

2018 JUNIOR YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER

Title: What is Church?

Theme: Aspects of the Local Church

8 LESSONS ON ASPECTS OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

Daily Small Group discussion questions included.

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Official date for the Week of Prayer is:

August 19 - 26, 2018

World Youth Day: August 19, 2018

Homecoming Sabbath: August 26, 2018

General Conference Youth Department

2018 Junior Youth Week of Prayer

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ABOUT THE WRITER:



Windlay Kwamboka has been writing since she could hold a pencil, and sold her first story to Junior Guide when she was Twenty Eight years old. By her twenties, she recognized that writing and speaking were not just what she loved to do, but what God wanted her to do. She has written off and on for most of her life, but has been writing full time since 2007, having written twelve books including the first, second, fifth, and sixth grade Bible textbooks used in The Holy Seed Church schools in Kenya, and over 150 stories and articles for all ages. She speaks at camp meetings, women's retreats, and other events, and

also does copyediting. She urges everyone to take their dreams to God and see whether they are more than just dreams. They may be assignments from the King of Heaven.

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Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.
(Deuteronomy 11:9, NIV)

This the charge to us every day. For every generation.

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There are lots of debates about the health dangers of asking children/youth to FAST. Today I am not going to get into that debate, instead I am going to ask that we focus on getting them to understand the concept of PRAYER AND FASTING and its importance in their faith journey. Believe it or not children/youth pick up on concepts more easily than you may think and if early in their Christian journey they are taught the importance of giving something up to spend time with God, chances are it will become an important part of their faith discipline.

I want to suggest that during this Week of Prayer we give them the opportunity to choose something to fast from. Maybe candy or sweets, youtube, cell phone, iPad, etc.

1. Ahead of the time for your Week of Prayer, involve parents in helping the children/youth choose what type of fast they want to participate in and what they want to abstain from.
2. Take about 20-40 minutes at the beginning of the program to talk about prayer, and give them an opportunity during that day/evening/night to immediately practice what you just taught them.
3. Teach them that PRAYER is both speaking and listening to God.
4. That FASTING is giving up something to get closer to God.
5. That PRAYER and FASTING is designed to help us hear God's voice more clearly as He speaks to us.
6. Encourage them to listen to hear God talking to them. Give them time to share if they want to.
7. Teach them what FASTING is and what it is not—it is giving up something, to spend that time with God.
8. Involve the parents.

Once children develop the habit of giving up something to spend time with God, then they can more easily understand what FASTING is. Believe me, that lesson will have a lasting impact on their lives and the life of your church.

Created by youth for youth: Making disciples from adolescence to young adults.

The story of The Holy Seed Church Youth Society, now titled Young Adults (YA), began over 5 years ago along a dusty country lane in the whole world with everyone is kneeling in prayer. Today that dusty lane has become a world-wide web of highways that links over 7.9 million souls. The Holy Seed Church young people in nearly every political entity on every continent of the globe. This story comes in every hue of the rainbow; it is filled with extremes of exhilaration and mountaintop experiences, as well as deep sadness and unfulfilled dreams. This is the story of God's leading a fascinating army down through the battles of the great over arching conflict that is life as we know it now.

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HAVE YOU HAD YOUR YOUTH WEEK OF PRAYER?

READ THIS FIRST

Planning for the Week of Prayer

1. **Start Your Planning Now.** We know that leadership sometimes changes at the end of the year, but please, if you will no longer be the AY leader next year, do not let that stop you from planning for this special week. Start your planning, develop your target, get your team together, and make sure your pastor is a part of that team.
2. **Global Youth Day Information.** Get information on the Global Youth Day project. This day will be the launch of the Youth Week of Prayer. Please visit our website, youth.adventist.org, or contact your local youth director to find out how you can participate.
3. **Commit Your Prayer Warriors.** Get a team of adults together who will commit to praying for you and your ministry on a regular basis. Make sure this is a group with whom you can confidentially share both your personal and ministry prayer needs.
4. **Plan a Day of Fasting.** What is a Week of Prayer without prayer and fasting. Please make arrangement to include at least one day of fasting during the week. Our suggestion would be the middle of the week, Wednesday. It could begin from the night before (or whenever the last meal is eaten), and carry through until right before the meetings begin.
If you are at a church where fasting is not a regular occurrence, then you may want to begin with a 10 hour fast. You would begin the fast 10 hours before your meeting time and break it right before the meeting. For example, if your meeting begins at 8:PM, then the fast would begin at 8AM. There are three main types of fast: Water Fast, where you abstain from all food and juices. Partial Fast, this is when you eliminate certain foods or specific meals. "Juice" Fast, this is when you drink only fruit or vegetable juices during meal times.
Please visit our website beginning in February for tips on fasting and how to break your fast. Try to provide some light, healthy refreshment for those who will be breaking the fast at church.
5. **Choose a Theme Song.** Involve your youth choir. If your church does not have a youth choir, this is the perfect time to get one started. Pick out songs that you all like and which fit the topic of each evening, or choose a song for the entire week.
6. **Form a Week of Prayer Development/Review Team.** Depending on the size of your church, this group can be four to eight persons who will go through all eight

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readings with you. Include on your team only interested and committed young adults and youth ministry leaders (Pathfinder, Sabbath School, etc., your pastor/s); this is important because it gives ownership to the entire group, rather than just you and your assistant. Ask the group to commit to meeting for at least three weeks—at least one week for four lessons, and an extra week to wrap things up. Be sure to identify the goal and direction you want to go, preferably at the first meeting, and choose a young person to speak for each day.

7.

8. Integrate World Youth Day (WYD) into Your Week of Prayer Plans.

Ideally, WYD should be a time to teach youth how to sacrificially give of themselves by providing opportunities in the church and the community. If you are a small youth group and do not have the resources to arrange a community-based WYD event, you can use this opportunity to break down denominational barriers in the area by partnering with and pooling resources and ideas with other youth groups from other churches in your area.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK WITH A SMALL OR LARGE GROUP

1. **Journal Space.** This book is designed to be filled with your thoughts. Use the space provided to record your reactions to the something you may hear in the sermon and the questions at the end of each day. It can also be used to write a prayer request or praise to God. Encourage participants to use it anyway they want. It's their journal! Tell them there are no rules, just guidelines. The important thing is to listen to the Lord and open their heart in response to His leading. Leaders, if you take the time to read the daily readings prayerfully and with the anticipation that God will reveal new things to you, you will be surprised at what will flow through your pen or pencil onto the pages of these journals.
2. **Start a Prayer Journal.** Nothing is greater for your personal spiritual growth than time spent in prayer. Your youth group will grow as you grow. Prayer journaling will help you encounter God in new and exciting ways. You will be able to “track” your walk with God as you go back and review answered prayers and see how He has led you step by step each day. New, fresh ideas will come to mind as you spend time in His presence journaling your prayers. You can find many ideas online on starting and keeping a prayer journal. Just go to www.google.com and type in the words “starting a prayer journal.”
3. **Daily Questions.** At the end of each sermon are questions and statements designed to get you thinking form small groups and discuss these questions. Take a moment to really think about what they are asking. Listen to the Holy Spirit as He

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teaches you through Scripture. Encourage participants to record their thoughts in their journal.

4. **Global Youth Day** is set to launch the official week of the Youth Week of Prayer meetings. Ahead of time, please contact your pastor or conference youth leader to see what projects your church will be involved in on this day, March 16. If you are planning a full day event, The Holy Seed Church Development and Relief Agency (THSCDRA) has an amazing activity, *In Their Shoes*, that can be done during your afternoon AY program.

5.

In Their Shoes is an interactive poverty experience that takes teens on a 24-hour journey into the lives of teens from other countries around the world. Through the eyes of this new identity, they will begin to understand the challenges that millions of people in developing countries face every day. You'll discover what THSCDRA is doing to help and what the Bible has to say about living a life of Christian service.

Aspects of the Local Church

1. **Sabbath:** *What is Church*— understanding what church is.
2. **Sunday:** *Called to Love* – the mission of the church.
3. **Monday:** *Your Gifted Church* – this is in relation to Spiritual Gifts and how youth can avail themselves for services in the operations of the church.
4. **Tuesday:** *Put Your Money Where Your Heart Is*— how youth and young adults can be involved in the finances of the local church. How young adults can have spiritual accountability for the finances that God has blessed them with.
5. **Wednesday:** *Church Construction 101*— explanation of the structure of the local church and how the youth can benefit from being cooperative mentees
6. **Thursday:** *Worship from the Heart* – how to express devotion to God. Unity in diversity!
7. **Friday:** *Different is Good* – what identifies you as an Adventist Youth
8. **Sabbath:** *The Wedding Day*— how Youth ought to prepare for the coming of Jesus.

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Keep First Things First

Proclaim, Preserve, and Promote on God's Term

A lot of time when you ask people about the role of the Christian **Church** they think of it in terms of New Testament teachings, and the first scripture that comes to mind is Matthew 28:18-20, where Jesus commissions the apostles to proclaim the gospel to all the nations.

But is that all the **Church** was called to do?

No, the Bible says the **Church** belongs to God and was given the unique mission of proclaiming, protecting, promoting, and preserving the gospel.

Let's look at what the Bible (Old and New Testament) says about the role of the local **Church**.

