the birds, the ones set aside for the sacrifices made for women who have given birth, or as offerings for cured lepers...

Having presented the necessary offering, the leper is admitted once again into the world of the healthy.

Pressing his cleansing certificate firmly against his chest, he runs home to embrace his wife, his children, his parents, his brothers. To resume his life where the injustices of the world had cut it short. At last he is himself once again. **Touched by grace, he is aware that he is someone new, someone with even greater freedom than before,** because God wants him to be free just like the birds that flutter over the fields.

But now it is Jesus who must remain in quarantine. His encounter with the leper has taken place in a public place, and many witnesses have seen Him hug the leper. As a result, the Master must stay away from the cities, for forty days, just like those suspected of leprosy. With His example, Jesus teaches to give our all, not our leftovers. To fight for justice, not be content with a bit of charity. To dignify and reintegrate the marginalised. Jesus came to this world to heal and to save, even though no one—not even His disciples—understands the strange reason behind His generous embrace to a repulsive leper. //

1 E. W. G. Masterman, quoted in William Barclay, *The New Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark*, Edinburgh: Saint Andrews Press, 2001, p. 48.

2 See William Barclay, *The New Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark*, Edinburgh: Saint Andrews Press, 2001, pp. 50-51.

 QUESTIONS

1. What attitudes can result in people around you feeling left out and ignored, like the leper? How can you avoid these attitudes?

2. What can we learn from the leper's experience about the grace of God? How does Jesus approach the leper?

3. How can we—as a church and as individuals—make others feel “accepted, cherished, loved, and even embraced”? Put some of the proposals into practice in the next couple of weeks.

4. Why do you think Jesus asked the leper to keep quiet? What can we learn from the leper's inability to do so?

5. “Jesus... must remain in quarantine... many witnesses have seen Him embrace the leper. As a result, the Master must stay away from the cities, for forty days, just like those suspected of leprosy.” What is the effect on you of seeing Jesus giving His all for us? How does His example inspire you?

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Think of someone around you who may feel out of place, outcast, rejected or simply lonely. Write them a positive message this week, pray for them and invite them to do a special activity with you or your group of friends.

GO DEEPER

- › Matthew 8:2-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-28.
- › E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, chapter 27 “Thou Canst Make Me Clean,” pp. 262-271.
- › Roberto Badenas, *Decisive Encounters*, Madrid: Safeliz, 2018, chap. 7 “The Embrace.”
- › Leprosy was the most feared sickness at the time. See the measures to be taken against leprosy in Leviticus 13: 1-3, 45-46.
- › William Barclay, *The New Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark*, Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2001, pp. 48-52.



ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1. THE EPIDEMIC

Materials: clothes pegs (3-5 per person)

Activity Description:

- › At the beginning of the activity, everyone should have 3-5 clothes pegs hanging from their clothes.
- › The clothes pegs represent an infectious disease. The goal of this activity is to rid yourself of the disease in about 5 minutes by getting rid of all the clothes pegs hanging from your clothes. In order to do this, you must hang your clothes pegs on other people and avoid other people putting theirs on you.

Application:

What did you learn in this activity? Did anyone manage to be “healed”? How did the “healed” treat the “infected”? When someone has an infectious disease, the instinctive reaction is to avoid them at all costs. Touching them is simply out of the question, like what happened with the leper.

The truth is that in this world we have all been infected by sin. We cannot try to pass on our “sickness” to those around us to get rid of it. The only final solution to our problem is found in Jesus’ healing touch. We become a new person in Him (2 Corinthians 5: 17).

Spend time in prayer. Ask Jesus to touch your life with healing, so that egotism turns into generosity, pride into humbleness, resentment into kindness, indifference into love...

ACTIVITY 2. FIND 7 THINGS IN COMMON

Materials: 1 sheet of paper per group, 1 pencil/pen per group

Activity Description:

- › Divide into groups of 5-6 people each.
- › In each group, find 7 things that you all share in common (besides the obvious, e.g., that you are all human).

Application:

Reflect on how we have more things in common than may appear at first sight.

When we manage to find points in common with other people, it becomes easier to build bridges of relationships instead of building walls of separation. God invites us to reconciliation at all levels, both with Him and with the rest of the people (2 Corinthians 5: 18-19).

Now apply this principle to people you may treat as outcasts, like the leper. What practical things can you do to approach everyone equally?

DAY

4

THE LOOK

KEY TEXT: JOHN 9

"NOW AS JESUS PASSED BY, HE SAW A MAN WHO WAS BLIND FROM BIRTH. AND HIS DISCIPLES ASKED HIM, SAYING, 'RABBI, WHO SINNED, THIS MAN OR HIS PARENTS, THAT HE WAS BORN BLIND?' JESUS ANSWERED, 'NEITHER THIS MAN NOR HIS PARENTS SINNED, BUT THAT THE WORKS OF GOD SHOULD BE REVEALED IN HIM...!' WHEN HE HAD SAID THESE THINGS, HE SPAT ON THE GROUND AND MADE CLAY WITH THE SALIVA; AND HE ANOINTED THE EYES OF THE BLIND MAN WITH THE CLAY. AND HE SAID TO HIM, 'GO, WASH IN THE POOL OF SILOAM'.... SO HE WENT AND WASHED, AND CAME BACK SEEING... NOW IT WAS A SABBATH WHEN JESUS MADE THE CLAY AND OPENED HIS EYES... 'WHETHER HE IS A SINNER OR NOT I DO NOT KNOW. ONE THING I KNOW: THAT THOUGH I WAS BLIND, NOW I SEE...'"

John 9: 1-3, 6-7, 14, 25 (NKJV)

“

What is important is that the works of God benefit the one who suffers... The works that God expects from us are to help, to encourage, and to heal.”



A YOUNG MAN BLIND FROM BIRTH BEGS FOR MONEY NEAR THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM. JESUS HALTS AND COMPASSIONATELY GAZES INTO THE EYES OF THE UNFORTUNATE MAN.

The disciples seize the moment to ask something that is troubling their young minds: what is the link between suffering and personal responsibility?

“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9: 2).

Besides the misfortune of being blind, he suffers the accusation that he or his parents are to blame. He is painfully aware that his blindness sparks condemnation rather than compassion.

Short on sensitivity, the disciples wish to satisfy their curiosity whilst ignoring the poor blind man. Both parties live their lives locked within a religious and righteous framework. In the spiritual atmosphere in which they have grown up, every misfortune has a justified cause and a guilty party: sickness, malformations, drought... They have learned that “justice must be served” by finding the culprits. They forget that “the blame” usually falls on several circumstances.

The disciples are familiar with the explanations of the Rabbis and so is the blind man.

Drawing on the idea that God visits “the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations” (Exodus 20: 5), they have always heard that children suffer because of the sins of their parents and that even the thoughts of the pregnant mother leave an imprint on the natural morals of the child.

The Pharisees were familiar with sexually transmitted diseases. The young man could have been born blind because of his parents. The Sadducees, with a determinist vision of omniscience and divine justice, consider that a child can be born blind as a punishment for the sins he will commit in his adult life. With the conviction that there is no other life but this one, they deduce that if God is infinitely just, wise and powerful, He must punish sins even before they are committed. The disciples wish to know what Jesus makes of this.

Jesus does not share the beliefs of the Pharisees and the Sadducees and He answers His disciples:

“Neither this boy nor his parents are to blame for his blindness.”

What is important is that the works of God benefit the one who suffers. Jesus knows the Scriptures better than anyone, and He knows that before God, “the son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son.” (Ezekiel 18: 20). He knows that in this world errors have fatal consequences and that we fall victim to evils that we are not guilty of. The Teacher declares:

“I must work the works of Him who sent Me” (John 9: 4).

The works that God expects from us are to help, to encourage, and to heal. In short, to do good. Jesus is less interested in providing a theoretical clarification, than in giving a practical lesson. Attending to misfortune is more urgent and useful than finding out who is to blame for the blindness. It is better to ask what we can do to alleviate pain than to ask ourselves why it happened.

“Additionally, we must hurry while the day lasts; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. And you all must also be the light.” (John 9: 4).

The Teacher understands that neither the sins of this man nor the sins of his parents are the cause of his blindness. In this world we suffer from inherited deficiencies, diseases, and other causes. Some are born blind, others dead, and amid the healthy, we all get sick and end up dying. A few benefit from excellent faculties, and others destroy themselves as a result of their own stupidity or as victims of others' mistakes. All this evil emerges from the abandonment of God's plan. The mission of Jesus consists in integrating human beings into the divine orbit. Evil and its origin have no explanation at a human level because they have cosmic dimensions that only God can explain.

By saying that neither the boy nor his parents are responsible for his blindness, the Teacher implies to His disciples that discovering the cause of our problems can be very useful in many occasions, but in others it is not a priority. Knowing the causes of the misfortune does not relieve grief.

Jesus does not wait for the beggar to ask Him for anything. He acts on His own initiative to work in his favour. Perhaps because of that—in contrast with what He does in other healings—the Teacher mobilizes a series of non-miraculous human resources to help him recover his vision. He spits on the ground, makes clay with his saliva, covers the eyes of the blind man with it, and tells him to go wash himself in the pool of Siloam. The method seems repulsive and unhygienic. However, in antiquity, saliva was believed to have healing properties, especially if it came from an important person. Pliny¹ dedicated a chapter to lay out the healing properties of saliva. It was used against a serpent's venom, epilepsy and leprosy.²

“

The mission of Jesus consists in integrating human beings into the divine orbit. Evil and its origin have no explanation at a human level because they have cosmic dimensions that only God can explain.”

Tacitus tells that when Vespasian visited Alexandria, a man with an eye disease asked him if he could moisten the affected parts with saliva.³ Jesus utilized the method not because He believed in it, but to test the young man's disposition. The tale concludes with the blind man going, cleaning himself, and returning with a restored eyesight. Jesus emphasizes that the young man did everything that was asked of him.

The religion that Jesus teaches is situated amid reality and mystery; while at the same time including both: “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us,” (Deuteronomy 29: 29), and that is enough for us. When dealing with the questions of “theology-fiction” brought up by His disciples, the Teacher responded, “Do not try to grasp what is beyond your reach, because if God has not revealed it, you need not know. **Look at those who you believe to be cursed with different eyes.** There are things that you will never know. Do what God asks of you, and with this you have enough to fill your life with purpose and meaning. Right now, take care of the blind man.”



“

Christ wept at the sight of woe.
Let His tenderness come into your
hearts. Practice self-denial that
you may have wherewith to relieve
the sufferings of God’s children.”

Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling*, p. 198.3.

Jesus has not answered the disciples’ question the way they expected Him to. He knows they need a response to the problem of suffering but He teaches them that the way to confront evil is not by discerning between guilt and innocence. **Human suffering does not find its origin in God. He does not desire human misfortune: suffering, sickness or death. On the contrary, God comes to us to offer salvation and eternal life through His grace.**

A heavy silence envelops the group as they exchange looks. The disciples, astonished, contemplate the one who was blind; Jesus considers what else He can do for their good. The young man looks to the sky, fascinated, dazzled by the light. The grim look on some faces reveals their conviction that the healing does not proceed from God. Those who recognize the man examine him, both sceptical and curious. They ask themselves:

“Is this the man who sat and begged?”

Some say, “he is,” and others, “he appears to be.” He declares, “I am.” Some suspect that his blindness was fake; simply a means to ask for alms.

Some religious people ask the young man:

“How were your eyes opened?” (John 9: 10).

He answers, “That man, whom I did not know, whose name is Jesus, made clay, spread it on my eyes and told me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash yourself.’ I went, washed myself, and received sight.”

The crowd murmurs saying, “He violated the Sabbath by making mud!” They ask again, “Where is He?” “I don’t know,” answers the young man. They force him to show himself before the Pharisees, and then his parents, because they don’t trust that he was blind. How sad to see this behaviour coming from religious leaders.



The hearts of the Pharisaic judges are hardened. The only thing they care about is the care about is the scandalous violation of the Sabbath: making clay and asking the young man to wash himself. They cannot accept it as an act from God.

The young man looks at them and says:

“How strange that you do not know where this Man’s power comes from! God listens to those who fulfil His will. If this man were not from God, He would not be able to do something so great.”

Infuriated, the Pharisees respond, “You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?” (John 9: 34). And without another word they cast him out from the synagogue.

