

In the Crucible with Christ Struggling with All Energy

Lesson #6 for August 6, 2022

Scriptures: John 16:5-15; Colossians 1:28-29; 1 Peter 1:13; Matthew 5:29; Genesis 32.

1. Why is it that some people cannot get past serious problems in their lives even many years later while others with God's help can put those things behind them?
2. So, what is the role of our wills or our willpower in the battle with self and sin? And how do feelings enter into that mix?
3. We know that God has won the great controversy. That will never change! How can we make sure that we stay faithful and on His side?
4. In the plan of salvation, we are to cooperate with God. In fact, He is supposed be the One in charge! How often do we pray and read our Bibles, and yet, things do not seem to change? How often do we prevent the Holy Spirit from doing His transformative work in our lives?

John 16:8-13: [Jesus said:] ⁸ “And when he [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will prove to the people of the world that they are wrong about sin and about what is right and about God’s judgement. ⁹They are wrong about sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰they are wrong about what is right, because I am going to the Father and you will not see me any more; ¹¹and they are wrong about judgement, because the ruler of this world has already been judged.

¹² “I have much more to tell you, but now it would be too much for you to bear. ¹³When, however, the Spirit comes, who reveals the truth about God, he will lead you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own authority, but he will speak of what he hears, and will tell you of things to come.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., John 16:8-13). New York: American Bible Society [abbreviated as *Good News Bible*].^{†‡}

5. How does the Spirit reveal the truth about God? Isn't that what the great controversy is all about? The Holy Spirit's greatest contribution has been to give us the Bible by inspiring prophets and apostles to write and then to preserve the Bible. So, if we want to connect with the Holy Spirit, the Bible should be our first approach.
6. As we have stated in these lessons earlier, God refuses to force our freedom. He will not control our choices. If He did, we would be automatons rather than free moral beings.
7. Remember that God did not refute or change the choices or decisions of Satan and all the angels who rebelled right in His presence in heaven. Think of all the ways that God could have prevented that rebellion in heaven from progressing. Then, turn to the Garden of Eden. Think of all the ways God could have prevented Eve from taking that “apple.” Martin Luther suggested that if God had tempted Adam, he would have said “No!” But, in each case, God made it very clear what the consequences would be if they, and we, disobeyed. But, humans disobeyed, and we continue to disobey!

8. We must consciously choose God's side in each given situation. Can you think of times recently in your own life in which there has been a battle between the Holy Spirit's will and your own selfish will? What can we do to make sure we hear God's voice when He speaks to us?
9. While this may not be a popular thing to think about, nothing important is accomplished without effort.

Colossians 1:28-29: ²⁸So we preach Christ to everyone. With all possible wisdom we warn and teach them in order to bring each one into God's presence as a mature individual in union with Christ. ²⁹**To get this done I toil and struggle, using the mighty strength which Christ supplies** and which is at work in me.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

Hebrews 12:4: For in your struggle against sin you have not yet had to resist to the point of being killed.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

10. Colossians 1:29 suggests that Paul was struggling not in his own strength but in the strength which God gave him to overcome. How does that work? Is there a way for us to overcome using God's strength?
11. We live in a world of labor-saving devices! We want to be able to accomplish more and more with less and less effort! Do you think the Devil wants us to think we can just comfortably glide into the kingdom of heaven?
12. Our human feelings often become almost overwhelming when it is time for us to make a choice. Think of the times when you might have even said to yourself, what do I feel like eating for supper? Or, what do I feel like doing today? Or, do I feel like going to work today? **God designed us to have feelings; but, they must not be the controlling influence in our lives.**

Jeremiah 17:9: [The LORD said:] "Who can understand the human heart?

There is nothing else so deceitful;

it is too sick to be healed."—*Good News Bible*.^{*‡}

13. It is useful to see and review some examples of places and times recorded in the Bible when people made very bad choices based on what their feelings were at the time.