Isaiah 12:14	Here we see that God is giving Judah a chance to tell others what the Lord has done to deliver the nation (Israel) from its sin.
Isaiah 45:22	In return, they are supposed to make known to the heathen (uncharted) nations around what God has done for them, and point them to the only true God .
Ezekiel 3:17-19	The local church's responsibility is to deliver the message of salvation to everyone . In this text God commissions Ezekiel to deliver His message and warnings . If we do not preach/deliver the message and fail to warn people they will not have that choice to choose/accept the message, and will die and it will be our fault. It will be on our shoulder.
Ezekiel 38:23	The local Church makes God's greatness known .
Malachi 1:11.	The local Church shares God's greatness with everyone

So, we see that the Old Testament ends with Malachi reminding the people to share God's goodness with everyone. Now, let's look at the role of the local **Church** in the New Testament.

Is it different or is it the same?

Matthew 9:35-38.	Jesus points out the importance of prayer in the ministry/mission of reaching the world with the gospel.
Acts 13:47	Christians/ Church members are part of God's goal of redeeming the

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	whole world to himself.
2 Timothy 2:15, 4:2 2 Timothy 3:16 Romans 10:10-17	Proclaiming the gospel is central to the Church's mission and it is a necessary part of the process of salvation.
Romans 10:10-17	The local Church is the light of the world and is a necessary part of the process of salvation . The Church is here to get people saved .
Matthew 28:19-20 Acts 2:42 Ephesians 4:12 Colossians 1:28	To prepare members for the work of service so that the Church can be built up. Our regular services should be primarily aimed at teaching and ministering to the members "to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. Ephesian 4:12"
Galatians 2:1-10 1 Timothy 1:3-4; 3:15; Titus 1:9 2 Timothy 1:13	Preserve the gospel . Paul refers to the Church as a stalwart and cornerstone of the truth. One of its duties is to preserve the truth of Jesus. The Church must faithfully deliver the gospel, disprove false teaching, and maintain doctrinal and moral purity among its members.
Ephesians 3:10 1 Cor. 12:12-26	Live the gospel and Promote the gospel . Paul says that through the Church God makes known his wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. Through the holy lives of its members and its unity-in-diversity, the Church is called to be a kaleidoscope of the gospel it preaches.
Acts 13:47	Christians are part of God's goal of redeeming the whole world to himself.

The commission to be a missionary was given to every individual Christian, but in another sense, it was given primarily to the local churches. Sure, it is good that the **Church** fulfills our social needs (find friends, network) and social deeds (help the homeless, donate blood, participate in food drives, etc.), but if we fail in following God's command to proclaim, defend, preserve, and promote the gospel; as well as disciple and retain believers, then we have failed in our Christian mission.

Prayer, according to the Bible, is the number one priority in reaching people and pointing them towards salvation.

In a nutshell, the Church belongs to God and must operate on His terms.

These three statements should be highlighted in boxes

1. There are two things that the local church should always be operating as: a soul-winning station for the unsaved, and a soul-building station for the members. We reach (the unsaved) and we teach (the saved).

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2. If we are reading the Bible, verse by verse, and book by book, we will be eating the kind of spiritual food that will nurture and strengthen us to be good followers of Jesus. We will become indoctrinated with the plans of God for our lives and the *Church*.
3. Did you know that if you read the complete 5-year Revival and Reformation Morning Watch series that's available on our website you would have read the entire Bible? Yes, in five years, a little at a time, and you can read through the entire Bible. That is nourishment for the soul. Visit our website to learn more: www.theholyseedchurch.org

Remember, a Week of Prayer is more than just a week of sermons preached. It is a week to reconnect spiritually, and prayer and fasting are two tried and tested ways to get closer to God and understand His will and purpose for our lives.

Suggested Order of Service

1. Prayer
2. Song Service
3. Welcome and Introduction
4. Individual Prayer Time
5. Congregational Song/Special Song
6. Sermon
7. Group Discussion and Prayer.

Break into groups of 12-20 and discuss the questions found at the end of each daily sermon.

Accept prayer request and pray for each other.

8. Congregational Song
9. Closing Remarks
10. Prayer (Corporate)

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What is Church?

In the Beginning

People have always done things in groups. Even God is a three-Personality group! He made whole crowds of angels to love, and when He made Adam, right away He said it wasn't good for him to be alone. So, God made Eve and told them to have children who would populate the earth.

Before Adam and Eve sinned, they worshiped God face-to-face. They walked with Him in the garden, and sang with angels, and...well, all we can do is imagine! We really don't know what they did. They certainly didn't have a Bible. None of the great or terrible human stories had happened yet. They must have asked God many questions about the world, and the plants and animals, and their responsibility as caretakers of God's earth.

We do know one thing they talked about. No great human stories had happened yet, but the worst thing in the universe had already happened.

Lucifer had convinced a huge number of angels—about a third of the original population to follow him in a terrible rebellion. He claimed that God was mean and unjust. What a stupid thing to say about the very source of all love in the universe!

God and the angels told Adam and Eve this story, and that Lucifer, now Satan, would be on the lookout to try to deceive them and get them to join his rebellion. Adam and Eve must have promised to be careful.

They were told to stay together for safety.

Well...we know how that turned out!

After sin, when they had to leave the garden and everything was different, with falling leaves and death and decay beginning to stain God's great creation, they couldn't see and talk with God anymore. Now, how could they worship?

They didn't have meetings quite like our church services, but they did gather in groups. In those days, everything was done in extended

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families. The father and mother would gather all the children, and as those children grew and got married, the wives would join the families of their new husbands. Then children came, and the worship groups grew. Worship at that time was centered around a sacrifice which represented the Lamb, the Deliverer, Whom God had promised to send, to overcome the evil one and take the family of God back to the garden. Every individual family worship group could be secure in knowing that God was there, present with their own group, even while He was also present dozens or hundreds or thousands of miles away with other family worship groups.

Have someone read Genesis 4:26.

Seth also had a son, and he named him Enoch. At that time people began to call on the name of the LORD.

No one is certain exactly what that means (I am sure they had prayed before this!) but it might mean that things had gotten so bad, and wickedness was constantly around them that they began to call out to the Lord more. they began to pray in a more formal and definite way. Perhaps, besides their daily worship, they had special services to honor the Sabbath. They might have told stories about things God had done for them, or shared things they were worried or confused about, and prayed for guidance.

In a way, by coming together to call on God, the people were following the advice God had given to Adam and Eve to stay together. We are stronger in groups, and we can either help each other withstand Satan...or we can help each other fall!

Our word "church" comes from the Greek word "ecclesia" [Eck-le-SEE-uh] which simply means "gathering." Early Greeks used the same word for their city assemblies and other political gatherings. By gathering in family "ecclesiasts" to worship God, early humans were creating the first "churches."

Discuss:

1. In what ways is your church like or unlike the family worship groups at the beginning of time?
2. What do you think you would like best about such groups?
3. How do you obey God's instructions to stay together for strength?
4. Do you and your friends help each other follow God?

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Activity Suggestion

Have a “family worship” with your group. Share the different ways your families worship together.

The Patriarchal Age

In the ages before and after the Great Flood, this form of worship continued. But things were changing. Some people refused to worship, claiming that there was no God. Most did think there was a God—or many gods! They saw the power that the sun and wind and rain have over life, and instead of thanking the Creator for those gifts, they made *them* into “gods.” Soon, people were seeing gods and spirits in every tree and lake and river. Of course, Satan loved this idea, and encouraged it as much as he could. That way, when worshipping a “river spirit,” for example, the people were really worshipping a demon.

Scary!

Worse things were to come. Since Satan was behind these false gods, and he is utterly evil, people began to imagine gods as being cruel and vengeful. Satan knew that one day God planned to send His Son to die for sinful humanity, so he started twisting that idea so people wouldn’t believe it when it happened. For example, he invented a god called Molech, who demanded that people sacrifice their children to him! They could gain the god’s favor that way.

Most people believed there were different gods in different areas and for different families. So, they didn’t care if their neighbors worshiped a different god—to each their own!

Was *this* “church”?

A new factor now entered into worship. Today we would call it outreach or witnessing. Those families and clans who worshiped the true God of heaven and earth had to try to find ways to teach their neighbors that there was a difference. Each local clan could reach out in loving ways to the people around them, and so God’s influence could cover the known world.

Now God made a new choice. He wanted to teach (or re-teach) all the peoples of earth that there is *only one God*. To do this, He chose one family to be His example.

Have someone read Genesis 12:1-3.

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God called Abram and Sarah out of Ur, one of the great cities that had its own set of gods, and He would work with them and teach them to teach others about His love and the way He meant people to live for health and happiness. In the end, God would even send His Son to earth through this family line!

People still gathered in family groups to worship. They still centered their worship around a sacrifice. But the sacrifice and rituals had come to have a “magic” quality. Most people had forgotten that the sacrifice represented the perfect Deliverer to come. They just thought if you did the right sacrifice in exactly the right way, and said the right prayers in the right order, somehow this would give you good standing with God.

God showed the world through Abram and Sarah (later Abraham and Sarah) that human beings could be friends with God. Their whole lives were to be about love, not ritual. The sacrifices were to show that salvation came from God, not from themselves.

Abraham and Sarah were the first in a line of people who traveled all over, building altars to the one God, teaching by example, and reaching out to the people with whom they came in contact.

When Moses came along, God wrote down the things that had been at the basis of His law since before the beginning of Creation. We call those the Ten Commandments. They form the foundation of a just society and provide order and structure in all civil interactions. But notice something—when Moses taught the people about following God, he kept using the word “love.”

Have someone read Deuteronomy 6:5.

This is just one example. You can find many more if you look. It didn’t even occur to most idol-worshippers to love their god, or that their god could love them. Many were drawn to this God of the Israelites, who loved His people.

People were gathering in greater groups—there could have been a million people leaving Egypt! But they were still just groups of many family groups. And they were still re-learning the truth about God.