When He learns that the man has been cast out from the synagogue, Jesus goes in search of him. When He finds him, He does not comment on what happened, He does not point accusing fingers at anyone. Instead, He asks him about his faith:

“Do you believe in Him whom God promised to send to the world? Do you believe that God loves you to the point of sending Him to save you?”

The young man has been healed from his blindness but God has something even better for him. He wishes to see him live as a redeemed man in a lost world. He wants him to know that he has been healed by divine grace, so that his gratitude goes in its entirety to God. He wants to show him that Isaiah's promise, "In that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness," (Isaiah 29:18) has been fulfilled in him.

"Do you believe in the Son of God?" (John 9: 35).

The young man humbly replies:

"Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" (John 9: 36).

To believe in God is to be on His side, to listen to Him, to obey Him and to follow Him. The young man wants to believe. And if someone is willing to believe, to God that means he already believes.

Jesus tells him:

"Well, you have seen Him; the one who talks to you is Him."

The young man, joyful and in awe, answers:

"Lord, I believe." (John 9: 38).

At this point, the man falls to his knees at Jesus' feet.

After having acknowledged Jesus as a special man and testifying before the Sanhedrin that He seems to be a prophet, the man now discovers that He is the author of life and is worthy of worship.

The Pharisees are filled with anger when they see the young man kneeling before Jesus. The Teacher says, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind." (John 9:39). He declares that there is something more terrible than not seeing our material surroundings: spiritual blindness.

The Pharisees rebel against the idea that they are "spiritually" blind from birth. They do not believe that they have inherited a mortal infection they are not responsible for but nonetheless cultivated. They need their spiritual eyes to be opened. They are blind as to who God is, who He sent, what He expects from us, and what we must expect from Him.

The Pharisees' blindness is harder to heal than child trachoma. No one is as blind as he who thinks he can see and has no desire to leave his darkness. The young man bids farewell to Jesus in radiant happiness because his blindness, both the physical and the spiritual, has been healed. His life will never be the same again.

Full of hatred, the Pharisees stare at them. But Jesus looks at the young man with joy, and at the Pharisees with sorrow because He feels that their blindness is permanent. What more could Jesus do to open the eyes of their soul? //

1 Pliny was a well-known Roman historian who collected diverse "scientific" information.

2 William Barclay, *The New Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of John*, Volume 2, Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2001, p. 48.

3 *Ibid*, p. 48



“

Do you believe in Him whom God promised to send to the world?”

 QUESTIONS

1. Consider the following phrases:

“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

The blind man “is painfully aware that his blindness sparks condemnation rather than compassion.”

At the time, it was common to believe that God punishes us for our sins or our parent’s sins during our lifetime.

How do you explain the relationship between suffering and personal responsibility in your church nowadays? How can this vision make a person who is suffering feel?

2. Jesus gives a practical lesson as a response to the disciples’ question. What should our attitude be—as individuals and as the church—when facing suffering, according to the example of Jesus?

3. Why is it that in the midst of suffering some people get closer to God and others distance themselves from Him?

4. What phrases from the text help you deal with the question of evil and suffering?

5. What do you think about the attitude of the Pharisees when they learned of the miracle? How can we avoid the same thing happening today in our church? And in yourself?



PERSONAL CHALLENGE

All around us, we find plenty of people who suffer. Dedicate some time to help someone who is suffering: in your family, in your church or in your community.

What about taking some time to become a volunteer and help others? Look for an organisation in your city, or dedicate one year of your life to being a volunteer, for example, in any of the destinations you can find in:

Adventist Volunteer Service: www.adventistvolunteers.org

ADRA: <https://adra.org/faq/can-volunteer-adra/>



GO DEEPER

- › John 9
- › Roberto Badenas, *Facing Suffering: Courage and Hope in a Challenging World*, Madrid: Safeliz, 2013.
- › Roberto Badenas, *Decisive Encounters*, Madrid: Safeliz, 2018, chap. 10 “The Look.”
- › William Barclay, *The New Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of John*, Volume 2, Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2001, pp. 42-60.
- › Exodus 20: 5 and 34: 6-7 were explained by saying that God punishes our descendants for our sin, when in reality these texts simply warn us about the fact that our actions may affect innocent people. See J. W. Hayford, *John: Living Beyond the Ordinary (Spirit-Filled Life Study Guide Series)*, USA: Thomas Nelson, 2010.
- › At the time, the Pharisees were the most influential group of society. It is estimated that there were about 6,000 Pharisees in a population of approximately 25,000 inhabitants (Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969, p. 252).
- › “Jesus did not come to explain away suffering or remove it. He came to fill it with His presence.” (Paul Claudel).
- › “Having been created free beings, we all run the risk of using our freedom against our own wellbeing and that of others. This freedom is the risk that divine love—both unfathomable and unfathomed—entails. God could have created robots programmed to obey, incapable of doing evil; but these beings, deprived of their freedom, would also be incapable of loving God by themselves. Because love can only be given in freedom.” (Roberto Badenas, *Encuentros Decisivos [Decisive Encounters]*, Madrid: Editorial Safeliz, 2017, p. 137).



ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1. WHAT DO YOU SEE WHEN YOU CAN'T SEE?

Materials: 5-6 different objects, 1 blindfold (per group)

Activity Description:

Ask for a volunteer in the group and blindfold them. Give them a few objects. The blindfolded person should describe the object with the help of the rest of their senses. What aspects have they been unable to describe?

Application:

There are things we can only perceive when our eyes are open. What spiritual lessons do you draw from this activity? Ask God to open your spiritual eyes so that you can sense His presence in your life.

ACTIVITY 2. I SUFFER FROM...

Activity Description:

It's role-play time! Ask one or two people in the group to describe a fictional situation that causes them pain (sickness, the death of a loved one, an accident...). What would you tell them in response? As a Christian, what could you do to help them, encourage them and heal them?

Application:

Take time to pray to God asking for loving eyes and a caring heart to reach out to those who suffer.

ACTIVITY 3. BLINDNESS IS A UNIVERSAL CONDITION

Materials: 1 sheet of paper, 1 pencil/pen (per group)

Activity Description:

In reality, we are all blind. In your group, think about things, actions or routines that hinder you from seeing what God wants you to see. Write them down and come up with a list of practical solutions.

Application:

Take the list you wrote down as a group and present it to God in prayer. Ask Him to help you put the proposed solutions into practice.

DAY

5

THE LIBERATION

KEY TEXT: LUKE 13: 10-17



"NOW HE WAS TEACHING IN ONE OF THE SYNAGOGUES ON THE SABBATH. AND BEHOLD, THERE WAS A WOMAN WHO HAD A SPIRIT OF INFIRMITY EIGHTEEN YEARS, AND WAS BENT OVER... BUT WHEN JESUS SAW HER, HE CALLED HER TO HIM AND SAID TO HER, 'WOMAN, YOU ARE LOOSED FROM YOUR INFIRMITY.' AND HE LAID HIS HANDS ON HER, AND IMMEDIATELY SHE WAS MADE STRAIGHT, AND GLORIFIED GOD. BUT THE RULER OF THE SYNAGOGUE ANSWERED WITH INDIGNATION, BECAUSE JESUS HAD HEALED ON THE SABBATH..."

Luke 13: 10-14 (NKJV)

EARLY ON THE SABBATH MORNING, THE FAITHFUL HURRY TO THE SYNAGOGUE. AMONG THEM, A HUNCHED WOMAN ADVANCES, HER EYES FIXED ON THE GROUND. THEY SAY THAT SHE HAS A "SPIRIT OF INFIRMITY."

She's been walking with a bent back for eighteen years now. What is the cause? An accident in her infancy? A rheumatic sickness? An evil spirit? The reason is unknown, but her back seems to be broken and the woman walks hunchback. Some people say that she walks as if crushed by a demon's foot. People move away without a glance, in case they become victims of the same evil spell that tortures her.

She knows that she is unwelcome in the synagogue. They have told her many times. Moreover, women are not obliged to attend the synagogue nor the temple. The ones who are cursed, even less. She is aware of this. Yet she goes to the synagogue every Sabbath, to pray and to study, and to find shelter from the world for a moment.

She attends because it does her good to listen to the Scriptures and because she needs to feel close to God, in spite of the pain and staring eyes. She hides in a corner, alone, ignored by everyone.

She lost her position as a respectable woman years ago, and since then people avoid her. She lives in her own small world, as if she were invisible. There is an old saying, "If you want to be invisible become a beggar," and that's the way it is. Whether on the streets or in the synagogue, people walk by "without seeing her." She is a nobody.

In every synagogue the area for men is separated from the small area reserved for women, where she takes refuge. Sometimes mothers sit there with their children to avoid distracting the men. Seeing a woman in the synagogue is very rare. But there she is,

sometimes alone, sometimes with others. She doesn't count for the *minyán* required to start the service. There is no one there, because she is nobody.

Snug in her corner she follows the service to the best of her abilities. She stands up to join in the singing and praying. It hurts her to hear the prayer that says, "Blessed are You, God, our Lord, King of the universe, who has not made me a Gentile, a slave, or a woman."¹ She prefers to say, "I praise you, Lord, for having made me as you wanted..." She asks herself if it was God who deformed her back, if it was the devil, or if she is to blame.

Since ancient times, the places of prayer in the synagogue are orientated towards Jerusalem. In each of them, you can see above the bimah and against the wall that faces the temple, the *aron kodesh* or holy ark, in which the Sifrei Torah or scrolls of the law are kept. Before it is the table on which the preacher deposits—with great care—the heavy roll of the Holy Scriptures and proceeds with his lecture.

The woman follows the teaching of the new Master. The ruler of the synagogue has invited Jesus to read and explain the text for the day and, as usual, He has accepted. Up front, with His *tallit* or prayer shawl on His head, He unrolls the sacred scrolls with extreme care. His words shed a new light upon the ancient divine revelation. She has heard that one day—regarding the prophetic passages that announce the Messiah (Luke 4: 16-21)—he declared:

"Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

The woman listens with fascination to the new Rabbi. He seems so different from the scribes.

“

She attends because it does her good to listen to the Scriptures.”

“

The Teacher has a very high concept of the Sabbath and of women; of what is lawful to do on that day and of what God desires for humanity.”

Jesus always gives consolation to the people who are dependent on others: the poor, the sick, the crippled, the unwelcome foreigners, the unattended children and the unappreciated women. He declares that God longs to see us happy, but men have filled the earth with misfortune, especially for the “nobodies” like her. Suddenly, the woman realizes that Jesus is looking at her. She shudders at the feeling of not going unnoticed by His look of love. **Even though no one wants to see her, He sees her.**

His gaze is compassionate, as if he can read the cries of her heart on her face.

Jesus looks at this bent woman, who comes to the synagogue deformed. What makes her come? She flees from an inhumane society in search of a compassionate God. And **when someone seeks God, Jesus goes out to meet them.** The Teacher reads the remorse in the faces of those who are subdued by the pain. He sees some who are defeated; everything they do goes wrong. They are overwhelmed, lacking in spirit; each with their own hump, unable to lift up their heads. The Teacher then does something outrageous.

He interrupts the sermon, looks at the bent over woman and calls her forward. Jesus asks her to come on the platform because to Him she is somebody, not “nobody”! **He asks her to be courageous, to dare to be herself, without worrying about people.** The woman trembles, but she gets up as if attracted by a magnet and walks towards where He summons her, asking herself why.

“Why does he make me cross the room set aside for the men to get to the platform where everyone will see me? He could heal me at a distance.”

As she gets closer, Jesus addresses her:

“You are set free from your infirmity.” (Luke 13: 12 NIV).

The woman suffers a “disease” worse than a mere ailment. It is the only time that Jesus talks about “freedom” during a healing.



Jesus desires to see her free, so that she is no longer bent or marginalized, and not merely healed. He wants her to be free from discrimination and insecurities. Jesus knows that those who do not own themselves can never be free. And so He tells her:

“Before me, and before God, you are free.”