Genesis 3:6: The woman saw how beautiful the tree was and how good its fruit would be to eat, and she thought how wonderful it would be to become wise. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, and he also ate it.—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

2 Samuel 11:2-4: ² One day, late in the afternoon, David got up from his nap and went to the palace roof. As he walked about up there, he saw a woman having a bath. She was very beautiful. ³So he sent a messenger to find out who she was, and learnt that she was Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite. ⁴David sent messengers to fetch her; they brought her to him and he made love to her. (She had just finished her monthly ritual of purification.) Then she went back home.—*Good News Bible*.^{*} [Bathsheba was a married woman. Why hadn't she been pregnant before? Why did she become pregnant after that one encounter with David?][‡]

Galatians 2:11-12: ¹¹ But when Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him in public, because he was clearly wrong. ¹²Before some men who had been sent by James arrived there, Peter had been eating with the Gentile brothers and sisters. But after these men arrived, he drew back and would not eat with the Gentiles, because he was afraid of those who were in favour of circumcising them.—*Good News Bible*.*†

14. In 1 Peter 1:13, Peter, without specifically saying so, was encouraging us to keep in mind the entire great controversy before we make important decisions. How can we know for sure we are not basing our choices on feeling, emotion, or desire? Are all our choices based on the Word of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

15. The Bible has some radical things to say about that.

Matthew 5:29-30: [Jesus said:] ²⁹ “So if your right eye causes you to sin, take it out and throw it away! It is much better for you to lose a part of your body than to have your whole body thrown into hell. ³⁰If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away! It is much better for you to lose one of your limbs than for your whole body to go to hell.”—*Good News Bible*.*‡

16. Virtually every true Christian would agree with that general principle. We do not want to go to hell! But, taking out an eye, or cutting off a leg! Is not that radical?

17. Many of us have, at one time or another in our lives, been controlled by wrong habits. We have heard many stories about smokers and alcoholics who miraculously lost their taste for the habit. But, most of the time, those kinds of miraculous changes do not happen. Changes of significant magnitude require a struggle between us, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and the Devil. **Does God sometimes allow such challenges? Do these struggles happen so that we recognize, once again, our need for Him?**

18. The story of Jacob is an amazing story, including deceiving his father and causing the wrath of his brother and escaping to Haran to live for 20 years with his relatives—during which time he ended up with two wives and two concubines—and then, finally, being encouraged by God to go back home. During that trip back home, Jacob had that incredible experience in which he fought with an unknown assailant. Did he think it was Esau? Or, one of Esau’s soldiers?

Genesis 32:22-32: ²² That same night Jacob got up, took his two wives, his two concubines, and his eleven children, and crossed the River Jabbok. ²³After he had sent them across, he also sent across all that he owned, ²⁴but he stayed behind, alone.

Then a **man** came and wrestled with him until just before daybreak. ²⁵When the **man** saw that he was not winning the struggle, he struck Jacob on the hip, and it was thrown out of joint. ²⁶The man said, “Let me go; daylight is coming.”

“I won’t, unless you bless me,” Jacob answered.

²⁷ “What is your name?” the man asked.

“Jacob,” he answered.

²⁸ **The man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob. You have struggled with God and with men, and you have won; so your name will be Israel.”**

²⁹ Jacob said, “Now tell me your name.”

But he answered, “Why do you want to know my name?” Then he blessed Jacob.

³⁰ Jacob said, “**I have seen God face to face**, and I am still alive”; so he named the place Peniel. ³¹The sun rose as Jacob was leaving Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. ³²Even today the descendants of Israel do not eat the muscle which is on the hip joint, because it was on this muscle that Jacob was struck.—*Good News Bible*.*†

19. The biblical account is recorded for our benefit. We know that **Jacob was actually struggling with Jesus Christ Himself**. Why would Jesus come to this earth and struggle with Jacob under those circumstances? How many of the beings of the onlooking universe were watching that struggle? Jacob needed to realize his total dependence upon God in that difficult, potentially life-threatening situation.
20. No doubt, Jacob often thought about his flight away from home and away from Esau and that vision he received at Bethel. Then, he was coming back, trying to reestablish himself in the promised land. When he received word that his brother was coming with 400 trained soldiers, he thought that his life was hanging by a very thin string.