For the first time, God had people build a tabernacle where they would meet with Him. He was, and is everywhere at once all the time, as He had always been. But He thought it might help focus the people’s

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hearts if they had a place to look to. They didn't worship inside it, as we do in our churches. But they gathered around it.

Was *this* "church"?

Discussion Questions

1. Can you see how the idea of sacrificing your child to a god would twist the idea of a Son of God coming to die for us? Why do you think Satan did that?
2. Do you know people who think (or have you ever thought yourself) that Jesus had to die because God was mad at us, and a sacrifice would satisfy His anger? Why did He really die?
3. When you see a beautiful river or tree, or the sea or sky, what signs do you see of God's hand at work?
4. How can you tell God loves you?
5. What do you think about more, God's love or His rules?

Activity Suggestion

Using cloth or paper, make a simple model of the desert tabernacle.

The Age of Kings and Prophets

As Israel grew, they wanted a king for themselves. God allowed it, even though He knew there would be negative results. He knew there would also be positive results. Kings like David, Solomon, Asa, and Josiah had a greater power to spread the truth about God to their whole known world. People paid attention to kings. Here's a good example:

Have someone read 1 Kings 10:1-3, 6-9.

Unfortunately, godly kings were few and far between. Evil king after evil king rose and fell. War and greed and idolatry did *not* teach their neighbors about the one true God! God sent prophets—hundreds of them over hundreds of years. Sometimes a king listened. Sometimes, as in the story of Jonah and Nineveh, the neighbors listened even when Israel did not. But mostly, people were going their own unhappy way, ignorant

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of the joy God wanted them to have. They worshiped all the same idols the other countries did.

Finally, God had had enough.

Have someone read Jeremiah 25:3-11. Ask the reader to try to use the tone of voice Jeremiah would have used.

Jeremiah was called “the weeping prophet” for good reason! It happened. Israel was taken into the 70-year captivity. And you know what? They gave up idolatry for good! Wonderful! Except...

Now they began to worry about keeping the rules. Keeping all the rules, all the time. To protect the rules, they made rules about the rules, and rules about *those* rules. There were specific instructions about how and when to wash your hands, and exactly which kinds of branches could be used to build booths for the Feast of Tabernacles. You couldn’t carry anything on Sabbath—not even your handkerchief!

And of course, there were lots of rules about who was “in” and who was “out.” A godly person should never touch someone of another race, or someone who was sick or poor.

In heaven, God must have sighed. They still didn’t understand about love. Was *this* “church”? The time had come to *show* the people, once and for all, what love and godliness was all about—what church really was. God sent His Son.

Discussion Questions

1. Why would a king or government leader have greater reach to teach about God? Do you know any who do?
2. Why do you think so many kings turned from God?
3. Can you think of anything God could have said or done that He didn’t do?
4. What is it in your own life that reminds you of God’s love?

Activity Suggestion

1. Divide the group into two groups:
2. Group 1:pretends they are sick or disabled or somehow “not good enough”.

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3. Group 2: pretends they are perfect and godly and shouldn't touch or speak to anyone in the first group.
 - a. Act this out for just one minute by the clock.
 - b. Discuss the way this made both groups feel, even for just one minute.
 - c. Then act out the way Jesus wants it, where everyone helps and is kind to each other.
 - d. Now how do you feel?

The One Who Calls

If church is a gathering, someone must call it. For millennia, the ones who called were humans—fathers of families, leaders of clans, priests, prophets, kings. They mostly forgot who really called them to come together to worship. That would be God, and Jesus came to remind us of it.

By this time, something called the synagogue system had developed. There was one temple in Jerusalem, and all sacrifices happened here. The great yearly festivals were here, too, and huge crowds gathered for them. But of course, daily worship still happened in homes among gathered families. However, now there were also teaching places, something like our churches, throughout the land, called synagogues.

Here, the word of God was read and discussed every Sabbath. Unfortunately, only men could be involved, but women could listen, and discuss at home.

Jesus used this system to announce His ministry.

Have someone read Luke 4:16-21.

He also used synagogues to turn people's ideas on their heads. He deliberately healed on Sabbath, right in front of the haughty rabbis. He touched all the "untouchables"—the sick, the poor, the lepers, the outcasts, the sinners. He healed and taught and fed, and He rebuked the leaders for not doing the same.

He called—and they came. They came by the thousands. Where Jesus was, people realized, there was love. Therefore, there was worship, also. Because when they saw and felt His love, they naturally praised and worshiped. They listened to Him, and tried to live as He said and did. They told each other. They brought their friends.

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This was church!

It's interesting to think about the fact that even Jesus' ministry was local. He was God—He could have appeared to the whole earth at once. And certainly, God has always been in all places, at all times, with all people. He spoke and continues to speak with different people groups all over the world in ways that they would understand. But He sent His Son to one particular place—to Israel. **In His whole earthly life, Jesus never traveled more than 90 miles. Perhaps part of His message to us was that we are individually called to our own neighborhoods and regions first. We have the most influence right where we live.**

The friends and followers of Jesus were devastated by His betrayal and death, but He rose again. He breathed His Spirit on them, and gave them new power. And He gave them a whole new kind of church.

Have three people read the following three passages:

John 13:35

Acts 2:17

Acts 2:43-47

Today, thousands of people believe that Christianity is “new;” a whole different kind of worship, a whole different way of being and living. And so it is. But it is also not new at all. It's what God has been trying and trying and trying to say to us since the beginning of time!

Discussion Questions

1. Have you listened to the call of Jesus?
2. How similar or different to the church of Acts 2 is your local church?
3. Why do you think Jesus deliberately broke the rules of the priests and leaders right in front of them? Did He love them, too?

Activity Suggestions

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1. Make a chart listing some of the things you like from the various forms of worship we have studied. Figure out ways you could include those in your worship.
2. Think of three people God called—one from very early in the Bible, one from later in the Old Testament, and one from the New Testament. Act out their calls and the results. Did people listen to them? Why or why not?
3. Divide the group into pairs. Have each person share one thing they think God has called them to do. Don't worry, it doesn't have to be your life work, unless you know that already. It can be to love a difficult person, or to do especially well in school. But it can't be just an automatic answer. It has to be something you seriously believe God has called *you* to do. Each person give encouragement to the other and share ideas that may help the other to fulfill that call.
4. Figure out a way you can help God's call to love to be more visible in *your* church. Then do that!

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2018 Junior Youth Week of Prayer

Day 2, Sunday

Called to Love

Remember when we talked about a new factor entering into group worship during the patriarchal time? It became ever more important for those who worshiped the true God to help others understand that it matters. It matters whether you worship the Creator who made and loves you or an idol which can do nothing but sit there, or a false god backed by the devil who demands that you “worship” by doing things like torture yourself and offering your children as sacrifices.

This can be done using the *name* of the true God, by the way. There have always been people who had a false idea of who God is and serve Him out of fear. When you hear of people beating themselves, whether physically or emotionally, because they think that’s what God expects of them, that’s not God! When you hear of people trying to force themselves to be someone other than who they truly are at heart, or forcing certain forms of behavior (even good behavior!) on themselves or others, that’s not God! God loves us and promises to come into our hearts to “will and to do of His good pleasure”—He never uses force. And He will make us more truly ourselves than we have ever been. “Denying self” means denying selfishness, not selfhood as one’s own unique person.

Have someone read Philippians 2:13.

The mission of God’s church, therefore, is to spread this Good News around as fast and as far as possible, by any means we can find. In the Old Testament, the patriarchs moved around and built altars to God, and their neighbors saw them worship and perhaps sometimes worshiped with them. In the times of the kings, now and then a godly king arose, and people near and far saw God’s love in action.

But our best and clearest picture of the mission God gave the church comes from looking at Jesus.

Jesus’ Words

If someone were to ask you what the mission of the church is, what would you say? *(Allow a couple of minutes for answers and brief discussion. You could also have a scribe write down the answers if you wish.)*

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The quickest answer might be to go to the instructions Jesus gave His disciples at the very end of His time here on earth. You can find many helpful things in the final words He shared before He died, in John 14 through 17. But our simplest expression of our mission is found in one special verse.

Have someone read Matthew 28:18-20.

Matthew 28:18-20 New International Version (NIV)

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Many of us know this verse by heart. For our discussion questions for this section, let's take a closer look at its parts.

Discussion Questions

1. "All authority has been given to" whom?
 - a. Why does it matter?
 - b. Why do you think this is put here?
 - c. Do humans try to usurp salvation authority over others?
2. "Go" where?
 - a. Does everyone have to go to other countries?
 - b. Do you have to leave home at all?
3. "Make disciples."
 - a. What does this mean?
 - b. If a disciple is a follower, how do you make more followers?
 - c. Is anyone left out of this call to discipleship?
4. "baptizing..." This is the sign that one has made a full commitment to follow God.
 - a. Have you been baptized? Why or why not?
 - b. Which is worse—to not be baptized if you know you are called to do so, or to allow yourself to be talked into baptism just because you reach a certain age, or your friends are doing it?

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5. "...teaching..." We often try to teach people everything before baptism, but it isn't possible. We will all continue to learn as long as we live and follow Christ.
 - a. What are some ways you learn?
 - b. What are some ways you teach?
6. "I am with you *always*" (emphasis supplied.) Notice that Jesus begins and ends the Great Commission with "I am in authority" and "I am with you."
 - a. Why do you think He did this?
 - b. What happens when people run out to try to "witness" without Jesus' presence and authority?

Activity Suggestion

Make a poster of the words of the Great Commission and hang it in your church or classroom.