Having recovered her dignity, she stays on the platform and Jesus—in the expectant silence—lays His hands on her as if in a consecration ceremony. There is a murmur of discomfort in the hall. It comes from those who think that only some especially-deserving men are worthy of such a privilege. But Jesus has no doubts about laying His hands on this woman because **He knows that we all, as human beings, are in need of the divine blessing** and that we all need more love than we deserve. All of us are equally unworthy of his loving embrace and we are all equally in need of his grace.²

Under the hands of the Teacher, that back which had not been touched in years—for fear of contagion or malediction—receives the touch of the Teacher. It straightens. Both her posture and her self-esteem rise so that she can also be lifted high in the community’s esteem. Right there before the congregation, she starts to glorify God. That is why, **instead of healing her any other day and**



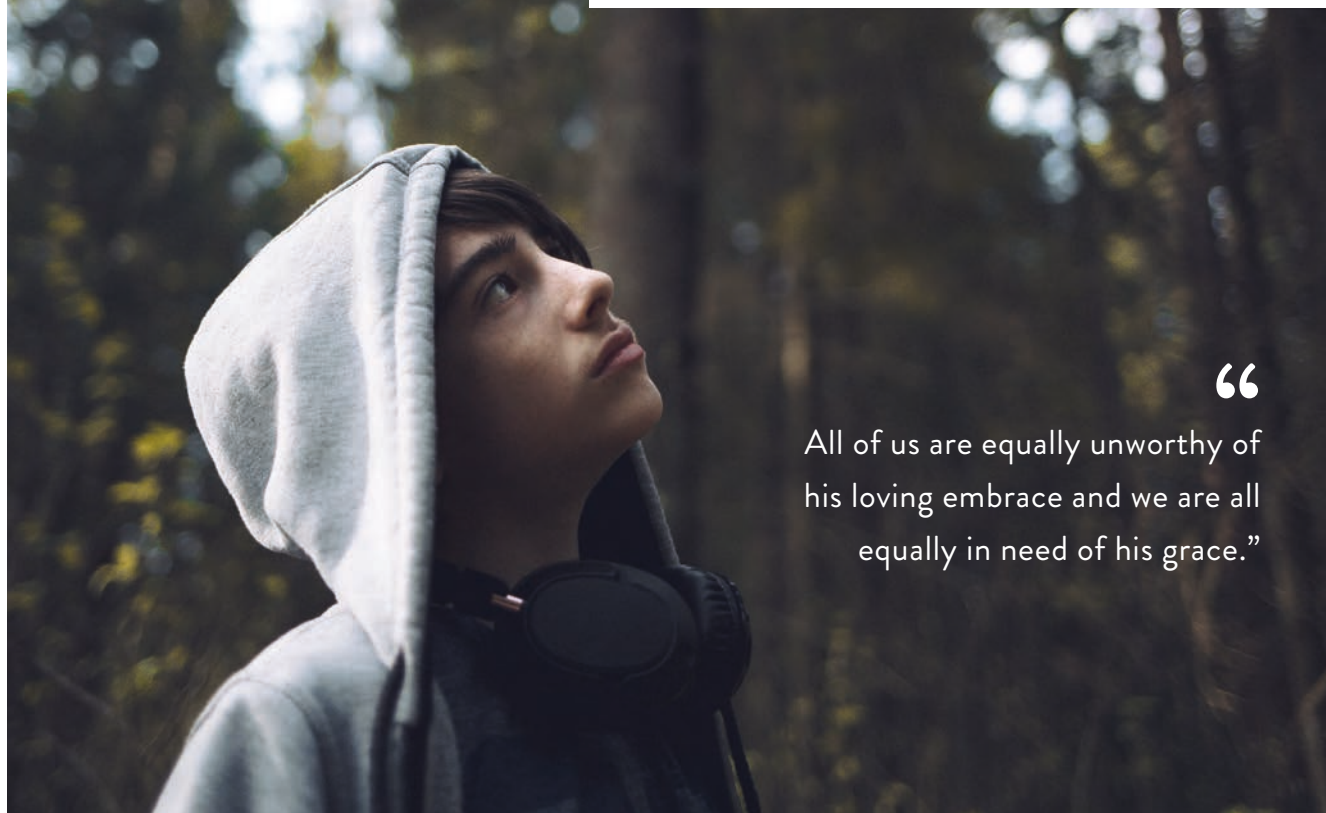
in any other place, Jesus does it in the synagogue, on the Sabbath, and during the sermon.

Many of those present, dazzled by the divine prodigy, erupt in applause and shouts of joy. But not everyone likes what has occurred. The synagogue leader—a layman and not a priest—who has invited Jesus to preach, now regrets his decision. Angered by what He had just done, he dares not to address Him. Instead, he addresses those present and rebukes them:

“The week has six days for working. Be healed on them and not on Sabbath. Look for healing out of this place and on a different day. You come to the synagogue to shut up and listen.”

This Jew believes that the Sabbath is not a day to enjoy liberation but to do what has always been done. The Sabbath is the day to suffer for God, not to rejoice. To him, Jesus does—in the synagogue and on the Sabbath—what He should not do: heal a woman who, according to him, God has “punished;” He invites someone he shouldn’t have to come to the platform, and He lays his hands on someone who is unworthy.

Jesus is outraged by this man and the holier-than-thou sectarians, the religious men who practice spiritual exhibitionism but do not leave room for notions such as: “forgiveness of sins,” “justice for



“

All of us are equally unworthy of his loving embrace and we are all equally in need of his grace.”

all,” “equal rights,” “freedom from prejudice,” “respect of differences,” or “acceptance of personal vocations”.

Jesus replies:

“Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound—think of it—for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?” (Luke 13: 15-16).

The Teacher has a very high concept of the Sabbath and of women; of what is lawful to do on that day and of what God desires for humanity. Sabbath is the anticipation of the redeemed world which God wishes to recover.³ To Jesus the Sabbath is the day of liberation *par excellence*.

“

Every false religion teaches its adherents to be careless of human needs, sufferings, and rights. The gospel places a high value upon humanity as the purchase of the blood of Christ, and it teaches a tender regard for the wants and woes of man.”

Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 286.4.



The Master deeply respects the dignity of every human being and He wants everyone—men and women, young and old—to live in freedom, unbent and at His service. That is why Jesus calls His followers to be arms that offer support and hands that bless.

All the children of Abraham are invited to free themselves from everything that bends them towards the dust and prevents them from seeing heaven. They are all invited to have Jesus lay His hands on them to transform them; to allow Him to cut their ties loose (their prejudice, selfishness, addictions, pride) and open the doors to a new life.

He wants all those who—like the woman—search for divine help, to be upright, with their head held high, in the service of God and those around them. Meanwhile, Jesus continues on with His task of transforming lives, resolving problems, straightening that which is crooked: marriage conflicts, personal difficulties, spiritual crises... Then and now, the divine Teacher tells us, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28). **The divine will is to reclaim the dignity of all human beings.** He who created us in His image and likeness sees His will is violated when we marginalize someone because of factors such as gender, race or social status.

Jesus expects His followers to get along with each other, so that we become a community of love. This community is made up of people who are diverse in a thousand different ways but are able to offer the world a model of fellowship in which any disagreement can be overcome. That should be its sign of identity (John 13: 35).

The nobodies leave the synagogue after having experienced real communion with God. They now know that divine Love is capable of transforming them, just as it did for that woman who, having entered crippled, now advances—among the men—radiant, dignified, slender, and graceful towards her new life.

“What a woman!”

The murmur is heard.

She has stopped being a nobody. And from her new upright position she even feels closer to heaven. //

1 See <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/three-blessings/>

2 A human being’s dignity does not rest on what he can do, but on what he is “by creation.” As human beings we do not need to earn the right to be treated as “the image of God.” Our dignity is *intrinsic* to our being, it comes from the fact of being created by God—male and female—in His image. (John Wyatt, *Asuntos de vida o muerte*, Barcelona: Andamio, 2007, p. 80, quoted in Emmanuel Buch, *Ética bíblica. Fundamentos de la moral cristiana*, Valls: Noufront, 2010, p. 159).

3 “The essence of the world to come is the eternal Sabbath. In the realm of time, the seventh day of every week is the image of eternity.” (Abraham Heschel, quoted by Robert Aron, *Los años oscuros de Jesús*, Bilbao: Ediciones EGA, 1992, p. 75).

 QUESTIONS

1. In the text we have just read, the woman regularly attends the synagogue even though she does not feel welcome there. Why do you think she kept on going after so many years of suffering? What do you gain from her experience with respect to attending church even when it is imperfect?

2. What has caught your attention from Badenas' account of the bent woman's encounter with Jesus? Choose the phrase that has impacted you the most and share why.

3. The leader of the synagogue gets angry because Jesus has healed on Sabbath (Luke 13: 14). What does Jesus' reaction say to you about what is lawful to do on Sabbath? What does Sabbath mean to you? See Matthew 12: 1-8; Mark 3: 1-6; Isaiah 58: 13.

4. Contrast the way women were viewed at the time as is reflected in the prayer: "Blessed are You, God, our Lord, King of the universe, who has not made me... a woman," with the actions Jesus did: He healed and put His hands on the woman in public: "The Teacher has a very high concept of the Sabbath and of women... the Master deeply respects the dignity of every human being and He wants all—men and women, young and old—to live in freedom, unbent and at His service." See Galatians 3: 28. What conclusions do you reach about the importance of women when you look at Jesus' actions?

5. John 13: 35 tells us that people will know that we are disciples of Jesus because we love each other. What implications does this have on how we treat others, regardless of their gender, race, social background...? How can you, and your church, improve and grow in the way you love?



PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Reflect on how you treat people who are different from you or who hold different opinions from yours. Does your relationship with them reflect John 13: 35? This week, sincerely ask God to transform your heart so that you can reflect His love when you deal with other people, regardless of their gender, race, social background... Think of practical ways in which you can show others that you love them with no strings attached.



GO DEEPER

- › Luke 13: 10-17.
- › Mark 3: 1-6.
- › Numbers 6:1-8. Both men and women could take the vow of a Nazirite.
- › Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, chap. 29 “The Sabbath,” pp. 281-289.
- › Roberto Badenas, *Decisive Encounters*, Madrid: Safeliz, 2018, chap. 11 “The Liberation.”
- › Who has never felt humiliated, put down, overpowered by someone or by pitiful circumstances? Who has never felt depressed, repressed, locked up in a completely unfair situation? There are people who live like this every day. Some, all their life. The poet Eduardo Galeano calls these people “the nobodies” in his famous poem of the same title: *Fleas dream of buying themselves a dog, and nobodies dream of escaping poverty: that one magical day good luck will suddenly rain down on them—will rain down in buckets. But good luck doesn’t rain down yesterday, today, tomorrow, or ever. Good luck doesn’t even fall in a fine drizzle, no matter how hard the nobodies summon it, even if their left hand is tickling, or if they begin the new day with their right foot, or start the new year with a change of brooms. / The nobodies: nobody’s children, owners of nothing. The nobodies: the no ones, the nobodied, [...] / Who are not, but could be. / Who don’t speak languages, but dialects. / Who don’t have religions, but superstitions. / Who don’t create art, but handicrafts. / Who don’t have culture, but folklore. / Who are not human beings, but human resources. / Who do not have faces, but arms. / Who do not have names, but numbers. / Who do not appear in the history of the world, but in the police blotter of the local paper. / The nobodies, who are not worth the bullet that kills them.*⁴
- › The text (Luke 13: 13) uses the same term and expression “He laid His hands on her” (*epétheken - epitithemi*) the Bible uses for the gesture we call “laying on of hands”, that is, the gesture that implies blessing and even consecration (see Acts 8: 18; 1 Timothy 4: 14; 2 Timothy 1: 6; Hebrews 6: 2). The gesture of laying on hands expresses the desire to ask for a blessing for someone.

⁴ Eduardo Galeano, *The Book of Embraces*, Trans. Cedric Belfrage, New York: W. W. Norton, 1991, p. 73.



ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1. THE DAISY

Materials: 1 pencil/pen per person, 1 drawing of a daisy per person

Activity Description:

We have all played the famous game “he loves me, he loves me not...” while picking one petal off a flower. We have also often discussed about what “we can do, we cannot do...” on Sabbath. Oddly enough, we often focus more on what we “cannot do” than on what we “can do”. Use the petals of this daisy to write down things that you think *can be done on Sabbath* to make it a *special day of connection with God*. Share your answers with the group.

ACTIVITY 2. THE NAME GAME

Materials: 1 sheet of paper per person, 1 pen/pencil per person, 1 empty box

Activity Description:

- › Each participant must write down their first name and their last name “backwards”. For example, *MARY SMITH* should be written *HTIMS YRAM*.
- › Fold the papers and put them all in the box.
- › Each person will take turns to get a paper from the box and read the name “backwards” out loud.
- › The rest must then guess the correct name of the person.

Application:

We all like people to know us by our name. God has a very beautiful promise for us in the Bible: when we see Him again, He will give each one of us a new name (Revelation 2: 17). This is a promise for each one of us as individuals. It reminds us that our Father cares for each one of us personally and completely. Dedicate some time to thank God for all His promises. Imagine when He calls you by name for the first time.