[From the writings of Ellen G. White=EGW:] **Satan had accused Jacob before the angels of God, [That sounds like the story of Job!] claiming the right to destroy him because of his sin; he had moved upon Esau to march against him; and during the patriarch’s long night of wrestling, Satan endeavored to force upon him a sense of his guilt, in order to discourage him**, and break his hold upon God. When in his distress Jacob laid hold of the Angel, and made supplication with tears, the heavenly Messenger, in order to try his faith, also reminded him of his sin, and endeavored to escape from him. But Jacob would not be turned away. He had learned that God is merciful, and he cast himself upon His mercy. He pointed back to his repentance for his sin, and pleaded for deliverance. As he reviewed his life, he was driven almost to despair; but he held fast the Angel, and with earnest, agonizing cries urged his petition until he prevailed. Such will be the experience of God’s people in their final struggle with the powers of evil. God will test their faith, their perseverance, their confidence in His power to deliver them. **Satan will endeavor to terrify them with the thought that their cases are hopeless; that their sins have been too great to receive pardon**. They will have a deep sense of their shortcomings, and as they review their lives their hopes will sink. But remembering the greatness of God’s mercy, and their own sincere repentance, they will plead His promises made through Christ to helpless, repenting sinners. Their faith will not fail because their prayers are not immediately answered. They will lay hold of the strength of God, as Jacob laid hold of the Angel, and the language of their souls will be, “I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me.”

Had not Jacob previously repented of his sin in obtaining the birthright by fraud, God could not have heard his prayer and mercifully preserved his life. [Why not? Can't God do anything?] So in the time of trouble, if the people of God had unconfessed sins to appear before them while tortured with fear and anguish, they would be overwhelmed; despair would cut off their faith, and they could not have confidence to plead with God for deliverance. **But while they have a deep sense of their unworthiness, they will have no concealed wrongs to reveal. Their sins will have been blotted out by the atoning blood of Christ, and they cannot bring them to remembrance.**—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 201.3-202.2.†‡

21. So, what practical choices can we make in our lives to draw us nearer to God and His plan for our lives? Do we need to make changes in our associations? Our lifestyle? Our reading materials? What we watch on TV or the Internet? Our health habits? Or, our spiritual life? **We need to spend more time in Bible study, prayer, and witnessing.** Everyone is supposed to be doing those things in preparation for what is coming.

[EGW:] **This will, that forms so important a factor in the character of man, was at the Fall given into the control of Satan; and he has ever since been working in man to will and to do of his own pleasure, but to the utter ruin and misery of man.**—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,* vol. 5, 515.1.†‡

[EGW:] **In order to receive God's help, man must realize his weakness and deficiency; he must apply his own mind to the great change to be wrought in himself; he must be aroused to earnest and persevering prayer and effort. Wrong habits and customs must be shaken off; and it is only by determined endeavor to correct these errors and to conform to right principles that the victory can be gained. Many never attain to the position that they might occupy, because they wait for God to do for them that which He has given them power to do for themselves.** [Where is the boundary between doing for ourselves that which we think we can versus relying on God? How can we know when to wait for God and when to proceed with our own decisions? For example, what about Abraham having an heir with Hagar after many years trying with Sarah?] **All who are fitted for usefulness must be trained by the severest mental and moral discipline, and God will assist them by uniting divine power with human effort.**—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 248.2.†‡

22. So, how successful can we be trying to accomplish such things by ourselves?

[EGW:] **We can do nothing of ourselves. In all our helpless unworthiness we must trust in the merits of the crucified and risen Saviour. None will ever perish while they do this. The long, black catalogue of our delinquencies is before the eye of the Infinite. The register is complete; none of our offenses are forgotten.** [There is nothing wrong with God's memory!] But He who listened to the cries of His

servants of old, will hear the prayer of faith and pardon our transgressions. He has promised, and He will fulfill His word....