Jesus' Actions

Actions speak louder than words. You know that's true in your own life, don't you? It's one thing for a person to claim to be your friend, and quite another for them to act like it, even when it's difficult or inconvenient. When you are in need, and someone helps, that's a real friend. And when someone else is in need, and allows you to help them, that's true friendship, too.

It is in watching Jesus' life that we really see the mission of the church in action.

Have three people read the following passages:

- 1. John 4:21-24.**
- 2. Matthew 8:1-3.**
- 3. Mark 10:13-16.**

Jesus touched, healed, taught, and loved thousands of people in His earthly life. These three are examples of Him showing love to three kinds of people the church leaders of His day would have said not to touch or speak to: women (especially foreign women), lepers (or any sick people), and children. The very people that were considered unimportant were the ones Jesus spent the most time with. In fact, the only people He ever rebuked were church leaders! He did that because He loved them, too, and was hoping to reach them. He expected better things from those

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who claimed to know His ways. And it worked. Acts 6:7 says that after Jesus died, many priests became Christians.

We can learn a lot by paying attention to the way Jesus did things. First, He made friends. He came to an area and healed sick people, or helped them catch more fish if that's what they needed, or told them stories about everyday things like birds and flowers and sheep. Then He encouraged them to follow God, and to learn more about what God is really like. "If you've seen Me, you've seen My Father," He told people.

For so long, they'd been told God was high and distant and demanding. This was something new.

And He called God "Abba," which means "Daddy"! Nobody had ever heard of such a thing! There are places on earth today where God is thought of as being high up and distant—and so He would be, if He hadn't chosen to come down into humanity with us. It's as if someone decided to become an ant so that he could talk to ants' in their own language! To the people in His land, Jesus looked like "just another guy"—just a friend from the neighborhood.

Discussion questions

1. Which of Jesus' actions mean the most to you?
2. Are you more interested in His healing, or miracles, or teachings, or time with children, or what?
3. How have you seen others do those kinds of actions in your life? Which ones meant the most to you?
4. How have you done actions like these? Can you think of more ways to love like Jesus?
5. Try to imagine what Jesus would look like if He came today and lived in your neighborhood.
 - a. What would He look like?
 - b. What kind of clothes would He wear?
 - c. What kind of food would He eat?
 - d. What kind of work would He do?
 - e. What do you think would make you want to be His friend?

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Activity Suggestion

Put your hands on each others' heads and say blessings on each other. How does it make you feel to give or receive this blessing? Can you take blessings to others in your church or community?

The Early Church

Once Jesus was gone and had passed on His work to the followers, the church and its mission began to grow. In fact, it grew by leaps and bounds. Of the thousands who followed Jesus at least out of curiosity, there were 500 on the hill when He went back to heaven, and 120 in the upper room when they received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. The very first day those 120 preached the story of Jesus, 3,000 more joined!

Our best pictures of how church should work come from the stories of those early Christians, found in the book of Acts, with some more insights from the letters Peter, Paul, and John wrote to them.

Have someone read Acts 2:42.

What are the four things listed that they devoted themselves to?

1. **Teaching**—Once the 3,000 (and growing) new believers were baptized, the apostles began fulfilling Jesus' instructions to teach them "to observe all that I have commanded you." The main thing was the story of Jesus. Everyone had to learn the basics of His life, ministry, death, and resurrection, so they could pass it on to others. Beyond that, the disciples passed on the love, acceptance, healing, and simple stories that Jesus had taught. Most of these first Christians were probably among the crowds who heard Jesus Himself at least a little, though many had come to Jerusalem for the Passover and may not have seen Jesus while He lived. When they went back home to their various countries, they would take the stories and teachings with them, and so the Good News would begin to spread, and they would have their own local churches to be headquarters for Jesus.
2. **Fellowship**—Those who lived in the region understood that one of the most important things Jesus' followers could do was to love each other so they spent a lot of time together. As the book of Acts goes on, we learn that they helped each other in amazing ways.
3. **Breaking bread**—This meant two things. First of all, they ate together a lot, because as we all know, eating together is one of the most important things people do to cement their friendships. Secondly, they were repeating the sharing of bread and juice that Jesus had

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shared at the Last Supper, because He said, "Whenever you remember me, do this." It is possible that at first they did this every day.

4. **Prayer**—Nothing can be done without prayer! The disciples had definitely learned that. The new believers prayed for the Spirit to fill and work in them, for their minds to hold the stories so they could pass them on, for healing and renewal for their friends, families, and communities (or other countries), and for the peace of Jerusalem. As good Jews, they must have prayed with huge thankfulness that the Messiah they had been promised for thousands of years had come!

Discussion questions

Let's look at those four things again.

1. **Teaching:** what are the ways you have been taught about Jesus? Who taught you? How did they do it? What worked or didn't work for you personally? What are the ways you teach others? Are there other ways you could teach?
2. **Fellowship:** How do you build your friendships and keep them strong? What is the difference between the friendships you have with people who believe in Jesus, and the friendships you have with people you hope you can influence for Jesus? Can you think of more ways you could increase fellowship in your local church?
3. **Breaking bread:** How often do you eat with church members? How often do you have Communion? What are the benefits to you of both these kinds of "breaking bread"? Can you think of ways to increase these?
4. **Prayer:** How often do you pray alone? How often do you pray with one or two others? How often do you pray with larger groups or the whole church? Do you think you and your community pray enough? How can you increase that?

Activity Suggestion

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Together, read the rest of Acts 2, from verse 43 on. Act out an early church group, doing the things you read. Have people say things they need, and others find ways to help them get those things. You can use real needs and problems in your group—it might give you some ideas of ways to make your church more like the early church. What do you think would happen if all your church members sold all their property and shared equally?

Your Church

Our churches today are quite different from those early churches, and in one way that's fine. The world keeps changing and growing, and we change and grow, and today we can talk with people all across the world in ways the early Christians would have been astonished to see. We have worldwide membership and worldwide leadership, and many of the needs the early Christians had are taken care of on a global level instead of in the local church.

On the other hand, there are ways in which our churches are different, and they shouldn't be. Some churches are cold and formal, worrying more about what order to do things like opening prayer and offering and the sermon than about spreading the love of Jesus. Others are little more than clubs, where people gather once a week to see their friends and show off their best clothes, but still don't think much about love for Jesus or others. Some churches send money to faraway missions but don't take care of the people in their own back yards. Others spend time only on preaching and trying to save souls, without paying attention to the injustice and oppression that they could work to change.

The mission of the church is still the same: spread God's love. This means healing as Jesus did (something our church is pretty good at, with a network of hospitals, clinics, and medical missionaries across the planet). It means teaching as He did, which was mostly telling stories—something anyone can do, even a child. It means touching and speaking to those no one else wants to touch and speak to. Sometimes we're not so good at that, but some churches are shining examples, and all of us can learn to be.

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We don't necessarily have to model our local churches specifically on the churches of Peter and Paul's days. But we can find the ways they showed God's love and learn ways we can do the same.

After Jesus came and lived and died and rose for us, everything was different. Now, people could see how it worked. They saw that we are to love everyone—men, women, children, black, white, brown, old or young, educated or uneducated, church leaders and sinners on the street.

Everyone! Even enemies! Jesus said to pray for people who treat you cruelly. Just think—if your prayers and actions could actually change your enemy into your friend, the problem would be solved, and not just for you, but for that person and all his or her family and friends and circle of influence. Not only that, but God would have another child in heaven. Now that's an outcome to work for!

Jesus is coming back soon. Will He find us doing His work?

Discussion Questions

1. You may live in a part of the world where circumstances are not that much different from first century Israel. What are some things you have in common with them? What are some methods they used that you can use, too?
2. You may live in a part of the world that is so different today that you can't even imagine what the early church's life was like. Make a list of the ways the world is different that we can use to help us spread God's love. What do you think Paul would do if he had a social media account?
3. What do you think are the most important things we need to keep the same no matter what century we live in? What do you think are the things that don't matter if they change? Is there agreement in your group? Is it okay if some opinions are different? Why or why not?

Activity Suggestions

1. If you live in a fast-paced modern region of the world: Make

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a list of the things the early church did. Now make a list of ways you can put those into practice using modern technology.

2. If you live in a region of the world that is similar to New Testament times:
 - a. Make a list of the things your church can or does do the same as the early church to help spread God's love.
 - b. Make a list of the things your church does differently than the early church to help spread God's love.
3. Do you know how to tell the story of Jesus? Divide into pairs and tell it to each other. Try to pretend the one hearing it is hearing it for the first time. Ask the questions you would ask if you'd never heard it before, and help each other tell it really well.
4. Did you participate in Global Youth Day activities? Do some service projects for people in your neighborhood and tell them God sent you because He loves them. Don't try to convert them or make them believe anything. Just tell them God loves them. Compare notes on what results you see.

2018 Junior Youth Week of Prayer
Day 3, Monday
Your Gifted Church

God's Gifts

The young church grew, spreading the story of Jesus throughout the known world, from Britain to Asia; and from central Europe to at least northern Africa, and possibly much farther south, in just thirty years!

In some ways, all people are much the same, but in culture, ways of living, even ways of thinking, we are all very different from each other. God's church needed a lot of different kinds of ministers in it.

Let's talk about that word "minister." That's the official, hired pastor who leads your church, right? Nope! Well, your pastor *is* a minister, but not the only one in your church. To minister is a verb,

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and it means “to attend to the needs of someone.” Mothers and fathers minister to their children, and children who help each other are ministering to each other. Doctors and nurses minister to sick or injured people. In many countries—perhaps yours is one—government officials are called ministers. There is often a Prime Minister, who is in charge of all the ministers. Under him or her, there are ministers of finance, and of education, and all kinds of departments.