ACTIVITY 3. COOKIE CHALLENGE

Materials: 1 package of cookies (1 cookie per person)

Activity Description:

- › Hand out 1 cookie per person and ask everyone to put it on their forehead.
- › The challenge is to eat the cookie without using your hands, moving only your face. (You can see an example of this technique in this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ror_mgs5-CQ)

Application:

A simple activity such as eating a cookie can become a true feat when we cannot use all of our faculties. In the same way, when we face situations while feeling incomplete we can encounter frustration and pain. So when Jesus offers us freedom as a gift, it entails a life of fulfilled potential. Dedicate time to pray. Share all the projects you currently have—those in which you would like to be involved with 100% of your faculties—with God.

DAY

6

THE STORM

KEY TEXT: MATTHEW 14: 22-33

"BUT THE BOAT WAS NOW IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SEA, TOSSED BY THE WAVES, FOR THE WIND WAS CONTRARY. NOW IN THE FOURTH WATCH OF THE NIGHT JESUS WENT TO THEM, WALKING ON THE SEA."

Matthew 14: 24-25 (NKJV)

THE TWILIGHT DYES THE EVENING SKY. EVERYTHING POINTS TOWARDS A STORM. THE USUAL SEA BREEZE HAS TRANSFORMED INTO A DEVASTATING GALE. "IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SEA," SAYS THE TEXT. IN REALITY, ON THE GENNESARET LAKE, 21 KM LONG BY 6-12 KM WIDE.

While the disciples collect the sails to prevent them from ripping, darkness encroaches. As lightning flashes and thunder rumbles a violent storm hovers over the lake and the fragile boat on which the disciples travel.

The young men cry out to God in anguish. **As believers, they seem to see God less in the beneficial forces of the nature that waters their lands than in those that hurt them.** The storms and the earthquakes stick in the minds of these Jews. The inhabitants of this arid land don't have any more water than that which the clouds bring. It is as if the elements force them to lift their eyes to heaven to survive. From the sky comes beneficial rain, along with hail and the withering drought.

Even though the Master teaches that God allows the sun to rise over evil and good people and sends rain over the just and the unjust (Matthew 5: 45), it is hard for the disciples to assimilate the idea of an impartial Creator. *Adonai Sevaot* is a powerful and wise God who has His reasons for not preventing the lightning bolt from striking the mast nor avoiding a shipwreck. If He does not preserve His people from these evils, it is because the misfortunes are inserted in a divine plan they ignore, but in whose existence they believe with all their soul.

Jesus wants them to learn to live in a world that suffers. We would like to not have problems as a result of being believers, but the storms also affect the children of God because the Lord does not show partiality.

The Teacher has stayed behind on the shore to dismiss the people. His disciples must grow outside of His protecting presence. He also needs some time alone in silence to meditate, pray, and find God and Himself. So He has decided to stay on His own while they cross to the other shore.

The recent death of John the Baptist has affected the Teacher. He glimpses, perhaps for the first time, the destiny that awaits Him. The mission of the prophet ended both brave on his part and cruel on the part of his assassins: with him decapitated by a capricious king and a courtesan. Jesus thinks about the courage that He and His disciples will need to accomplish their mission in such a dangerous environment. In no time, as soon as He completes His mission, they will have to carry out the task of forming God's new people, person by person. As the group makes its way through the lake

“

Even though the Master teaches that God allows the sun to rise over evil and good people and sends rain over the just and the unjust (Matthew 5: 45), it is hard for the disciples to assimilate the idea of an impartial Creator.”





“

The Teacher stretches out His hand towards the sinking man and brings him afloat.”

on the vulnerable boat, the Teacher thinks about how fragile that small group of followers is in the immensity of the world.

Soon they will have to drive their boats through pitfalls, dodge the storms of life and safely cross foggy zones. The sea, with its storms and moments of calmness, with the coming and going of waves, is a parable of existence, of our own personal and relational conflicts. Likewise, this fragile boat, shaken to and fro, advancing against wind and tide and often on the verge of a shipwreck, is an image of life: personal and family squalls, work gales, spiritual fogs. With such fragile boats as ours, it is not easy to control the rudder or to make it through unharmed and reach a good port.

The multiplication of the loaves and fish that has just occurred reminds Him of the miracle of the manna. This occurred at the beginnings of the people of Israel. It happened between two crossings: the passage of the Red Sea, which marks the exit from Egypt, and the passage of the Jordan River, which marks the entry into Canaan. Both occurrences were like a baptism for the Jews. The sea and the river are both barriers and passages between life and death. How better to symbolize the break with the past and the beginning of the future than with a “path on the sea” and another on the river? **As humans we need to live through something that remains engraved in our memories.** That is why the Teacher adopted baptism as the “passage-door” of entry to His people and as a symbol of the new birth. The passage through the testing waters can occur repeatedly throughout the life of the believer.

The storm that beats down on the boat now worries the Teacher. The crossing could last three hours with good weather. This time the disciples are relentlessly pulled towards the centre of the lake. It is already the fourth watch (between three and six in the morning). As seasoned fishermen they have done everything they know to dodge the storm. They are exhausted and at the border of desperation. They feel abandoned, alone and lost. They cry out to a God who seems absent.

Jesus does not lose sight of them. Prayer does not isolate Him from reality. From the shore the Teacher follows the trajectory of His friends, who fight in the middle of darkness.

Like a father keeps watch over his family when they are in danger, so Jesus watches over His people. His desire to help them is so strong that in the terrible fourth watch when darkness is at its deepest, something remarkable happens. With the help of God, the body of Jesus is freed from the laws of gravity. He is elevated and walks on the turbulent waves to reach the boat.

When the disciples think they will perish, flashes of lightning help them see a mysterious figure on the waves. It advances steadily towards them. They don’t recognize Jesus and believe it is a ghost. The terror freezes their blood. They let go of the oars and the boat is left at the mercy of the elements.

There are few emotions stronger than fear. Panic can paralyse us when it dominates us. The fear of the supernatural startles them and the disciples’ eyes remain fixed on the being that draws near. Panic tears a scream of terror from their mouths, but Jesus tells them in a powerful voice:

“It is I; do not be afraid.” (Matthew 14: 27).

The disciples can’t believe what they see and hear. The Teacher, whom they thought was absent, is right there.

Peter begs Him:

“Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” (Matthew 14: 28).

Jesus responds:

“Come.”

“

He realises that when one loses sight of Jesus it could be the end.”

Peter, with hesitant steps, looks at the Master and walks on the water. Little by little, carried by vanity, he turns towards his astonished companions. The waves interpose themselves between Peter and the Teacher and in an instant, he loses sight of Jesus and starts to sink. In despair, he yells:

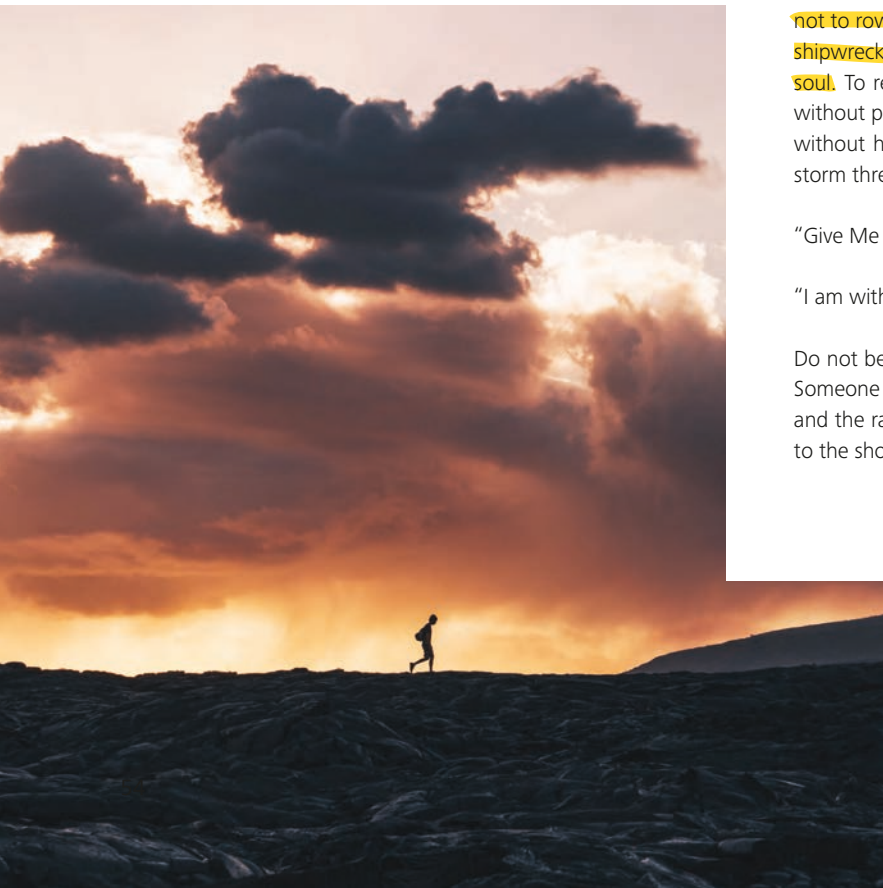
“Lord, save me!”

A short but sincere prayer that comes from the heart. Divine love responds on the spot. The Teacher stretches out His hand towards the sinking man and brings him afloat, while saying:

“O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Matthew 14: 31).

Without letting go of the Teacher’s hand, Peter returns to the boat and stays silent, embarrassed stiff with cold. His weakness has almost cost him his life. He realises that when one loses sight of Jesus it could be the end.

Peter’s error was not in being afraid—because fear is inevitable—but in forgetting that a faith so small in such a grave situation makes him very vulnerable. **His error was to lose sight of Jesus and turn his gaze in a different direction at the moment in which his survival depended on his communion with the Master.** Peter’s grave mistake was to think that he could keep going indefinitely without divine help, by his own means.



“

Only through realizing our own weakness
and looking steadfast unto Jesus can we
walk securely.”

Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 382.4.

Peter’s experience illuminates our own lives: left to myself, I drown. The sea of life always ends in death. I need to hold on to Christ’s arms, which lift me up, return me to the boat and carry me to shore. The love of the Teacher is stronger than the winds of hate, the hurricane of passion, the whirlwinds of selfishness, the tall waves of pride and the false calm of indifference.

Jesus commands the wind, which dies down, and the waves, which return to calmness. The clouds disperse and the disciples finally arrive in peace at their destination.

A new day is born on the lake as a new day arises on each of those who decide to sail the seas of existence in the company of Christ.

Jesus warns them:

“While this life lasts you will have to endure storms, but do not fear. I am with you in the storm: not to evade it, but to give you faith and courage to overcome it. **I am with you on the boat, but not to row in your place. I am with you in the voyage not to evade shipwrecks, but to help you overcome them and bring peace to the soul.** To reassure you that the boat will reach the shore, perhaps without part of the cargo, perhaps even without mast or sails, but without having lost any of those who travel with Me. When the storm threatens, think of Me and pray: ‘Lord, save me.’

“Give Me the rudder of your boat and I will deal with the rest.

“I am with you even when you think Me absent or asleep.”

Do not be startled too much if in the middle of the storm you see Someone coming towards you. He will calm the waters, the clouds and the rain will disappear, He will take the rudder and guide you to the shore safe and sound... Yes, He is Jesus. //

 QUESTIONS

1. Consider the phrase: “As believers, they seem to see God less in the beneficial forces of the nature that waters their lands than in those that hurt them.” Does the same thing happen today? In what positive everyday aspects can you see the presence of God?

2. Why do we sometimes think of God only when things go wrong? Where is God when we suffer?

3. Some may think that because they are believers and follow Jesus they will not experience difficulties. Why is this way of thinking incorrect? Why is the absence of problems not synonymous with being a Christian?

4. In the midst of the storm, when Jesus approaches the boat, the disciples do not recognize Him and believe He is a ghost. Why do you think they did not recognize Him? How can you make sure you recognize Jesus in the midst of difficulties and you do not lose sight of Him?

5. What impacts you from the fact that Peter walked on the water in the midst of the storm as a result of his request to Jesus, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water” (Matthew 14:28)?



PERSONAL CHALLENGE

At this moment of your life, what is a storm for you? Can you perceive the presence of God in the midst of your storm? Use this storm to be close to God.