The greatest victories to the church of Christ or to the individual Christian are not those that are gained by talent or education, by wealth or the favor of men. They are those victories that are gained in the audience chamber with God, when earnest, agonizing faith lays hold upon the mighty arm of power.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 202.4-203.1.†‡

[EGW:] **The warfare against self is the greatest battle that was ever fought.** The yielding of self, surrendering all to the will of God, requires a struggle; but the soul must submit to God before it can be renewed in holiness....

God does not force the will of His creatures. He cannot accept an homage that is not willingly and intelligently given. A mere forced submission would prevent all real development of mind or character; it would make man a mere automaton....

Whatever shall draw away the heart from God must be given up. Mammon is the idol of many. The love of money, the desire for wealth, is the golden chain that binds them to Satan. Reputation and worldly honor are worshiped by another class. The life of selfish ease and freedom from responsibility is the idol of others. But these slavish bands must be broken. **We cannot be half the Lord's and half the world's. We are not God's children unless we are such entirely.**

There are those who profess to serve God, while they rely upon their own efforts to obey His law, to form a right character, and secure salvation. Their hearts are not moved by any deep sense of the love of Christ, but they seek to perform the duties of the Christian life as that which God requires of them in order to gain heaven. **Such religion is worth nothing.** When Christ dwells in the heart, the soul will be so filled with His love, with the joy of communion with Him, that it will cleave to Him; and in the contemplation of Him, self will be forgotten. Love to Christ will be the spring of action. Those who feel the constraining love of God, do not ask how little may be given to meet the requirements of God; they do not ask for the lowest standard, but **aim at perfect conformity to the will of their Redeemer.** With earnest desire they yield all and manifest an interest proportionate to the value of the object which they seek. A profession of Christ without this deep love is mere talk, dry formality, and heavy drudgery.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ** 43.3-44.2.†‡

23. What actually happened to mankind when Adam and Eve ate the fruit in the Garden of Eden, and we “fell”?
24. Jesus came to this earth and lived as a human being, showing that it was and is possible for human beings on this earth to live in perfect cooperation with our Father in heaven. But, it was not easy.

Matthew 26:36-43: ³⁶ Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.”

³⁷He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee. Grief and anguish came over him, ³⁸and he said to them, “The sorrow in my heart is so great that it almost crushes me. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

³⁹ He went a little farther on, threw himself face downwards on the ground, and prayed, “**My Father, if it is possible, take this cup of suffering from me! Yet not what I want, but what you want.**”

⁴⁰ Then he returned to the three disciples and found them asleep; and he said to Peter, “How is it that you three were not able to keep watch with me even for one hour? ⁴¹**Keep watch and pray that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.**”

⁴² Once more Jesus went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cup of suffering cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done.” ⁴³He returned once more and found the disciples asleep; they could not keep their eyes open.—*Good News Bible*.*† [Did the Devil have something to do with their being unable to stay awake? Did the Devil use anesthetic agents?][‡]