Pastors do minister to the needs of their church members, and also to the needs of the community around their church, but all members also minister to each other, to the community, and to the pastor!

To do all those things well, people need all kinds of different abilities. Just imagine what would happen if all the doctors and teachers switched jobs! What do you think would happen to your country if the minister of finance and the minister of justice traded places? Sometimes we do have people in government who are in the wrong jobs for their abilities, and things just do not go well. So God gave gifts to His church members. This was always true, of course. In the Old Testament, God gave different gifts to different people.

Have someone read Exodus 31:1-6.

Would you have thought of giftedness in spinning thread and weaving cloth and metalwork as spiritual gifts? God says they are, or at least they are when He gives them to be used in spiritual matters.

So there was nothing new in the idea of God gifting people with special abilities to use in His service. But spiritual gifts came into new prominence with the early New Testament church. There are three places where they are listed.

Do this:

- a. Have three people read the following passages, and have one or more scribes list the gifts on a board.
 1. Romans 12:4-8
 2. 1 Corinthians 12:4-11
 3. Ephesians 4:11-13
1. Put check marks beside gifts that are mentioned more than once.
2. Keep the three passages open; we will be referring back to them.

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Discussion Questions

1. Which gifts are listed most often in the three passages?
Do you think these gifts are more important? Why or why not?
2. Are all possible spiritual gifts listed in these three passages? How can you know? (Hint: remember the Exodus passage above?)
3. Which gifts do you see in use at your church or school? Do you think any are missing?

Activity Suggestion

1. Choose a sport or team game that is popular among your group. Pretend you are setting up a team.
 - How many members do you need?
 - Are there other roles, such as coaches or referees?
 - Who in your group would be best in the various positions?
 - Why do you need differing abilities?
2. If you have time and space, go outside and try playing for a few minutes, with people in all the wrong positions for their abilities, or with the whole team trying to do all one thing.
3. Then switch around and put the people in their best spots. Discuss the differences and how that same thing affects church life.

The Body of Christ

You might think having lots of different gifts and abilities in the church would lead to unity in diversity, and unite us as a church. Well, that's not always the case. Sometimes disunity and arguments about the best way to do something happens in our church. But that's because of human weakness, not God's diverse gifts. All these differences are supposed to unite us, not divide us.

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Take a look at Ephesian 4:4-6. What do you think it means when it says "there is one body and one Spirit"? In his writings, Paul often refers to the church as "the body of Christ." When Jesus was here on earth, He could touch and hug and heal people directly. Now He's in heaven, so guess where His hands and feet are? They're yours! You and I and all of us have the job of continuing Jesus' work as if He were still among us. He *is* still among us, but only spiritually speaking. He's the "one Spirit," and somehow all of us, all Christians around the world in hundreds of different countries and circumstances, are supposed to learn to work together as the "one body" of Jesus.

Let's look again at 1 Corinthians 12. Have everyone quietly skim verses 14-26. This is a funny passage. Choose people to be the foot, hand, eye, ear, and head, and have them speak the words the passage gives them. Let the eye and the ear take turns pretending to be the whole body. Ask them how they would eat, or run, or other actions you can think of.

If the whole church is the body of Christ, it might have many hands doing loving service, and many feet going to tell the story of Jesus, or walking to help someone in need, but it has only one Head. Who is that?

Have someone read Colossians 1:15-18.

We could also think of the body as having one heart: the Holy Spirit. That is the one of the Godhead who lives among us and in us, helping us to use all these gifts to God's glory.

That Head and that Heart are the One who controls and guides all the gifts. It's not that people don't do more than one thing. We all take our turns at bat, and we all take our turns in church life doing what needs to be done. You could give a sermon if you needed to. Yes, you really could! But God calls each of us to do some special work that He especially suits us for, and He asks us to work in teams.

A good example is Paul and Barnabas.

Have two people read the following two passages.

1 Corinthians 9:20-22

Acts 4:36

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Paul's best skill was debating and explaining. He could get really deep into hard-to-understand things about God and religion, and he could speak in different ways to different people to help them understand the word of God. The book of Romans was written to deep thinkers, and it can be hard for the rest of us to understand some parts of it. But he wasn't always that good about being gentle and encouraging with people, especially when they were weak or easily tempted.

Barnabas, on the other hand, could encourage and help a person, and get them back on track with God. Both men working together, like two hands, made a great team.

God also often calls someone to work in humble circumstances, not knowing that what they do is important.

Have someone read Acts 9:36-42.

If you could travel back in time before this and ask Dorcas if she thought her work was particularly important, what do you think she might say? Apparently God thought it was so important that He decided her community could not get along without her for a while longer!

God gave you the gifts He wants you to have, and He'll help you use them wisely.

Discussion Questions

Have you ever seen humans try to be the head instead of Jesus? What happened? What do you think are the safeguards around, for instance, pastoral authority, to keep one person from trying to do God's job?

Think of some people you know who make a good team working together. What are the differences and similarities between them?

Which kinds of gifts in the lists appeal to you the most? Why?

How do you think someone could begin to determine their gifts? (We're going to learn more about that, but you share your thoughts about it.)

Activity Suggestion

Make a drawing on a board or flipchart or poster of a large stick figure. Label its head "Jesus." Label its heart "Spirit." As a group, go through the lists of gifts and make labels for the part of the body where they belong. Some may need more than one part. For example, teaching might be by the head, but it might need heart, too. In fact, you might find lots of the gifts have lines to the heart. Why do you think that is?

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The Better Gift

Sometimes people argue over the gifts they think are more important than others. It can go the other way, too. Some people avoid gifts they think will make them have to be “up front” if that scares them.

Have someone read Exodus 4:11-13.

Even Moses, who has been famous for thousands of years as the great lawgiver and leader of his people, was afraid at first. What would have happened if he had refused to do what God asked?

Another thing that can happen is for people with different gifts to judge and criticize each other. People who have been given great creative gifts by God, such as drama or art, are seen by some as being disrespectful to God’s mission. Yet they can draw some people to Jesus who never would have come to a sermon or seminar.

We must learn to let Jesus be the head and give the gifts He wants to give, and to work together, delighted and relieved that everyone has different gifts and that we are all needed to make a great team.

On the other hand, there is a better gift—one that’s so much better than all other gifts that Paul says to pray for it. In fact, we can’t use any of our gifts without it. If we try, it will lead to disaster every time.

Have someone read 1 Corinthians 12:37-13:1.

What does Paul say is the best gift? Where does love come from? The heart, right? And Who is the heart of the church?

The gifts are called spiritual gifts because it is the Spirit who gives them and who works in us to use them lovingly. Look at your lists of gifts again. Take a minute to discuss what would happen in each instance if a gift were used without love.

So, how do we know what our gifts are? While you are young, not all gifts God has in store for you are given yet. Moses was 80 when God called him to lead Israel, remember. But from his babyhood God was preparing him, and He is also preparing you for your work for Him. You can be certain there is much you can do for your church and your community right now, without getting any older or any more education.

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There are three main ways that God uses to lead us to our gifts.

1. **A call.** Moses got his from a burning bush. Isaiah saw a vision of God on His throne. Sometimes today people receive a dramatic call like that. But usually it's quieter. It's something you feel in your heart.

Have someone read Isaiah 30:21.

Even today, as you've been studying and hearing about the spiritual gifts, there may be one or more that has particularly appealed to your heart. You may have thought, "I could do that," or "I would like to do that," or even, "Hey, I do that!" Do you teach your friends about Jesus, explaining things from the Bible so they can understand? You may have the gift of teaching or preaching. Do you love to help people?

Perhaps you have the gift of helps.

2. **Affirmation from others.** Sometimes we get ideas that are just from our own heads. You've had that happen, right? But if this call is from God, others will see it in you, too. You may say to a friend, "I feel kind of nervous saying this, because it might sound like I'm bragging, but sometimes I feel I might have the gift of wisdom." And your friend might respond, "I think you might be right. Remember when I had that complicated problem at home and I didn't know what to do? You prayed with me and helped me figure it out. When I'm confused I always know I can come to you."

By the way, these are *gifts from God*. They are not from you, and you don't get to be either proud or embarrassed about them. To recognize what God is asking you to do is not bragging, and to refuse to do it because you are afraid you will look proud is not humble.

Have someone read 1 Timothy 1:18 and 4:14.

Timothy's gift as a pastor and church leader included the gift of prophecy (this means to speak for God, not to foretell the future, unless God specifically does that through a person). His gifts were confirmed by the elders who laid hands on him and prayed for him.

3. **Results.** No, if you have the gift of evangelism it doesn't mean everyone you tell about God will choose salvation. But it does mean that you will feel very fulfilled and joyful and close to God while doing it, and it means that people will respond, and others will agree that you do have that gift. In fact, the more you learn your gifts and use them better and better throughout your life,

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the happier you will be about it, even when it sometimes seems that everything is going wrong and you are not getting results!

Have someone read Revelation 1:4-6.

Does this sound like a happy person or an unhappy person? John the Beloved had been tortured and persecuted and they'd tried to kill him more than once. Now he was exiled on the island of Patmos. But he was still joyful, because he was doing what God called him to do, even if it looked like nothing was coming of it. How could he know that 2,000 years later, his words would bring joy, hope, and peace to millions of Christians all over the world?