Talk to God in prayer about how you feel: angry, disappointed, frightened, confident, at peace... It can be a silent prayer, aloud, with a friend or a relative, while you exercise, in writing, in a poem, by means of a painting... the possibilities are endless!

Memorize some of these biblical promises: Romans 8: 38-39; John 17: 15; Philippians 4: 11-13; Philippians 4: 6-7; Matthew 28: 20b.



GO DEEPER

- › **Matthew 14: 22-33; Mark 6: 45-52; John 6: 14-21.**
- › **Mark 4: 35-41.**
- › **Romans 8: 38-39; John 17: 15; Philippians 4: 11-13; Philippians 4: 6-7; Matthew 28: 20b.**
- › **Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, chap. 40 “A Night on the Lake,” pp. 377-382.**
- › **Roberto Badenas, *Decisive Encounters*, Madrid: Safeliz, 2018, chap. 12 “The Storm.”**



ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1. LIFELINE

Materials: Blindfolds (2 or 3 that can be reused), rope or string (not too thick, at least 4 m long), a chair or a table or any objects that can be used as obstacles.

Activity Description:

The activity consists in reaching the goal after overcoming a series of obstacles blindfolded. The key is to hold on to the rope or string.

Blindfold each of the participants and give them the end of the rope. The other end of the rope will be held by other participants at the other end of the room. Other participants will be the obstacles. In pairs, make arcs and shapes that the “blind” participants must go through or over. Some of the participants can also make it difficult for the “blinded” and try to disorient them. You can also put objects in the way. The blindfolded participants must use their hands and the rope to guide themselves, and they must never let go of the rope. The activity ends when the blindfolded person reaches the end of the rope.

Several people could do this “blindfolded” obstacle course. In each case, you should change the location of the obstacles so it continues to be a challenge, or blindfold all the participants so they don’t see the course beforehand.

Application:

Peter needed to fix his eyes on Jesus so he could walk towards Him in the middle of the storm. We cannot physically see Jesus, but we have the Holy Spirit who guides us in our faith. We can nurture this faith daily when we devote time to be with Jesus. As long as we don’t let go of that “rope” we will be able to go where He leads us. Nothing and no one will be able to deviate us from our final destination. Pray for Jesus to be the guiding “rope” of your life, so that when difficulties and obstacles arise, you cling firmly to Him.

ACTIVITY 2. THE MUSEUM OF EMOTIONS

Activity Description:

This activity will enable us to visualize two antagonistic emotions or attitudes, which produce the same terrible result. We are talking about PANIC and SELF-SUFFICIENCY. On the opposite side we find TRUST, the only one that leads us through the storms and troubles of this life.

- › Divide the people in three groups: each group will represent a frozen image or scene of the three given concepts: PANIC, SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND TRUST. Everyone in the group must participate. Give a few minutes for each group to prepare, and then go on with the representations.
- › Reflect together on each image/scene. What has been portrayed?

Application:

Fear paralysed the disciples. They were unable to react to Jesus appearing on the water. Peter was the only one who approached Jesus. However, his self-sufficiency and his desire to advance by his own means without looking at Jesus ended with him sinking. He quickly reacted and put his trust in Jesus once again, and was then able to reach Him.

Reflect on how fear or excessive self-confidence affect our spiritual life and the church. Share practical ideas on how to overcome each case. Pray for God’s help in living a life of trust in Him.

DAY

7

THE TOMB

KEY TEXT: JOHN 11

"OUR FRIEND LAZARUS SLEEPS, BUT I GO THAT I MAY WAKE HIM UP... SO WHEN JESUS CAME, HE FOUND THAT HE HAD ALREADY BEEN IN THE TOMB FOUR DAYS... 'WHERE HAVE YOU LAID HIM?' [...] JESUS WEPT... 'LAZARUS, COME FORTH!' AND HE WHO HAD DIED CAME OUT..."

John 11: 11, 17, 34-35, 43-44 (NKJV)

THE SMALL CEMETERY OF BETHANY IS SINISTER AND SAD.
 AS WITH ALL THE CEMETERIES IN THE COUNTRY, IT HAS NO TREES
 OR FLOWERS, ONLY STONES PLACED BY VISITORS ON THE TOMBS.
 THESE EVOKE THE DIVINE DECLARATION, "FOR DUST YOU ARE,
 AND TO DUST YOU SHALL RETURN" (GENESIS 3:19).

Following the path marked by cypresses, the Teacher and His disciples enter the cemetery. A group of brooding men preceded by two women in mourning—Martha and Mary—follow.

Jesus asks:

"Where have you laid him? Show me the tomb."

They take Him before a grotto excavated in the rock, closed by a great slab of stone.

He gets closer to the sepulchre. In the midst of the silence, He is visibly moved and cannot articulate a word; neither a sermon nor a funeral eulogy. He looks around Him and, unable to contain His emotion, breaks into tears. Those present—moved—say to each other:

"Look how much He loved him...!"

Jesus doesn't cry for the dead, but for the living. He cries for those who are anguished by the question of death. It is not easy to control our emotions when we encounter death in youth. For those who do not believe, saying goodbye to a loved one plunges them into the discouragement that is brought about by the unfathomable mystery of death.

Not all look at the Master with sympathy. Comments circulate in low voices. Some of them say:

"Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying? (John 11: 37). He had been warned days earlier, 'Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.' (John 11: 3). We expected Him to come without delay, but... why did it take two days for Him to get going? How could He leave His friends alone with the pain?"

Since His arrival, everything is a reproach.

“

He looks around Him and, unable to contain His emotion, breaks into tears...
 He cries for those who are anguished
 by the question of death.”



Martha, Lazarus' big sister, says to Him:

"Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died."

Mary, the younger sister, utters the same reproach.

Complaints of hearts that were torn yesterday and today, before heaven and cold death.

Few things are more painful than the feeling of abandonment produced by the absence of a person we have just lost. No loneliness is worse than that brought about by their absence. Some people more and some less, we all need an arm to lean on or shoulder to cry on. The cruel blow of loss is accompanied by the stab of doubt before the silence of God.

Before the crying and hopeless faces of those who loved Lazarus, how can the Teacher explain that this goodbye is not final? He has already tried to teach them that death is a dream, a parenthesis. And that the time between our suffering and the new life is not a time of solitude and emptiness. Jesus shares our tears and He wants us to share in His hope and joy. Hadn't He already demonstrated that in Nain? Did He not just show it again with Jairus' daughter? The Lord promised and promises:

“

He has already tried to teach them that death is a dream, a parenthesis. And that the time between our suffering and the new life is not a time of solitude and emptiness.”

"I will not leave you alone..."

Jesus knows that in this painful stance, there is no room for speeches and grandiloquent phrases. To the accusing glares of Lazarus' sisters, He replies:

"Your brother will live again."

To not die eternally is the grand dream of humanity. And Jesus declares that an even more real dream is the "dream of death." Faced with the idea that "life is a dream", he says that "death is a dream".

Consoling words sometimes sound like meaningless affirmations to those who suffer; a formula often said in passing, hurried, distant, uttered in a low voice. A statement that expresses our difficulty to place ourselves before death and those who suffer instead of our faith. And that powerful promise, "Your loved ones will live again", more than an answer, seems like an escape. It resembles a painkiller more than a hope. No wonder Martha responds—in a distant tone—like many believers who have been disappointed by the cruelty of life:

"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day. But that does not alleviate my pain."

The certainty of daybreak does not remove the darkness of night.

Jesus cries, moved by the pain, but also by the hope and serenity that He is unable to transmit. He cries because we—both those who leave and those of us who remain—do not know how to fully assume life—and death—in the light of eternity. The grave is not the end, eternal life is.





“

I am here with you, as is God.
And where God is there is life.”

The Teacher stops before the huge round slab that serves as a door to the tomb where Lazarus lies. But the stone, roughly carved, does not close completely and the stench of death and the flies are unbearable.

Jesus, deeply moved, stands before the grave. He waits until everyone is silent and gives an order to His disciples—in a serious tone and with a firm and confident voice:

“Move the stone!”

A horrified scream erupts from the guts of the two sisters:

“Lord, no, please no, he already reeks. It’s been four days. It’s too late.”

Before the tomb, whose scent is barely concealed by the balms, oils and myrrh, Jesus sighs. He knows that the stone of the sepulchre is easier to remove than the stones of our prejudices. **He understands that for God the hardest thing to do is not to resurrect Lazarus, but to convince those who are present that death is not final.** The Master has not stopped teaching that this life is no more

than the first phase of our existence and that thanks to the power of faith, there will be a second and eternal phase that comes from God, the author of life.

“I am the resurrection and the life,” said Jesus. “And whoever lives and believes in Me shall not die eternally. I did not come only to share your pain, but also, and above all, to bring you hope; a certainty before which our most atrocious sufferings become bearable, and all of them are fleeting.”

There is an irresistible power in hope, in that clinging to the invincible force of divine grace and His definitive will to give us eternal happiness. It provides us with serenity to overcome our troubles and illuminates our life and future.

“Yes, I am the visible Messenger of resurrection and life. Open the eyes of your soul. Look at Me well. I am here with you, as is God. And where God is there is life. ‘For He is not the God of the dead but of the living.’ (Luke 20: 38). He who trusts in Me will not die eternally. His death will be but a dream. This fragile life doesn’t have to be the prelude to death but, lived in God, it is the prelude to life without end. No stone slab is enough to permanently close a grave.

“Do you believe this? Then move the stone from the tomb.”

Fearfully, the disciples push the stone, which rolls and leaves the sepulchre open. Lying in the cold silence of the death chamber, you can make out Lazarus’ corpse, covered in a white shroud and wrapped in bandages soaked with oils. Serene, Jesus gathers Himself before the crypt. A sacred aura surrounds His face. He peeks into the sepulchre and raising His eyes to heaven exclaims:

“Father, thank You for having heard Me. I know that You always hear Me. But I say this out loud... so that they may believe You sent Me.”

Having said this, He cried out in a loud voice:

“**In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. (...) He who Himself was soon to die upon the cross stood with the keys of death, a conqueror of the grave, and asserted His right and power to give eternal life.**”

Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 530.3.

“Lazarus, come forth!”

A shuddering silence takes over the group. Everyone’s eyes are fixed on the cave. Suddenly, a sound is heard from the cave’s interior and Lazarus stands up and advances to the door, leaning on the wall.

A scream of horror makes those present step back. Jesus approaches Lazarus because he is blocked by the shroud and orders:

“Untie him and let him go.”

With the help of his friends, Lazarus is freed and advances towards his loved ones. No remains of the sickness can be seen. His appearance is full of vitality. With a look of wonder, exultant with joy and love, he falls at the feet of Jesus.

The open tomb, which Mary thought would smell of death, smells of life.

The Teacher not only promises a future life, but also reveals the key to the present life. His grand miracle is not giving life to a dead man, but letting Him bring new life to the tomb—often white-washed—of our own soul.¹ The great miracle for us is passing from the impersonal statement, “I know that you can give life to the dead,” to the personal statement, “I know that, starting today, you can fill my inner sepulchre with life again.”

His message is that we do not have to wait for the afterlife to enjoy eternal life. We have to rise up in resurrection to another way of life today if we want to enjoy eternity tomorrow. He who is with us in the midst of life will continue to be there beyond death. Because “the beyond is not what is infinitely remote, but what is nearest at hand.”²

Yes, the Teacher also cries with us and for us. But as a ray of sunlight makes its way through the rain, behind the veil of His tears the light of His smile shines to tell us that in the worst drama of our story, death does not have the last word; life does. And that in the Kingdom of the life to come, no one will ever know what it means to cry (Revelation 21: 4). //

1 See Matthew 23: 27, 2 Corinthians 5: 17-19.

2 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison. The Enlarged Edition*, Ed. Eberhard Bethge, New York: Touchstone, 1997, p. 376.





QUESTIONS

1. Why is death a topic that we avoid talking about openly?

2. Let's go to the story: John 11: 4-7, 11-16. How does Jesus react to the news of Lazarus' illness? What surprises you about His response? Why does He delay His going to Bethany?

3. How do the people, Martha and Mary, react to the delay of Jesus? Do you identify with them? How do you deal with the silence of God in moments of pain?

4. "Jesus knows that in this painful stance, there is no room for speeches and grandiloquent phrases." What do you learn from Jesus about our attitude towards those who lose a loved one?

5. Jesus stated, "I am the resurrection and the life." (John 11: 25). How can our faith in Jesus help us face death? And life?