25. What can we do not only to help ourselves but also to help others around us who may be struggling with their spiritual situation? Maybe, they have not attended church for a long time or Sabbath school. Can we reach out to help them?
26. In order to successfully maintain our relationship with God, we need to understand the basic principles in the great controversy, the truth about God, about evil, and our situation in that larger context. **Are we, on a day-by-day basis, intentionally choosing God’s side?**
27. Do we understand clearly the fact that God refuses to force our will? And, do we understand why that is important? **Without freedom, love is impossible.** In order for us to maintain a close, working, long-term relationship with God, it requires perseverance and commitment, even radical commitment.
28. This lesson has focused on:
 1. **The role of truth** in overcoming crucibles
 2. **The role of our free will** in overcoming crucibles
 3. The **role of commitment and perseverance** in overcoming crucibles—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 80.†
29. The argument among free will, God’s grace, and salvation has been a centerpiece of the Christian dialogue since the 5th century. The extremes in this argument were probably represented by Pelagius (355-420 A.D.) who moved from what is now England to Rome versus Augustine (354-430 A.D.) who was Bishop of Hippo in North Africa.
30. Augustine believed that God created human beings perfect, good, loving, and free. He believed that when we sinned, we lost our freedom. [Is that true?] And we cannot—under any circumstances—live a truly Christian life because we are born with that sinful nature which we have inherited from Adam. Would that be inheritance of an acquired characteristic? It is impossible for us to consistently choose good. Augustine went on to say that we, essentially, cannot accomplish anything by ourselves. We can only be freed from all this evil by undertaking certain sacraments administered by the church. Thus,

God can remove our inherent guilt and regenerate us as new spiritual beings with the help of the Holy Spirit. Augustine believed in **Divine predestination**, thus suggesting that God already has made the choice for some to be saved and others to be lost.

31. **Pelagius correctly suggested that Augustine’s position would lead people to be lax in their efforts to obey God.** If one believes that s/he is already either saved or lost, why should one struggle? Pelagius believed that we remain free. But, unfortunately, each of us chooses to follow the example of Adam and Eve; and we sin. So, we are guilty not because of guilt that we inherited from Adam, as Augustine argued, but rather, because of wrong personal choices. Thus, because we are truly free, God holds us accountable for what we do. God has given us the example of Jesus to show that it is possible for humans to live a perfect life. He recognizes that we will not be able to do that; but, He helps us when we fail. For more information about the argument between Augustine and Pelagius, see Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 5th ed. (Oxford, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pages 18-20.
32. **We do not need to go to either the extreme of Augustine or Pelagius; the truth can be found in the Bible itself.**

[From the Bible study guide=BSG:] The Bible presents God as love (*John 3:16; 1 John 4:8, 16*). He created Adam and Eve innocent (*Gen. 1:31, Gen. 2:25, Eccles. 7:29*) and **with freedom of choice** (*Gen. 2:15–17*). However, our parents chose to sin (*Gen. 3:6*).—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 82.†§

John 3:16: [Jesus said:] “For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life.”—*Good News Bible.*†*

1 John 4:8,16: ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love....

¹⁶And we ourselves know and believe the love which God has for us.

God is love, and those who live in love live in union with God and God lives in union with them.—*Good News Bible.**

Genesis 1:31: God looked at everything he had made [including especially humans], and he was very pleased. Evening passed and morning came—that was the sixth day.—*Good News Bible.*†* [God declared that His creation was very good. Was He wrong?][†]

33. We do not understand all the changes that took place when sin entered our world; but, it is very clear that they were profound. As a result, we experience suffering, death, and condemnation.

[BSG:] For this reason, all humans are born in sin, and none is born righteous (*Rom. 3:9–18, 23; Ps. 14:1–3; Ps. 51:5*). Thus, the Bible rejects Pelagianism and presents sin as more than an individual human act. Rather, sin is described as both an external and internal force that enslaves and destroys all humanity in all its aspects. Facing this grim outlook, Paul exclaimed desperately: “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (*Rom. 7:24, NKJV*). By itself, humanity cannot solve the problem of sin and evil. The only hope for sinful humanity is in the

sacrificial and transformative ministry of Jesus Christ (*Rom. 3:24, 25; Rom. 5:6–19; Rom. 7:25*) and in the regenerative and mediating ministry of the Holy Spirit, who gives us a new heart (*Ezek. 36:26, 27; John 3:5–8; Rom. 8:3–6, 9–17*).—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 82.†§

34. Think how quickly things deteriorated to the point where Cain killed Abel! (Genesis 4)

Romans 5:12-19: ¹² Sin came into the world through one man, and his sin brought death with it. As a result, death has spread to the whole human race **because everyone has sinned.** ¹³There was sin in the world before the Law was given; but where there is no law, no account is kept of sins. ¹⁴But from the time of Adam to the time of Moses death ruled over the whole human race, even over those who did not sin in the same way that Adam did when he disobeyed God’s command.