Decide today that you will allow God to show you the gifts He wants you to use, and learn to use them better every day that you live. Find others with different gifts, with whom you can make a great team for the Lord. Remember that one of the very best ways to discover and develop your gifts is in your own church, where you can try different things and find out what you are best at.

Discussion Questions

Why do you think God passes out different gifts to different people? Why doesn't He just make us all alike and give a set of gifts to everyone?

Why do you think love is the greatest gift?

Do you have an idea of some of your own gifts yet? Write them down and discuss them with a good friend and with a trusted adult.

Activity Suggestion

Divide into pairs and try to help each other determine at least one gift. Then make a plan, and write it down, of ways you can try to use that gift. Also make a list of adults you know that will let you try things and not be angry if you make mistakes, but will help you do better the next time.

2018 Junior Youth Week of Prayer

Day 4, Tuesday

Put Your Money Where Your Heart Is

Do you know what the word "stewardship" means? It's almost like "minister," except that "minister" usually means to care for people, while "steward" usually means to care for things. A steward is often hired by a rich person to take care of money and manage the running of a business or estate. The steward must care for the things *not* as if they were his or her own, but as the owner wishes.

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Jesus said that we are God's stewards. When you think about it, we don't really own anything. Everything belongs to God, and we need to take care of everything the way God would. We are going to talk about five areas of God's ownership which He wants us to steward for Him: earth, health, time, talent, and treasure.

Stewards of the Earth

Do you know who God's very first stewards were?

Have someone read Genesis 1:26, 27.

Since God was the Creator, Owner, and Ruler of the earth, what do you think it meant when He said for Adam and Eve to "rule over everything"? They were to rule under Him and by His love and power, right? Were they to be cruel to animals or harm or use up the plants or land? Certainly not!

But after they gave in to Satan, everything changed. They began being cruel to animals, harmful to the land, and worst of all, cruel to each other. Already, by Genesis 4, Cain murdered Abel, and his great-great-great grandson, Lamech, had two wives and boasted about how many people he killed. What kind of stewardship is that?

God wants us to care for the world around us and all in it as He would if He were here in person. At the other end of the Bible, when God comes back again to His earth (just as in the story Jesus told in Luke 12) we find the warning of what will happen to those who were destructive of the world He made just for us.

Have someone read Revelation 11:17, 18.

I don't want to be one of those people, do you?

Discussion Questions

If Adam and Eve had said "No!" to Satan, what do you think would be different about the world itself, not just the people in it?

What are some ways that you help care for the earth?

Are there ways that you help destroy the earth? What can you change about your habits?

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Why do you think it matters to God whether we take care of the earth? Can you think of things Jesus said or did that show that God cares for animals and even plants?

When we band together, we can do much more than we can do individually. What are some things your local church could do to help care for God's creation?

Activity Suggestions

Go out together and pick up trash along a road near you. Better yet, find someone who needs help and clean up their yard or weed their garden. That way, you are helping both the earth and one of God's children.

Create a plan to use less plastic in your church or school.

Stewards of Our Health

The very next thing that began to go downhill when Adam and Eve turned away from God's plan was health. They were meant to live forever. Now they lived hundreds of years, and every generation lived fewer years than the one before it. It was even worse after the Flood, especially when people began eating meat. Within just a few generations, they went from lifespans in the 600s to lifespans in the 200s. By the time the book of Genesis ended, Joseph lived just 110 years. There have been many eras and many regions of the earth in the thousands of years since then, where lifespans were as low as the 40s. They are that low in some places now. Nowhere are they higher than 80 or so, though a handful of people still live over a century. We think of those people as amazingly old, but in the time before the Flood, they would have been barely old enough to have children!

No doubt a lot of this can be explained by the degradation of the earth itself after sin was allowed in. But we have done a lot of it to ourselves, and we can do better. We know that the more plants we eat, as close as possible to the way they grew, the better it is for us. Yet we eat a lot of meat, and candy, and fried foods, and sugar, and the list goes on. It's different in different parts of the world, though America is one of the worst, and American food and customs are rapidly spreading everywhere. Are there American fast food places near you?

Let's look at just one food: the lowly potato. Potatoes are native to the Western Hemisphere, but they were introduced into the rest of the world by the 1600s and 1700s and quickly became popular—for good reason. A potato contains fiber, protein, several vitamins, a load of potassium, which is essential for every cell in your body, and a good chunk of

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carbohydrate for energy. People have lived on potatoes alone, and though that's not a good idea, it kept them going in hard times.

Now take that potato, take off all the peeling (you just removed the vast majority of its nutrients) and slice it into millimeter-thick slices. There's not much potato left in one of those slices, but there's about to be a lot less! Drop the slices into oil sizzling at very high temperatures for a few minutes. Whatever is left of health disappears, and each slice, which contains perhaps one calorie, picks up 20 times that much in oil (which has also lost whatever nutrition it had by being superheated). Add some powdered artificial flavorings and coat the whole thing with salt. Now you have potato chips or crisps, and you can easily eat two potatoes' worth in a few minutes. Instead of a nourishing meal created by God, you have just clogged up your system with complete junk that isn't just not good for you—it's actively bad for you!

A few chips once in a while is one thing. Having them as a basic food group, as far too many people do, is another!

We must be far better stewards of our precious bodies than this. With healthy bodies and minds that are sharp and clear because they get all the nutrients they need along with plenty of water, we can do great things for God. Besides, it just tastes better! If you grow a garden, you know how wonderful fresh food can be. Even in the city you can have a few pots on a porch or balcony. Then you are caring for the planet and for your health, *and* you can share with other people and spread the love of God. If your whole church works together in this way, imagine how the ripples of love and health will spread!

Have someone read 3 John 1:2.

Discussion Questions

To whom do you belong? Are you caring for yourself as your heavenly Owner would want you to?

On a scale of 1-10, how healthy do you think you are? Is your health getting better or worse as you grow older?

Why does it matter to God if we steward our health?

What are three things you can do to be healthier?

What about mental health? Your mind is part of your body, too. What do you do to keep your mind healthy, and what do you do to get help when it is slipping?

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What can you help your church do to help improve the health of members and community?

Activity Suggestion

As a group, create a beautiful poster using either NEWSTART or CREATION Health memory aids for good health, given below.

[Note to whoever sets this up: These should be in two columns, not taking up so much space. I don't know how to make two columns in just one spot like this.]

N utrition	C hoice
E xercise	R est
W ater	E nvironment
S unshine	A ctivity
T emperance (moderation)	T rust
A ir	I nterpersonal relationships
R est (daily and Sabbath)	O utlook
T rust in God	N utrition

Stewards of Our Time

How much time do you have? We always talk as if some people have a lot of time and some have a little. The fact is, we all have exactly the same amount of time: 24 hours per day. The question is, how are we spending it? And who owns it? If ever anything belonged solely to God, time certainly does. This is true whether or not we are aware of it, but it doesn't make much difference in our lives until we choose to devote ourselves to God. We have all done that here, right?

Have someone read Ephesians 5:15-17.

What principles of time management are in this passage?

If you are taking good care of your health, you have 8 or more hours set aside for sleep. You probably have several more hours for school. The rest may be more under your control. You may work part-time, and/or help at home for some of that time. You probably have homework and other chores. Does this mean you only have a little leftover time for God?

No! All that time is for God! He is doing miraculous and mysterious things to your body and mind while you are asleep, using your school time to train you for His work, and so on. Every single morning when you wake up, dedicate the day to Him, and then pay attention. Do your best to manage the time you have to create the most joy for the most people, yourself and everyone around you. But also watch for

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unexpected moments when God impresses you that He has something for you to do, usually for someone else, and it means you have to go “off-schedule.” We should manage our time, but we should never get so tied to our plans and our management that we don’t notice what God is saying to our hearts. Remember—it's *His* time; you’re just His steward!

Discussion Questions

Why does time matter so much?

What has God done with your time lately?

Discuss this word of wisdom: “If you are too busy, then you are trying to do some things God has not given you to do.”

How does the gift of the Sabbath change our perception of time?

Is there any way you can work with your church to help people manage God’s time better?

Activity Suggestion

Give each person a piece of paper with the hours in a day written down one side (or print off a one-day calendar from the internet). Work alone or in pairs or teams to create personal schedules to manage your time wisely. Don’t be too caught up in “clock-time”; allow leeway. Just determine which parts of the day are best for which kinds of activity.

Be sure to set aside time for daily devotions!

Stewards of Our Talents

We don’t need to talk very much about this, because we talked a lot already about the gifts God gives, and how we are to use them for Him. But two things are worth thinking about. One is that all abilities and talents come from God, not just the ones given specifically for spiritual use, like faith or pastoring or intercession. If you can play musical instruments or write stories or build things or cook or you have a really good head for math, those are all abilities from God. And if they came from God, to whom do they belong? Remember, we are only stewards. What difference would it make to your piano practice or your math homework if you consciously thought you were taking care of God’s things?

The second thing to consider is that God also expects us to manage our spiritual gifts wisely. He does not ask us to burn ourselves out by doing every single thing that could possibly come within our spiritual gift. He can get a lot more good use out of a steward who wisely cares for herself and her gift and will be around for a long time than one who

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thinks he should say “yes” to every single thing that comes along and ends up exhausted and cranky.

Have someone read 1 Peter 4:10.

This verse actually says we are stewards of God’s grace! What do you think that means?

Discussion Questions

What kinds of gifts do you have? Think of all the things you do well, no matter how common or unimportant it may seem. Do you manage all those abilities with the knowledge that they really belong to God?

How many Bible characters can you think of who used their gifts and abilities as if they belonged to God and were only entrusted to them to manage for Him?