PERSONAL CHALLENGE

“The Teacher not only promises a future life, but also reveals the key to the present life. His grand miracle is not giving life to a dead man, but letting Him bring new life to the tomb—often whitewashed—of our own soul. The great miracle for us is passing from the impersonal statement, ‘I know that you can give life to the dead,’ to the personal statement, ‘I know that, starting today, you can fill my inner sepulchre with life again.’”

Take a moment to reflect on this paragraph alone, in private. Choose a special place that is a space where you can encounter God. It could be a corner in your room, a bench in the park or even a lake next to a mountain. On a sheet of paper or on your mobile phone (on Airplane mode to avoid any distractions), write the answer to the following questions:

- › What areas of your life need to be resurrected like Lazarus?
- › What changes can you incorporate into your routine to live more fully in Jesus (John 10: 10b)?

Make a plan and put it into action in the next 21 days. Set an alarm on your mobile phone with a reminder 21 days from today. In 21 days, when your alarm goes off, review what you wrote down and evaluate: Have you followed your plan?



GO DEEPER

- › John 11
- › Matthew 22: 32; Mark 12: 27; Luke 20: 38.
- › 1 Corinthians 15: 50-58; Revelation 21: 1-4.
- › Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, chap. 58 “Lazarus, Come Forth,” pp. 524-536.
- › Roberto Badenas, *Decisive Encounters*, Madrid: Safeliz, 2018, chap. 13 “The Tomb.”
- › “We are much more concerned with getting over the act of dying than with being victorious over death. Socrates mastered the art of dying; Christ overcame death [...]. There is a real difference between the two things. The one is within human capacity, the other implies resurrection.” (D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison, The Enlarged Edition*. Ed. Eberhard Bethge, New York: Touchstone, 1997, p. 240).
- › “The pious call it the kingdom of God. [...] all we who ask too much and have a dimension too many could not contrive to live at all if there were not another air to breathe outside the air of this world, if there were not eternity at the back of time... In eternity there is no posterity... It is there we belong. There is our home. It is that which our heart strives for.” (Hermann Hesse, *Steppenwolf*, New York: Picador USA, 1963, pp. 152-153.



ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1. 10 POSITIVE THINGS

Materials: 1 sheet of paper per person, 1 pencil/pen per person

Activity Description:

- › Form groups of 2-3 people each.
- › I don't know what difficult situations you find yourself in right now. Perhaps it is the loss of a loved one, an unfair situation, a problem you can't solve. You may ask yourself, "where is God when I need Him?" Pause for a minute. Reflect on the situations in which God has in fact helped you. Write a list of 10 positive things that have happened to you this week and share with the group.

Application:

Regularly take time to think about the positive things in your life. Thank God for these specific blessings in prayer.

ACTIVITY 2. LEARN TO BE POSITIVE

Materials: 1 sheet of paper or slide with the situations below

Activity Description:

We sometimes live complicated situations that we don't know how to deal with. The truth is we can always find a good solution. Form groups of 5-6 people. Together as a group imagine a positive ending to the following situations:

- › You go to a birthday party and forget to take the cake with you.
- › Your luggage is already packed in the car and you are ready to go on vacation. You try to start the engine but it is dead.
- › You write a special message to an important person, but you make a mistake and send it to a person you have not spoken to in a very long time.
- › You decide to go to university on your motorbike because you are in a hurry. You have a really important exam today. It starts raining on your way there so you are completely soaked when you get to class.
- › You treat your friends to dinner and realise you forgot your wallet at home.

Application:

The next time things go unexpectedly wrong, resolve to react positively with God's help (Romans 8: 28).

ACTIVITY 3. 10X1 = I CARE ABOUT YOU. (INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY)

Materials: Mobile phone – social media

Activity Description:

We all love to talk with our friends on WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook... I am sure you know someone who is going through a rough time or needs to feel loved. So, the challenge for this week is that you write someone 1 encouraging message every time you write 10 messages on your social media. Say a prayer for that person too. Remember that your message can help them deal with a tough day. Encourage them to see life in a new light.

DAY

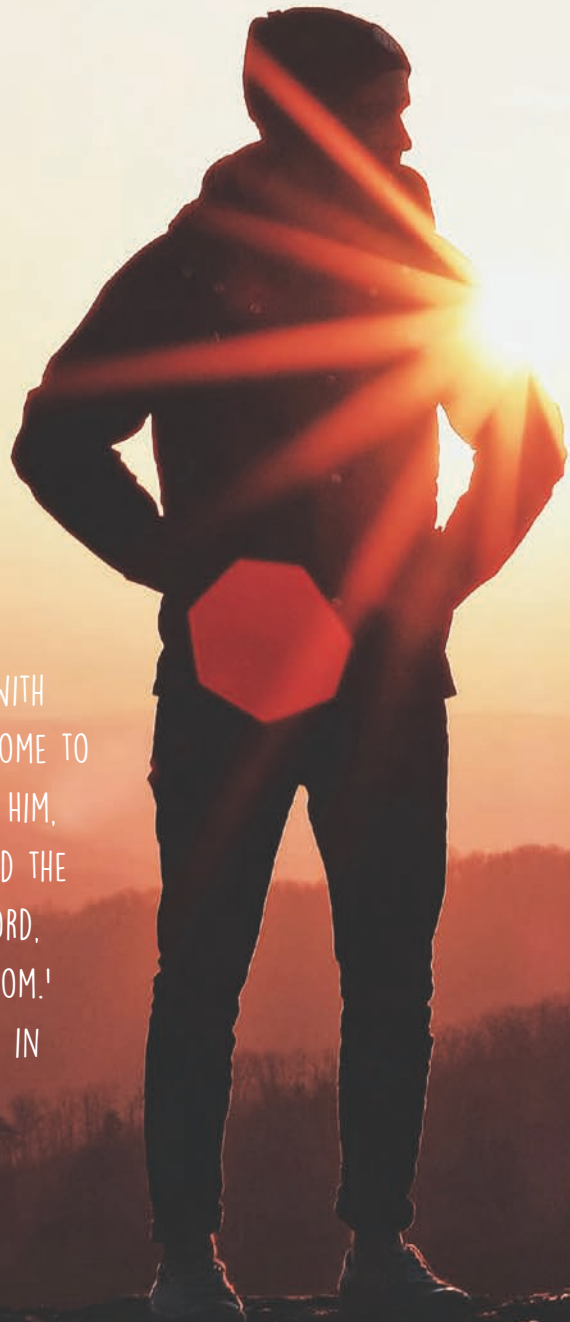
8

THE PROMISE

KEY TEXT: LUKE 23: 26-48

"THERE WERE ALSO TWO OTHERS, CRIMINALS, LED WITH HIM TO BE PUT TO DEATH. AND WHEN THEY HAD COME TO THE PLACE CALLED CALVARY, THERE THEY CRUCIFIED HIM, AND THE CRIMINALS, ONE ON THE RIGHT HAND AND THE OTHER ON THE LEFT... THEN HE SAID TO JESUS, 'LORD, REMEMBER ME WHEN YOU COME INTO YOUR KINGDOM.' AND JESUS SAID TO HIM, '...YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE.'"

Luke 23: 32-43 (NKJV)



THE GOLGOTHA OR "MOUNT OF CALVARY" IS A STONY HILL OUTSIDE OF JERUSALEM. IT IS BARREN AND GRIM. FLOCKS OF CARRION BIRDS HOVER OVER IT, WAITING THEIR TURN TO DEVOUR THE CORPSES OF THE EXECUTED.

In this dreadful place, three inmates are being crucified. They writhe in pain as their hands and feet are brutally nailed onto a cross. The legionnaires rush to finish their task amongst shouts and mockery. With each blow of the hammer, the screaming of the swirling mob heightens, barely contained by the soldiers.

An anonymous bandit is being nailed to his cross. We don't know his name, nor that of his companion. We are unaware of his age, his appearance, his people, and even the crimes for which he is being crucified.

There is no difference between the two thieves either side of Jesus. At this moment, nothing indicates that one is "bad" and the other "good," because both of them insult the Teacher.

The excited crowd moves a step closer to the crosses beneath a sullen sky. It is now Jesus of Nazareth who is being stripped of His clothes. Unlike the others, Jesus' body is covered with blood as a result of the blows. The thief follows the Nazarene's torture with astonishment and observes—with indignation—the undeserved wounds inflicted upon this man whom he secretly admires. The soldiers have even placed a crown of thorns on His head. They say that Pilate washed his hands after having Him flogged and condemning Him to death for declaring Himself the "King of the Jews." **Would He let Himself be mistreated like this if He were the Messiah?**

“

An anonymous bandit is being nailed to his cross. We don't know his name, nor that of his companion. We are unaware of his age, his appearance, his people, and even the crimes for which he is being crucified.”

The Teacher sparked in him the desire to start a new life before he let himself be dragged into the gang of Barrabas. He had listened to the young Rabbi but did not follow Him because of peer pressure. Thus, he ended up being a criminal. But ever since he ran into Jesus, the light of His words has made a crack that is still open in his dark heart. That is why he asks himself:

“Why does He allow others to treat Him this way? Why, Him being so noble, has the Sanhedrin delivered Him to the Romans? The priests insist: He must die because He calls Himself the Son of God.” (See John 19: 7).

But how could He possibly perform miracles if God were not with Him? Who is this Man? They say that bloodthirsty Pilate declared:

“I find no fault in Him at all.” (John 18: 38).

The magistrate—cowardly and unjust—pardoned Barabbas, the head of the gang. At the same time, he condemns the two poor accomplices to be crucified. The Teacher has even been flogged. The cruel paradoxes of life! Barabbas, “the son of his father,” a bastard, is free, whilst Jesus is condemned for calling Himself the “Son of the heavenly Father.” Today, here, the innocent will die in the place of the criminal. What Barabbas does not know is that there, on that central cross where he should have hung, the Rabbi hangs, and with that death much more than his destiny will be decided...

The crowd mocks the Nazarene. The thief believes that Jesus has shattered the hopes of the people. A few days ago, in a triumphal demonstration in Jerusalem, He was hailed as the promised king who would free Israel from the Roman yoke and restore the throne of David. But He has disappointed the people and they have Him crucified. **They say He already announced that they would kill Him. So if He knew, why didn't He do anything to prevent it from happening? What kind of prophet is He?**



At this point the criminal agrees with Pilate. Is there any truth in this jungle of oppressors and oppressed, other than the fact that the weak fall victims to the strong?

The thief has heard that Jesus announced His resurrection on the third day. It is said that He restored the life of a young man in Nain and a girl in Capernaum. They also say that He insisted that they were asleep. Several claim to have seen Lazarus of Bethany come out alive from the tomb. How can Someone who gives life back to others, resign Himself to die? Who is this Man? A prophet of God? Then why doesn't God defend Him? Is He crazy? No, Jesus seems very sane. An impostor? No, the Teacher has always been sincere. A deluded person? Impossible, He is very much lucid. What if He were the expected Messiah? How can it be that no one believes in His mission? Could it be that His kingdom is not of this world as He claims? What if His kingdom were celestial, in other words, located beyond life and death?

Everyone rebukes Him, even the other thief. They sneer at Him, saying,

"If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross. Save Yourself and us." (Matthew 27: 40, 42, Luke 23: 39).

The voice of the other thief joins the voice of the mob, soldiers, magistrates, Hebrews and pagans. They all shout against the Nazarene. But now, the "good thief" keeps quiet, looking at a silent and unresisting Jesus. Suffering in solitude with humanity against Him. Even enemies conspire together against Him. Herod with Pilate, the Pharisees with the Sadducees, the rulers with the people, the Romans with the Jews, and the victims with the executioners.

Jesus is silent, as if He were a voluntary offering. Above His head, at the top of the *stipes*,¹ the wind shakes the insulting sign that Pilate has ordered: "This is the King of the Jews," written in the three languages of the country, as if to give a universal meaning to His claim of "reigning" over His people. Suddenly, a ray of light filters through the clouds, and the thief witnesses the tenderness of Jesus before His mother's pain, when He entrusts her to the care of one of His disciples. The face of Jesus reflects majesty and magnanimity. The thief is impressed.