Adam was a figure of the one who was to come. ¹⁵But the two are not the same, because God’s free gift is not like Adam’s sin. It is true that many people died because of the sin of that one man. But God’s grace is much greater, and so is his free gift to so many people through the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ. ¹⁶And there is a difference between God’s gift and the sin of one man. After the one sin, came the judgement of “Guilty”; but after so many sins, comes the undeserved gift of “Not guilty!” ¹⁷It is true that through the sin of one man [Adam] death began to rule because of that one man. But how much greater is the result of what was done by the one man, Jesus Christ! All who receive God’s abundant grace and are freely put right with him will rule in life through Christ.

¹⁸ So then, as the one sin condemned all people, in the same way the one righteous act sets all people free and gives them life. ¹⁹And just as the mass of people were made sinners as the result of the disobedience of one man, in the same way the mass of people will all be put right with God as the result of the obedience of the one man.—*Good News Bible.*†‡*

35. **Romans 1-3** make it very clear that by their own choices, humans have become very sinful. In Romans 1, Paul discussed the long list of sins committed by the pagans. Then, in Romans 2, he said that the bigoted Jews were even worse! But, as spelled out in Romans 5, God has a plan.

[BSG:] Historically, most Christians rejected Pelagius and embraced Augustine’s understanding that all humans are born with a sinful nature and that sin is an invincible force for humans. **Roman Catholics integrated into their theology Augustine’s idea that all humans inherit Adam’s guilt and the need for sacraments but rejected his views on predestination.** In contradistinction, Protestantism rightly rejected Augustine’s idea that we inherit Adam’s guilt and that God’s grace comes through the sacraments, but **large parts of Protestantism erroneously accepted his concept of predestination.** In the wake of the Enlightenment, modern and postmodern societies tend to reject the Augustinian ideas and think more in line with Pelagius. **[Modern humans who think that humans have descended from apes, do not want to think that God has anything to do with their lives!]** To reach people in these societies, we not only need to emphasize

the biblical teachings on the free will and our profound responsibility for our individual and communal history but also share the biblical teaching about the seriousness of the power of sin and our only hope of salvation in Jesus Christ. This illustration helps us understand that knowing the truth is essential for our understanding of suffering and trials in our lives. But it also helps us understand our own nature and the power of free will. **Such understanding helps us always seek and accept God’s help, guidance, and power to overcome our crucibles.**—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 83.^{†‡}

36. **Many Christians have been tempted to accept what has come to be called “cheap grace,” thinking that once they have committed themselves to God through baptism that they cannot be lost.** In contrast, God calls for radical commitment.

[BSG:] Some Christians think Christianity is synonymous with the absence of suffering and troubles. Other Christians do allow for some amount of inconvenience. But how many Christians are radically committed to God, to His call to follow Christ, to His kingdom, and to His mission in the great conflict between God and Satan, good and evil? In the context of increasing persecution of contemporary Christians in various parts of the world, numerous Christians feel the need for a better—indeed, radical—preparedness to go through crucibles. Examine your level of commitment to God and His kingdom. Design a scale of personal commitment. Based on your scale, what is radical commitment for you? To what extent are you ready in your Christian commitment to serve God in whatever way He may ask of you?—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 84.[‡]

37. Are we prepared for radical commitment to God’s side in the great controversy? Will the time of trouble require radical commitment?

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