Suggested Activity

If you have a few minutes, let several people give brief demonstrations of a gift God has given them: sing a song, draw something, do a hard problem, etc. When they do well, praise God instead of the person. Now ask some of the quieter people, who may not think they are gifted, what they do well. Perhaps someone is good with children, or one cooks or cleans. Help all to see that *all* abilities come from God and belong to Him, and He is pleased when we use those wisely, no matter what they are.

Stewards of Our Treasure

And now, nearly at the very end, we finally come to the one thing most people think of first, if not exclusively, when the word “stewardship” comes up—money! Here’s an important truth: if we have not dedicated all of ourselves, everything we have and are, to God and His service, it makes very little difference if we give money. God and the church can use that money whether we are cheerful or grudging, but we lose the blessing.

How much of our money and other earthly treasures belong to God? *All* of it, right? And how much does He ask us to make sure He gets back?

Have someone read Malachi 3:8-12.

Just 10% is claimed by Him as His own, and even then He gives the management of it to humans. Beyond that 10% tithe, He gives us the chance to be joyfully generous. If you have ever been in a position of need, you know how wonderful it is when someone lovingly meets that

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need. But if you have ever been in the position of being able to be the one doing the helping, you know it's true—it really is more blessed to give than to receive. We need to be humble enough to do either one, depending on where God has placed us.

If our church received a faithful tithe from every member in the world, it would have enough to do all the work it is called to do to share God's love with the whole earth. If on top of that, all people gave generously, not just to the church, but to those in need in their area, just think how much better the world would be!

Fact: if we have given our all to God and are walking in His ways all day every day, of course we will return an honest 10% tithe and give as generously as we can! That will be the least we do. Every day, all day, our whole lives, we will be seeking to care for God's world and all the people, animals, and plants in it; we will be watching over our physical, mental, and spiritual health, and that of those around us, so we can be all we can be for God; we will be stewarding our time for God, making sure to have plenty of rest, good, hard work, happy play, and time for God and others; we will be working hard to improve our talents and deepen our spiritual gifts; and we will recognize that all our "stuff" is really God's "stuff," to be used exactly as He wishes.

Discussion Questions

Do you pay your tithe faithfully? Do you give other offerings, not just money, but things to people who need them, or time and talents for God's work?

What does it feel like to give?

What does it feel like to receive?

Do you ever think that you have so little money, your tithe really doesn't matter? What do you think God thinks about that?

What can you do to manage your money well?

What can you do to help your local church in its budget and work?

Activity Suggestion

If there are any in the group who do not know how to figure ten percent, have others teach them how. That part of our money is used by the church to pay pastors and other workers, and for other work of the church. For other projects, we can make choices. Think of a project you think would help your local church, or one that your local church is already working on or raising money for. Come up with some ways to give to that, and also some ways to raise more funds for it. See how good you feel if you personally help to get something done for the whole church.

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2019 Junior Youth Week of Prayer
Day 5, Wednesday
Church Construction 101

The Foundation of the Foundation

Do you remember the very first night of Week of Prayer, when we said people always like to do things in groups? This year, the group we're spending our time on is your own local church. Your church, of course, is only one small bit in the huge, world-wide organization of the whole Seventh-day Adventist denomination, with over 25 million members and many more than that who attend and are active even if they aren't baptized members yet. But the decisions for that whole, big organization all start at the level of *your church*.

An article about church organization on the website (www.theholyseedchurch.org) called the local church "the structural foundation." A structural foundation is the base on which a building stands. If you could go into the ground underneath your school or church, you would find deep, strong, usually stone or concrete bases that hold up the whole thing. If the foundation is bad, the building will fall. Jesus told a story about that very thing.

Have someone read Matthew 7:24-27.

What is the sand? What is the rock? Is your church built on sand or rock? If your church and other local churches are "the structural foundation" for the whole denomination, then if the local churches fail, then the whole thing fails. Did you ever think of that?

Of course, there have been churches which closed down due to loss of membership, or (much worse) closed down because the people started fighting with each other. Once they started fighting, they stopped being church, and if people in that situation don't pray hard, repent, and learn to get along, their whole church will fail. The denomination still goes on. But if more and more local churches started failing, or were weak, or didn't do their work for God, what would happen to the denomination?

That would be bad! Your church needs to be strong for God.
Besides, your community needs you.

Here's where we start:

First, the church is not a building, it's people. You are the church. Your voice matters. And there's only one Shepherd for this particular flock of people: Who do you think that is?

Have someone read John 10:14.

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Of course, you knew that already, didn't you? When Jesus is the Shepherd, and His people listen to His voice, then even if one gets lost now and then, He finds that one and brings the flock together again.

Another way to look at it, if we want to stay in the same imagery of building, is that there is only one Foundation.

Have someone read 1 Corinthians 3:11, and keep their Bible open to read more in a minute.

Paul is talking to people who are following one particular preacher and then arguing over which one is better. Have you seen people do that? One missionary or evangelist comes to town, and soon everybody follows after that one person. Usually the evangelists are following Jesus themselves, and they don't like it at all when people start leaning on them instead of on Jesus!

This is what was happening to Paul and Apollos. We don't have Apollos' response, but it was probably about the same as Paul's.

Have your reader read verses 5 and 6, then verse 10.

We can trust and follow preachers, so long as their words are true to the Word of God, but we build our lives only on One.

Jesus was and still is rejected as the foundation by many people, even by most of the Jewish leadership of His day.

Have three people read:

Psalm 118:22

Luke 20:17-18

Acts 4:11-12

Jesus is the foundation of all life, let alone of salvation, and the whole point of having churches. He is the foundation of your foundation.

Discussion Questions

If you visited your church and knew nothing about anything, just by watching, what would you think was the foundation?

Don't answer too quickly. Base your answer on what you would see and hear at one random service.

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If the answer is not immediately Jesus, what do you think might need to change?

Are there changes you could make or help to make?

What does it mean to have Jesus as your foundation and build your whole life on Him?

Activity Suggestion

As a group, using a large poster board or large piece of paper or a board, (you can have more than one team if your group is large) draw an outline of a church. Along the bottom, make a thick, strong line (or draw a line of stones) to be the foundation. Write "Jesus" on that foundation. If you're feeling artistic, you could draw a picture of Jesus holding up the church.

Keep your drawing to use in the rest of the sections this evening.

The Church Walls

So, the whole denomination is built on Jesus alone. But all the local churches are the next layer of that foundation. The denomination depends on their strength and faithfulness. In fact, at the very "top" (not really a good word), the church administrators are only trying to do the things the whole world church is asking them to do by their votes. (The reason "top" is not a good word is that the elected officials are really the servants of those who elected them, just as Jesus said we are all to be.)

Let's look, then at how your individual church is organized, and what might be your place in that organization.

Churches vary. One of the best things about our worldwide church is that it's full of all kinds of different people who speak different languages, sing different songs, and do different things in church. But there are some basic similarities.

First and most important, a church has to have members. It's not a church if it has no members. On the other hand, it can be a great church with even a few members. Did you know just two or three believers can be a church?

Have someone read Matthew 18:20.

Of course, this is talking of any small group of people meeting to pray or study or work together. But there have been churches that started with just a handful of people like that. At first, they aren't called churches. A few friends gather and pray, and start talking about

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how wonderful it would be to have a church closer than the one they travel to, or a church in a particular district or for certain needs. There are small churches in hospitals, just for sick people. There are churches in Jewish areas where they celebrate the Old Testament feasts as having been fulfilled by Jesus, churches in Hindu areas where everybody sits on the floor, churches in Native American districts which are organized like “longhouses” with the seats down the two sides and the speaker walking in the middle, and lots more.

Anywhere that Jesus is the foundation and the focus, there can be a church. And the members are the most important part.

Have someone read 1 Peter 2:4-5.

You—yes, that means you—are the living stones that make up the walls of God’s church!

Discussion Questions

Can you think of a specific strength God has given you, that helps to hold up your church and make it strong? If not, pray to find a way.

How many people attend your church? They are all “living stones” in your church.

Do you know how your church began? If not, ask someone who might know. It’s probably a fascinating story, and it’s sure to be full of faith and surprises.

Why would members be the most important part of a church? Have you ever thought of it this way?

What are some of the things about your church that are unique? What languages, music, and customs do you share?

Suggested Activity

Take your church picture and let each person draw a stone into the walls and put their name on it. While you do this, discuss the specific and concrete ways you help to hold up your local church.

A Solid Roof

As a church grows, it needs some leaders. Good leaders are not the head of the church—that’s Jesus. But they are shelter and warmth for the growth of the people in the church. You could think of them as the roof.

People in each local church choose their own elders. These are people who will watch over the people’s spiritual life. They might call on people who are sick, but even more importantly, they might call on

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people who are heartsick. You know a good elder by the loving light in their eyes; by the way they can be depended on to pray with you and help you figure out a path even in the midst of complications and troubles. In some churches, each elder has a certain number of members in charge.

Others are more general. Above, we just said people choose their own elders, and that's true...but really it's God who chooses them.

Churches also need deacons and deaconesses to take care of the day-to-day needs of members, and of the building if the church has one. (Not all churches do.) You can see this happening in the early church. As membership grew by leaps and bounds, the apostles found themselves overwhelmed. In those days, they believed the church was not just for preaching and Sabbath services, but was to take care of all those who were in need. They joined all their money together and took care of all the widows and other poor people. The apostles needed help!

Have someone read Acts 6:1-6.

These were the first deacons. Deacons are still leaders, but they are leaders in a different, more practical way. They are very important to the church structure.