The darkness that surrounds the cross seems to cover the whole earth now, as if this execution had cosmic proportions. All at once, Jesus' prayer touches his soul:

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." (Luke 23: 34)

In the thief's mind—after hearing and seeing Jesus—a genuine conversion takes place; he now knows who Jesus is. That heart capable of forgiving its executioners, that love that embraces all mortals—including those who torture Him—can only come from God. Because there is no human hatred that does not beget hatred. Nobody of this world would ask God for forgiveness for his executioners: those who blaspheme, torture and crucify him so unjustly. The tortured thief understands that the invoked forgiveness includes him, and he has the intuition that **humanity is thus divided in two: those who accept the grace of that forgiveness and those who reject it.**

The Teacher's words mean, "Let me be to blame instead... I am the friend who will never leave you. I am the light behind the darkness. (...) I am change and hope. I am the refining fire. I am the door where you thought there was only wall. I am what comes after deserving... I am gift without cost... I am... Before the foundations of the world, I am..."²

“

What if He were the expected Messiah?”



A revelation dazzles the outlaw: the kingdom Jesus belongs to and in which He already reigns, is above all the kingdoms of this violent world. This man embodies the kingdom of God, the kingdom of love that has come near to us in Him, which we can access already if we let Him reign within us. (Luke 10: 9; 17: 21).

The thief embraces this truth, which fascinates him. The kings of this world are not as strong as they believe themselves to be. He sees in Jesus the awaited Messiah, his King and Saviour. In this being that is dying, he doesn't see the curse of crucifixion, but rather the greatest blessing promised by God to humanity to redeem it from its misery. He sees that the grace of God is able to forgive the worst of the guilty (2 Corinthians 9: 8). This Man who dies with him—denied, betrayed, cursed, and insulted—is revealing the infinite love God has for him.

The wonderful teachings of Jesus—some of which he already treasures—are now filled with meaning. Oh, how I wish I had followed Him! That is why he dares to ask that His grace reach him, even if it is to the point of death. Shouting with all his soul he says:

“Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” (Luke 23:42).

And with what relief does he listen to the Master in his agony!

“I promise you that you will be with Me in Paradise.”³

Both the greatness of the promised salvation and the faith of the thief are amazing. His faith is not shaken by the helplessness of a crucified saviour, nor the apparent triumph of His enemies, nor his own crimes. He knows that he is forgiven! **He begins to acknowledge and worship a God who, because of love, humbled Himself and took not just human form but experienced the sting of death.**

He clings to hope as he sees his Saviour in agony at his side. Down below people shout at Him, and clouds of flies cover His open wounds. The “good thief” sees Him triumphant over death, resurrected, glorious, reigning over the living and the dead. And he expresses his desire to be with Him in His kingdom of glory.

This thief has already entered the kingdom of grace without going through baptism. He is the first believer in history who dies a “Christian,” that is, believing in Jesus. Although he does not receive the baptism of water, he does receive the baptism of blood, of Spirit, and of fire, because his old self has died. He has put what remains of his life as an offering on the altar, and any “firewood” is good for the divine fire...

The first fruit of the good thief is to confess Jesus Christ before his companion with two declarations: the holiness of Christ (“He did no evil”) and His final victory (“when you come into your kingdom”). The second fruit, when he says to him:

“

This man embodies the kingdom of God, the kingdom of love that has come near to us in Him, which we can access already if we let Him reign within us.”



“Do you not fear God? **Do you not take Him seriously, to whom you owe your existence?**”

He is already a witness ...

Sabbath—rest—is near. First, his legs will be broken so he dies and then his body will be thrown to the ground: food for the vultures. It doesn't matter. John says, “happy” are those who die in the Lord, “because their works follow them.” (Revelation 14: 13). Although he is unaware of know it, **the wrongdoer on the cross will continue to be the most appropriate person to eternally remind us that salvation is by grace.** He and Mary Magdalene—the woman freed from perdition who is at the foot of the cross—will be the first fruits of the saved. The thief, the first to believe in the crucified saviour; and the courtesan, the first to believe in the risen saviour.

Now Jesus can die in peace. The good thief has given Him at least one piece of evidence that His sacrifice is not in vain. With a loud voice, He says:

“Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.” (Luke 23:46). Mission accomplished!

Having said this, He dies.

Everything has been fulfilled. Isaiah wrote that the Messiah would be counted among the evildoers (Isaiah 53: 12), and the prophecy states that the most sinful could become children of God. This story makes me cry tears of joy because I see that God wants to transform the life of each one of us so that we can be with Him in paradise.

If the inspired text has not wanted us to know the name of the bandit and has preferred him to be known as “the good thief,” there must be a reason (tradition calls him Dismas). We know nothing more about him. But his profession of faith is perhaps the most impressive that any man has ever made because he did not believe in a risen and glorified Christ—as we all other believers later believed—but in a Saviour who was tortured like him and crucified by his side.

The promise made to him is also the most beautiful that anyone has ever heard. Because Jesus promised him that he would be in paradise with Him.

This account of the conversion of the good thief is a treaty of justification by faith that is more impressive and convincing than all the theological papers I have read on the subject. Peter seems to identify with the good thief when he says, “I have been crucified with Christ.” (Galatians 2: 20).

This story teaches us that there is no person “so rotten” that they cannot be rescued by the grace of Christ. It shows us that the most important thing for salvation is to desire it as strongly as the thief desired to be with Jesus in paradise. We “are” in Golgotha, where we see three crosses. Either we identify with that of the good thief, or with the other. Jesus is in the centre, waiting.

As the sun sets on Calvary, the shadow of the cross grows larger and extends farther away, until it reaches beyond the horizon, to the entire universe. **Nailed to the hard ground and pointing to the sky, the wood tears space and time in two. It is like a vertical wound, from top to bottom, before and after, while His open arms embrace the entire world. It is a meeting point, a crossroads, a guiding post**

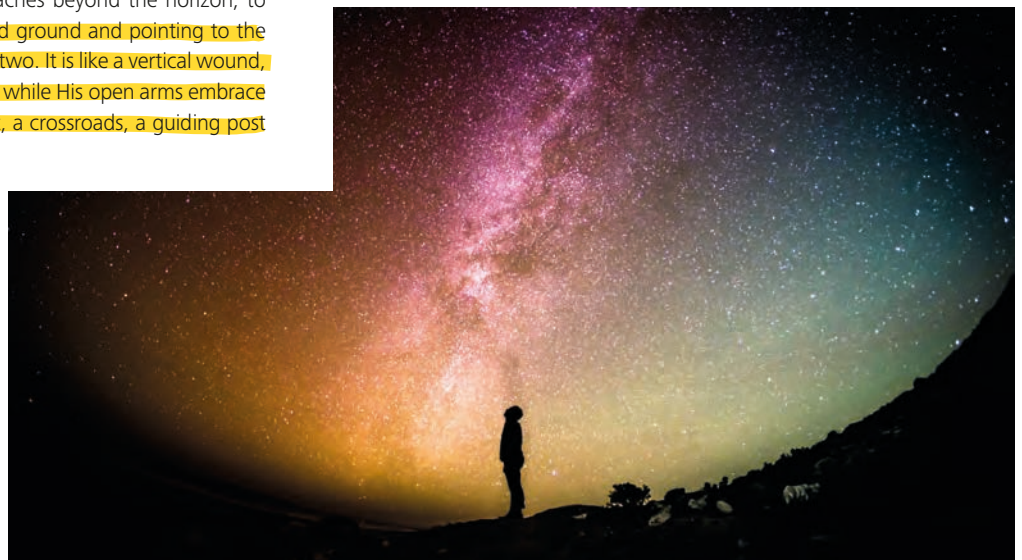
that points the way to eternity where we can encounter Jesus. A bridge stretched over the abyss, the cross has turned from being an emblem of death to becoming the symbol of life without end.

Today—being aware of our spiritual needs—we could well pray with the wise man, “Lord, I do not ask for the forgiveness granted to Peter, nor the grace granted to Paul. I am content with what you promised the good thief on the cross.”⁴ //

-
- 1 Vertical pole that holds the weight of the *crux* or *patibulum* (the horizontal crossbar).
 - 2 Francis Spufford, *Unapologetic: Why, Despite Everything, Christianity Can Still Make Surprising Emotional Sense*, New York: Harper One, 2013, p. 142.
 - 3 The original Greek phrase has no punctuation, so it can be perfectly translated as, “Truly I say to you today, you will be with Me in Paradise.” However, the majority of the Bibles translate this text as, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise,” as a promise of salvation that was to be fulfilled that very day. Now, Jesus did not go to paradise that same day since, after His resurrection, He states that He has not yet ascended to the presence of the Father (John 20: 17). That means that this passage would be better translated in the sense of “I assure you today—in spite of how incredible it seems—that you will be with Me in paradise in the final resurrection like all the saved,” in harmony with the general biblical teaching that salvation will happen for all at the same time (Hebrews 11: 39-40, see Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 751).
 - 4 This prayer appears on Nicolaus Copernicus’ tomb (1473-1543), in the church of Warmic (Poland). (Roberto Badenas, *Encuentros decisivos [Decisive Encounters]*, Madrid: Safeliz, 2017, p. 239).

“None have fallen so low, none are so vile, but that they can find deliverance in Christ. (...) No cry from a soul in need, though it fail of utterance in words, will be unheeded.”

Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 258.6.



 QUESTIONS

1. Jesus hangs on the cross. How do you think His disciples felt at this moment? What would they think about Jesus as Messiah, Saviour of the world, or of His claim to be the Son of God?

2. Jesus says a prayer, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” (Luke 23: 34). How do His words impact you, given the context? How can you apply them to your day to day life?

3. It seems that Jesus’ plan has failed. What do you see when you look at Jesus on the cross?

4. Jesus is on the cross as a result of the efforts of religious leaders (Luke 22: 2, John 11: 47-50). In what way can we be guilty of the same thing, of rejecting Jesus as Messiah—as individuals and as a church?

5. The good thief “did not believe in a risen and glorified Christ—as we all other believers later believed—but in a Saviour who was tortured like him and crucified by his side.” What do you learn about faith and salvation when you consider the good thief and his encounter with Jesus?



PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Today is the last day of this week of prayer. Every day we have accompanied Jesus in His decisive encounters with people of His time. Now it's time for you to have your own decisive (re)encounter with Jesus. Choose one of the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John) and read it in one or two months. You can, for example, read a chapter every day. Make it a meaningful experience, so choose a special time and place. Start each session by praying to God, asking Him to meet with you.

Here are some ideas of what you can do:

1



YOUVERSION BIBLE APP

Use an app to read the Bible, such as YouVersion Bible app: <https://www.youversion.com/the-bible-app/>. It offers 1,755 versions of the Bible and 1,134 languages for free. When you create an account, the app will allow you to highlight texts, add notes and bookmarks, create images with the verses, add friends, and share on social media. After reading each chapter, choose your favorite text, create a verse image and share it with your friends or on your social media.

2



READ-SUMMARIZE-APPLY

Choose a notebook to use as a journal and follow the steps:

1. Read the chosen text at least 2 times.
2. Summarize what happened.
3. Apply: What does the text say to you? How will you apply it to your life?

3



CREATIVE RESPONSE

Read the text and react through the arts: write a poem or a story, paint a picture, compose a song...

4



DISCOVERY BIBLE READING

Use these 5 questions to get the most of this chapter:

1. What is new?
2. What surprises you?
3. What don't you understand?
4. What will you obey or apply?
5. What will you share with someone this week?

5



MEETING JESUS BIBLE STUDY METHOD

Source: Andy Deane, *Learn to study the Bible: Forty different step-by-step methods to help you discover, apply, and enjoy God's Word*, USA: Xulon Press, 2009, pp.167- 171.

Choose a notebook to use as a journal and follow the steps:

1. Read the chapter.
2. Take note of the Context.
3. Summarize the words of Jesus, as well as His emotions and tone of voice.
4. Write down Jesus' response.
5. What do others say about Jesus?
6. What is His reaction?
7. What is my reaction?
8. How will I apply it to my life?

6



NEVER ALONE

Get someone to study the gospel with you. At the beginning or end of each day, you can text or call to share what has impacted you the most from the text and why.



