

Thy Word Is a Lamp Unto My Feet: The Bible for Today
Growing Through the Word

Lesson #12 for June 23, 2007

Scriptures: Matthew 22:37,38; Galatians 2:20; 5:14; Hebrews 4:2; 5:12-6:3.

1. What does it mean to “grow up spiritually”? What does faith do to you? Read Acts 16:31. Is faith really the only requirement for salvation? Think back over your own experience. Did your life change completely when you accepted Jesus Christ? What actually happens when we begin to have faith? Does “faith” save us? Or does God save us? What type of faith is necessary to save us?
2. Could you write out a short definition of faith?

Faith is just a word we use to describe a relationship with God as with a Person well-known. The better we know Him, the better the relationship may be. Faith implies an attitude toward God of love, trust, and deepest admiration. It means having enough confidence in God—based on the more-than-adequate evidence revealed—to be willing to believe what He says, to accept what He offers, and to do what He wishes—without reservation—for the rest of eternity. Anyone who has such faith would be perfectly safe to save. This is why faith is the only requirement for heaven. Faith also means that, like Abraham and Moses, we know God well enough to reverently ask Him, “Why?” *A. Graham Maxwell*

3. “Sure, we are saved by faith, but what kind of faith?” *Adult Teacher’s Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 137 (Sabbath afternoon, June 16). Do you agree with this statement? Are we saved by faith? Or are we saved by a relationship with Someone? It is Christ who saves us, not faith! Faith is just a word we use to describe our relationship with God.
4. What role does the Bible play in faith? If “faith” is just a word we use to describe a relationship with God like someone that we know well, how do we get to know Him better? How do we get to know Him at all?
5. Jesus speaks about the Christian life as being born all over again. (John 3:1-16) What does it mean to be a “spiritual babe”? Many Christians look at the statement by Jesus “unless you change and become like children” (Matthew 18:3) and take that to mean that the trust of a small child is the essence of salvation. But what about other passages of Scripture such as Hebrews 5:11-6:3? Clearly Paul believed that we must not remain as little children; we must grow. Read also Ephesians 4:11-16. These verses suggest that a small child would not be safe in the final days of this earth’s history. What about us? Are we tossed about by “every strange wind of doctrine”?
6. Note these words from the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Sunday, June 17:

It’s clear from the Word that though we are saved by faith, though ***our acceptance with God is based on the righteousness of Jesus credited to us by grace through faith alone***, the Christian life is one of spiritual and moral progress. We are to change, and for the better; we are to reflect more and more of the character of God (see 1 Peter 1:14-16).... Why, as you seek to advance in the Christian life, must your hope of salvation rest not on yourself but only on Jesus and the merits of His righteousness?

What are “the merits of His righteousness” and how do they “work” for your

salvation? How are they “credited” to your account? Is this a legal transaction? Is this a case of heavenly bookkeeping? If the “merits of His righteousness” are credited to us, does that affect our behavior in any way? Are we really changed? Or is the only change the one found in the records in heaven?

7. Some of us feel very strongly that there is no “magic” occurring in our salvation and our relationship with God. God is not performing some kind of transformation which affects only the books in heaven. We are saved by a relationship with Jesus Christ described by the word “faith.” The same Greek word is also translated as “belief,” “trust,” or “confidence.”

It is a law both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature that by beholding we become changed. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell. It becomes assimilated to that which it is accustomed to love and reverence. Man will never rise higher than his standard of purity or goodness or truth. If self is his loftiest ideal, he will never attain to anything more exalted. Rather, he will constantly sink lower and lower. The grace of God alone has power to exalt man. Left to himself, his course must inevitably be downward. {GC 555.1}

If we give God the opportunity and if we really want to learn about Him and become like Him, He will actually make the changes in our lives. We can become like Him only if we give Him the opportunity to work in our minds through Bible study, prayer, and witnessing. We do not make these changes ourselves. God makes the changes occur; but they are the ordinary, natural working of the laws of the mind.

8. Clearly, the life and example of Jesus were in stark contrast to virtually every other human life. How did He turn out to be so different? If God is, in His very essence, love, how can we learn to be loving ourselves? The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* suggests that the answer is found in Zechariah 4:6. Does that verse help you?
9. The Bible is a record of the lives, failures, and some successes of our spiritual ancestors. How does reviewing this evidence help you to live a better life?

We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history.--*General Conference Bulletin*, 1893, p. 24; *Life Sketches*, p. 196; *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 31; 3SM 162.3; LDE 72.1.

10. There is an interesting and apparently contradictory picture presented in the book of Hebrews. Hebrews 3 and 4 talk about the failure of the faith of the children of Israel as they left Egypt and sought to enter the land of Canaan. But Hebrews 11:29,30 says:

²⁹It was faith that made the Israelites able to cross the Red Sea as if on dry land; when the Egyptians tried to do it, the water swallowed them up. ³⁰It was faith that made the walls of Jericho fall down after the Israelites had marched around them for seven days. (GNB)

Did they have faith or not?

11. Review the experience of the children of Israel in your own mind. After being a privileged group living in the land of Goshen, they were subjected by a new government and forced to work as slaves. Then they saw Moses rise in Pharaoh’s household and they had hope for

some relief. But Moses was accused of murder and fled. Their depression and slavery become even more oppressive. Suddenly, Moses returned and through an almost unbelievable sequence of miracles called the 10 plagues of Egypt, they were allowed to leave. A few days later, the Egyptian army was trying to force them to return to Egypt, but the children of Israel miraculously escaped, walking through the Red Sea on dry land. If you had been among them, how would you have felt about Yahweh, the God of the Hebrew people, at that point in time? Many modern TV evangelists suggest that if we just had more faith, there would be more miracles.

12. Based on that idea, the children of Israel had an enormous amount of faith at that time. Did they? Or was that a time of very little faith?
13. Think of the times in the Bible when there were a lot of miracles—the deliverance from Egypt, the days of Elijah and Elisha, and during the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. What was the condition of faith of God's people during those times? When people see more miracles occurring, does that greatly expand their faith? Those were times of **low faith** and not times of great faith!
14. Faith, or the lack thereof, isn't an intellectual matter, or even a matter of signs and wonders. It's a matter of the heart. We can grow in faith only to the degree that we surrender our hearts and souls to the Lord; we can grow in faith only through exercising our faith; we can grow in faith only to the degree that we study God's Word with a heart open to learn from Him. (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, Monday, June 18)

What does it mean to say faith is "a matter of the heart"? Is that where we weigh evidence?

15. Read Romans 10:17. What does this verse tell us about growth in faith? Compare Hebrews 11. **Almost the entire group of saints listed in this chapter as examples for us of faith lived before there were any scriptures! How did they develop such faith?**
16. Look again at the statement of Jesus about the faith of a child. (Matthew 18:3) What is the most important characteristic of a child? If a child fails to grow physically, we become alarmed. If the child fails to grow mentally, we panic! If a child fails to grow socially, we seek out medications and counselors. If a child fails to grow spiritually, should we say, "That's wonderful, how sweet"? Or is a "spiritual child" very vulnerable? What was Peter talking about in 1 Peter 2:2: "Be like newborn babies, always thirsty for the pure spiritual milk, so that by drinking it you may grow up and be saved"? (*GNB*)
17. Read Matthew 22:37,38. Compare Romans 13:8,10; 1 Corinthians 13:8; Galatians 5:14; 1 John 3:14; 4:7,8,16. What kind of love is being described in these verses? Is it possible for ordinary mortal human beings to exhibit this kind of love? Have you seen many examples around you? But love is what God is! How can we get to know Him and understand His love better? **Jesus recognized that if we could truly learn to exhibit this kind of love, we would stick out like sore thumbs in a selfish world! (John 13:35)**
18. Is this kind of love something we are, or something we do, or both? Every human being must develop a sense of self-worth. How can we develop this sense of self-worth and be truly loving at the same time? This kind of change does not come about naturally!

The Christian's life is not a modification or improvement of the old, but a transformation of nature. There is a death to self and sin, and a new life

altogether. This change can be brought about only by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit. Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, page 172.

If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things are become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17, *NKJV*)

19. Read Galatians 5:22,23. These verses suggest that love can come about only through a divine implantation in our lives. It is very interesting to note that at the end of that list of characteristics is temperance, or self-control! **How can a naturally-selfish human being under self-control ever exercise true love?**

20. Our lesson suggests that:

Faith has three parts: 1) believing in a set of doctrines, 2) believing in Jesus as our Savior, and 3) following His will and way. The first is intellectual, and the other two are live-changing, involving surrender to Jesus (Philippians 4:13). *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 143.

How do these words fit with your understanding of the “faith process”?

21. Read Galatians 2:20. Let us make no mistake about the fact that it is not natural for selfish human beings to be truly loving. It requires a complete transformation. This can happen only as we read Scripture, begin to see and understand God and Jesus through the stories of Scripture, and get to know Them as personal Friends. Paul says this kind of transformation requires a daily death to our selfish selves.
22. Could we ever come to the place that we could see God’s will for our lives so clearly that we might recognize that His will is always best? Could we ever admit that His will for our lives is even better than our own?
23. Only through daily conversation with God—through prayer and Bible study—can we hope to know God as a Friend and be transformed by that knowledge. But that is God’s most fervent wish for every one of us.

Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own. {COL 69.1}

But that transformation requires that we be willing to accept it and give God the opportunity and the time to actually change us. The entire Godhead is waiting with great longing to see this happen in Their people here on this earth. Will we ever comply with Their wishes?

24. Could the Word of God become our most precious treasure? Could our time of Bible study and prayer become our favorite time of the day? Could we even reach the place where we would rather spend time with God than spend time watching our favorite television program, playing with children or grandchildren, vacationing, or working? Will the final events of this earth’s history take place unless we do?

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