GO DEEPER

- › Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 19
- › Romans 1:16.
- › Matthew 5
- › Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, chap. 78 “Calvary” and chap. 79 “It is Finished.”
- › Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ Magazine*, edited by Youth Ministries, South German Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist® Church, Germany: Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2018. Contact youth@eud.adventist.org for more information on the Steps to Christ project.
- › Roberto Badenas, *Decisive Encounters*, Madrid: Safeliz, 2018, chap. 19 “The Promise.”
- › “To return evil for good is devilish; to return good for good is human; to return good for evil is divine.” (Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, London: Elliot Scott, 1910, p. 89.)
- › “He [God] has infinite attention to spare for each one of us. He does not have to deal with us in the mass. You are as much alone with Him as if you were the only being He had ever created. When Christ died, He died for you individually just as much as if you had been the only man in the world.” (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, London: Fount Paperbacks, 1997, pp. 139-140.)
- › “It is a scourge of consumer societies [...] to consider people as if they were things, to make distinctions between things according to their value, and between men according to their power. He [Jesus] has a child’s heart that ignores such distinctions. He addresses everyone—the virtuous and the criminal, the beggar and the prince—with the same clear voice, as if there were no virtuosos or criminals, no beggars or princes, but only—each time—two human beings face to face, and between the two the word that comes and goes.” (Christian Bobin, *L’homme qui marche*, Cognac: Le temps qu’il fait, 1995, p. 15.)
- › “Imagine God making us a similar offer:
I will give you anything you desire. Anything. Perfect love. Eternal peace. You will never be afraid or alone. No confusion will enter your mind. No anxiety or boredom will enter your heart. You will never lack for anything.
There will be no sin. No guilt. No rules. No expectations. No failure. You will never be lonely. You will never hurt. You will never die.
Only you will never see my face.
 Would you want it? Neither would I. It’s not enough. Who wants heaven without God? Heaven is not heaven without God.
 A painless, deathless eternity will be nice, but inadequate...
 We may speak about a place where there are no tears, no death, no fear, no night; but those are just the benefits of heaven. The beauty of heaven is seeing God. Heaven is God’s heart.” (Max Lucado, *When God Whispers Your Name*, Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1999, pp. 172-173).

NAILED TO THE HARD GROUND AND POINTING TO THE SKY, THE WOOD TEARS SPACE AND TIME IN TWO. IT IS LIKE A VERTICAL WOUND, FROM TOP TO BOTTOM, BEFORE AND AFTER, WHILE HIS OPEN ARMS EMBRACE THE ENTIRE WORLD. IT IS A MEETING POINT, A CROSSROADS, A GUIDING POST THAT POINTS THE WAY TO ETERNITY WHERE WE CAN ENCOUNTER JESUS.





ACTIVITIES

Today is the last day of the week of prayer, so we recommend you do something special: organize a picnic or a dinner to conclude this special week.

You can ask each participant to bring something to eat or drink. Decorate the room to make it especially warm and welcoming, and choose special music to put in the background.

During the picnic or dinner you can do the following activities:

ACTIVITY 1. MENU OF PROMISES

Materials: large paper or coloured construction paper, tape, scissors, pens or markers, decoration material

Activity Description:

- › Each person must bring a personal photograph. The picture should represent a moment of their lives in which they felt God's promises being fulfilled in their lives.
- › Stick your photographs on the wall, on coloured paper or cardboard, or on the windows. Write the name of each person next to the photograph. You may also write a description.
- › During the picnic or dinner, each person can share their experience of when God fulfilled a promise in their lives, thus enjoying a succulent meal of fond memories together.

ACTIVITY 2. EXPRESS ART

Materials: music player, speakers, watercolours, paint brushes, white canvas (or thick paper that you can paint on)

Activity Description:

Listen to the song “**Your Promise**” by Christian songwriter María José Jimeno.

[English: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3DAIXamZAG0>]

- › First, listen to the song with your eyes closed, so you can concentrate on the lyrics.
- › Then go over the lyrics as if you were reading a poem.
- › Finally, play the song a second time (or a third time if needed). Meanwhile, each participant should paint, on their canvas, the feelings, emotions, thoughts and spiritual meaning the song inspires through its melody and its lyrics. This is supposed to be a spontaneous drawing or painting. You can share it afterwards if you wish, and explain what it means to you.

[NOTE: the song for this activity can be changed to one that makes more sense in your context.]

ACTIVITY 3. TIME CAPSULE

Materials: 1 decorated box, preferably one with a lock, envelopes and letter paper, pencils or pens, aromatic candles.

Activity Description:

- Each person should write a letter to their future self, to be opened in one year exactly. For example, in the next Week of Prayer.
In this letter, you can express your personal desires, your needs, your dreams, your projects, your prayers, etc. Also include how you see yourself in one year, the things you will be grateful for and the **promises** you envision will be fulfilled with God's help in one year.
Keep the candles on as people write their personal letters. (*NOTE: the sense of smell is intimately linked with the limbic system, which is responsible for the functions of memory and learning. That is why a particular smell will evoke certain past events.*)
- Put each letter in its envelope. Each person must write their name on the envelope. Place the envelope inside the box or "Time Capsule." Also put some aromatic candles in the box.
- Finally, close the box and lock it. Someone should keep it and be its "guardian" for one year. Make the commitment to meet again in one year to open the "Time Capsule" and hand out the letters to their owner.

BONUS ACTIVITY

Before you leave, you may hand out a gift box of cards with Bible promises to each person.



CREDITS



Decisive Encounters, Youth Week of Prayer

Author: Roberto Badenas

Based on the book *Encuentros Decisivos* [Decisive Encounters] © 2017 Editorial Safeliz S.L Pradillo, 6 Pol. Ind. La Mina, E-28770 · Colmenar Viejo, Madrid, Spain

TEL.: [+34] 91 845 98 77 · FAX: [+34] 91 845 98 65 admin@safeliz.com · www.safeliz.com

ORIGINAL TITLE:

Encuentros decisivos,
Semana de oración para jóvenes

PROJECT DIRECTOR:

Jonatán Tejel

PROJECT COORDINATOR AND EDITOR:

Alexandra Mora

ADAPTATION OF THE TEXT IN SPANISH:

Andrés Tejel

CONTRIBUTORS:

Sarai de la Fuente Gelabert, Samuel Gil,
Alexandra Mora, Javier Palos Ibáñez, Silvia Palos
Ibáñez, Loyda Pamplona, Esther Quiles Peiró.

TRANSLATION TO ENGLISH:

Alexandra Mora and Astrid Tejel

PROOFREADER:

Alexandra Browne

DESIGN AND LAYOUT:

Simon Eitzenberger (www.desim.de)

IMAGES:

unsplash.com: p.1+80 Ian Espinosa; p.2 Hunter Bryant;
p.7 Jeshoots.com; p.10 Oliver Sjoström; p.11 Alexander
Andrews; p.12 Quino Al; p.13 Sam Manns; p.14 Bruno
Nascimento; p.18 Tiko Giorgadze; p.19 Vince Fleming;
p.20 Vasily Koloda; p.21 Lina Trochez; p.22 Hian
Oliveira; p.27 Fabio Neo Amato; p.28 Jon Tyson;
p. 29 Neonbrand; p.30 Dino Reichmuth; p.34 Sam
Burriss; p.35 Ben White; p.36 Nasa; p.37 Aiony Haust;
p.38 Kyo; p. 44 Mitch Lensink; p.45 Anthony Ginsbrook;
p.46 Remi Walle; p.50 Ian Espinosa; p.51 Glenn Cars-
tens; p.53 Zen Maldives; p.54 Guille Pozzi; p.58 Bruno
Van der Kraan; p.59 Sharon Mccurcheon; p.60 Rodolfo
Sanches Carvalho; p.61 Alexandru Tudorache; p.61
Omar Lopez; p.66 Bryan Minear; p.67 Paula May; p.68
Jeremy Perkins; p.69 Johan Mouchet; p.70 Greg Rakozy;
p.72 Thom Holmes, Aaron Bruden; p.73 Ben White,
Ian Espinosa; p.75 Annie Spratt; p.77 Helena Lopes

Pexels.com: p.26 Úrsula Madariaga; p.52 Juan Pablo
Arenas; p.62 Ylanite Koppens; p.72 Pixabay; p.73
rawpixel.com;

Shutterstock: p.42-43 Frankie's

Decisive Encounters, Youth Week of Prayer

© 2018 Youth Department of the Inter-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist® Church, Schosshal-
denstrasse, 17, 3006 Bern, Switzerland. All rights reserved.

youth@eud.adventist.org

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright
© 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

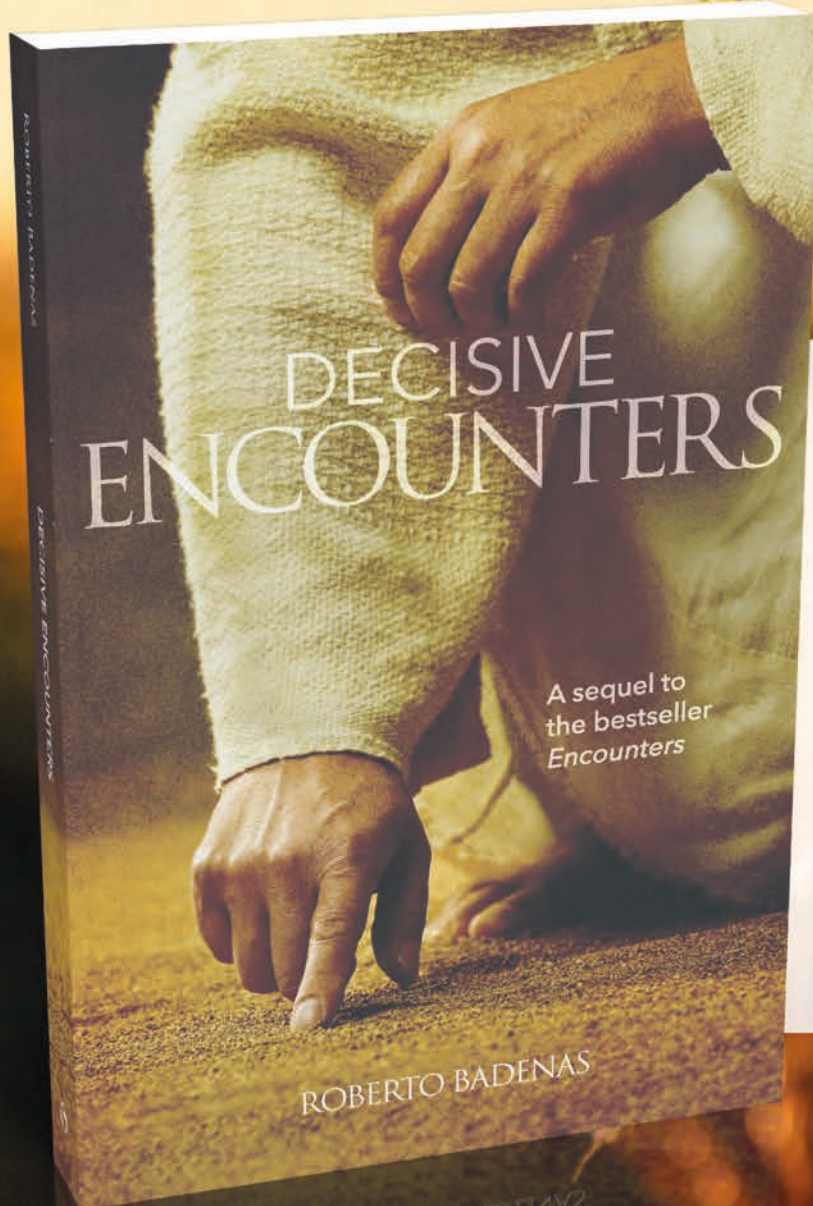
Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by
permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Permission to print this Youth Week of Prayer granted for local use in churches, youth groups, and other
Christian educational activities. Special permission is not necessary. However, the contents of this Youth
Week of Prayer may not be reproduced in any other form without written permission from the publisher. The
contents may not be altered in any way. All rights reserved.

1st edition 2019

Printed in Spain

DECISIVE ENCOUNTERS



LIFE IS A JOURNEY, FULL OF SURPRISES, EMOTIONS, POSSIBILITIES, AND ENCOUNTERS. SOME OF THESE ENCOUNTERS—WHETHER SOUGHT OR UNEXPECTED—CAN CHANGE THE TRAJECTORY OF OUR LIVES. THESE ARE DECISIVE ENCOUNTERS.

SOFT COVER - 260 PAGES



www.publicacionesadventistas.com

Jesus.
CARPENTER. TEACHER.
SAVIOUR. MESSIAH.

Immanuel.

God became man to encounter humanity.

*Life is full of encounters, the expected, the unexpected.
Each of them transforms our lives. But there is one
encounter that is above all: the encounter with Jesus.
He never leaves us the same.*

When you finish reading,
THE TURN WILL BE YOURS.



Seventh-day
Adventist® Church
INTER-EUROPEAN DIVISION

Youth Ministries Department

Inter-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist® Church
Schosshaldenstrasse 17, 3006 Bern, Switzerland