Your church also has Sabbath School teachers, because where there is a church, there certainly should be children! Churches with no children (there are some) don't last long. These leaders have a particular gift for working with children and youth. They are perfect examples of the warm, sheltering "roof" we are using as our example.

Other kinds of leaders in a church, all chosen by the members, include clerks, treasurers, communications secretaries, and someone in charge of music. The bigger the church, the more of all these people it needs. Smaller churches still have them all, but one person may do several different things.

Discussion Questions

Can you name some of the leaders in your church (not counting the pastor)?

Who is your favorite elder?

What are some of the things deacons and deaconesses do in your church?

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Do you have a favorite Sabbath School teacher or youth leader? Have you shown him or her or them how much you appreciate them?

Suggested Activity

Take your church and draw slates or shingles or whatever kind of roof you want. Put the names of some of your church leaders there. As you work, discuss the ways your church leaders make you feel warm and sheltered. Are there ways you can help them be strong for their work?

The Steeple

Maybe you were surprised that we didn't start with the need for a pastor. But lots and lots of churches don't have pastors of their own. They might depend on a traveling pastor who can come now and then, or they might share a pastor with several other churches. Is your church like that? Who preaches when the pastor can't be there?

It's kind of like a steeple. Steeples are popular in some countries and not in others, but they aren't essential to the structure. Their original intent was to be like a finger pointing up to God. That's what a pastor is. The pastor is not the head or the foundation of the church. That's Jesus. But the pastor points to Jesus.

It's not even the pastor's job to go out and reach the community for God. Did you know that? Maybe you noticed this yesterday when we read about spiritual gifts:

Have someone read Ephesians 4:11-13.

What are the elements listed as the job of pastors and teachers? Who are the saints? Did you notice that "we all" in verse 13?

That's why churches can get along, sometimes for a long time, without a pastor. The people in the church are doing their work, reaching out to all they meet to tell them the Good News.

"God loves you! He sent His Son for you! He's coming back for you!"

But as churches grow, they start to really want a pastor of their own. A pastor, or a team of pastors for very large churches, usually has special training in a university called a seminary. This word comes from the Latin word for "seed." Pastors get special training in spreading the seed of the Gospel, and in training others to spread and cultivate that seed.

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A pastor can be the focal point for the ministry in the church. He or she may find it easier to organize a series of sermons, or to minister directly to the needs of the congregation, than a group of church members who share the preaching and teaching duties when there is no pastor.

Your Part

Do you feel necessary to your church? You are! There are several reasons.

1. As we said before, churches without children soon die out. That's because, as the old people die, there is no one growing up to take their place.
2. Children have life and energy and ideas that older people don't have. They have new ways of looking at things, because they are new people! This can be frustrating for people who have been used to doing things the same way for a long time, but if all that energy is well channeled by a team of youth leaders and Sabbath School teachers who understand and love young people, it can keep the church alive as nothing else can.
3. The most important reason you are needed is because **you are you!** There is only one you in the entire universe! Nobody else is just like you, and even though God may give you spiritual gifts that are the same in name (helps, encouragement, pastoring) as someone else's, they will be automatically different in you just because you are unique. God can't do without you!

In our "church construction," we could think of children and youth as building (or growing) new rooms and wings onto the church. Children are the playground. They are the Sabbath School rooms, where songs and stories of Jesus are handed on to new little ones. They are the smiles and hugs at the doors, that welcome new people and make them feel loved.

You matter!

Discussion Questions

Your group has already discovered and discussed some of the spiritual gifts among you. Talk about how those help to build the church "up and out." Has anyone in your group helped to start some new ministry or new way of doing things? Share the story.

What do you think is the greatest gift of your pastor? Have you shown appreciation and love?

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Can you see needs in your pastor that you might be able to help fill? Pastors carry heavy burdens, and far too often, the church only tells them its complaints and worries. Pastors need hugs and smiles and prayers and letters of encouragement.

Suggested Activities

Write and illustrate some cards of appreciation for your pastor and other church leaders. You could also organize a Church Leader Appreciation Day.

Finish your church picture by putting a steeple on it with your pastor's name, and draw some wings or outbuildings that represent the gifts and growth of your children and youth.

2018 Junior Youth Week of Prayer Day 6, Thursday Worship from the Heart

What is worship? **[Take a moment to let people give their answers. You might have a scribe record them.]**

It's likely that most of your answers have involved what we might call "churchy things": going to church, singing, or praying. But worship is bigger than that. Here is a simple, baby-talk definition we could use: "God big, me small!"

That pretty much covers it, wouldn't you agree? Worship is the reaction of a limited human being who comes in contact with an infinite, unlimited, mighty Creator. Sometimes it's even a reaction when we come into contact with any being greater than ourselves.

Have someone read Revelation 22:9.

If you ever saw an angel, what do you think would be your first reaction?

It even happens that people try to worship other human beings, just because they seem powerful, or rich. But there's only one Being worthy of worship.

Once we recognize how great God is; that He made us, owns us, loves us, and is sovereign over us and over everything that is, the natural reaction is gratitude, humility, and obedience, and all of these together equal worship. We bow our heads in the presence of a Being so huge and incomprehensible that we can't begin to understand Him, but we rejoice in His love and seek to return it.

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The problem is, people tend to try to narrowly define what worship is. They only allow a certain kind of music, or a certain kind of prayer. Perhaps they think you are only being reverent if you kneel while praying, or they believe one or more musical instruments are inappropriate for worship.

Once there was a small church where a new family began to attend. They were very musical, and asked permission to have a praise band between Sabbath School and church, and the pastor happily said, "Yes!" But they sang different songs than the ones the older church members were used to. And an interesting thing happened. There was a woman in the church that people tended to take their troubles to; we'll call her Joan. One day, one of the older women called Joan on the telephone and asked, "Why doesn't that new family like to be worshipful?"

Confused, Joan asked what the caller meant. The woman explained that the only way of being worshipful was to be very quiet, and if you sang, you should sing quiet, slow songs. The new family liked to sing lively songs—they weren't "rock" by any stretch of the term, but they were more upbeat. To this woman, they weren't worshipful.

The very next day, the mother of the new family called Joan. "Why don't the older people want to worship?" she asked. "Don't they love God?"

Joan was surprised to have these two similar calls from opposite sides of the question. Again, she asked her caller to explain. It turned out that the new family believed that the word "worship" only applied to songs that were sung to God, not about Him. They liked songs about God, but those weren't worship.

Both callers were entirely sincere. Each had a particular definition of what it meant to worship, and each believed the other was not being worshipful. Joan tried to help them see that different people can worship God in different ways, and both are right, so long as they are worshiping God with an honest heart, but the church never did come to agreement. In the end, the new family, plus all those who had begun to attend because they were drawn by the lovely music, stopped coming. What a tragedy!

Worship, like stewardship, is not so much what you do as who you are. It is expressed in prayer and praise and church-going and so on, but it's really a whole-life, whole-self attitude. We express this

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attitude by what we do, not only in church each week or during daily times of devotion or group worship, but all the time by humbly and worshipfully turning to God in praise, or trouble, or for guidance in daily decisions and actions.

Discussion Questions

What do you think about the true story of the church that misunderstood each other? What would your solution have been if you went to that church?

What are your favorite ways to worship when you are at church? At home? At school? By yourself? Do your favorites change from one circumstance to another? Is one "more worshipful" than another?

What have you done today that showed a worshipful attitude?

Suggested Activity

Find a hymnal or other song book and look through it to see which songs are *about* God, and which are *to* God. Sing one of each kind of song and discuss what kinds of emotions each song made you feel and why. Is one more worshipful than the other?

How to Love God

Thousands of years ago, God called Moses to lead his people through the wilderness to the Promised Land. While they were wandering, they had a chance to learn more about how to love God. One of the things Moses taught them has become world-famous. People, especially Jewish people, but all who love God, use it as a prayer. The Jews call it the "Sh'ma," because that is how it begins in Hebrew.

Have someone read Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

These are the words that are central to our faith. We are to have them on our hearts (what we love), in our hands (what we do), and in our minds (what we think about) all the time. Interestingly, these words talk *about* God rather than *to* God, yet they are central to the worship of millions of people. Again, to put it into simple baby-talk, *God loves you! Love Him back!*

It's that simple. And that hard. (Because we're just not that good at loving.) But God keeps on loving us, and we keep on loving Him as well as we can, and loving everybody else, and that's what makes the world go round!

When Jesus was here, a man who studied and taught God's law added another term to the three in the Sh'ma, and Jesus agreed with him.

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Have someone read Luke 10:25-28. Keep this passage open; we will refer back to it many times.

What were the three ways Moses said to love God? You can go back to Deut. 6:4 if you need to. What way did the lawyer add? What did Jesus say about it?

Let's spend some time digging into the Sh'ma and the four ways to love God. What is the first way in Luke 10:25?

Loving with All Your Heart

How can you love God with all your heart? That's just a, strong, busy little organ pumping your blood! However, it does respond quickly to our emotions. Have you ever noticed that your heart beats faster when you are feeling emotional, no matter whether the emotion is pleasant, like happiness or love, or unpleasant, like anger or fear? Love doesn't come from there—it comes from our whole inner self—but it reacts there, so we've connected the two in our thinking. To love with all one's heart means to love with all one's being, but especially to love with warmth, emotion, and creativity. We show heartfelt love for God especially in the gifts we bring Him, such as music and other arts.

When we think of what worship is, music is often what comes up first. As we saw above, people argue over what kinds of songs, and how many, and which instruments (if any) to use, but the minute you start arguing, you stop worshiping. One of the best ways we can give to God is to give each other the gift of respect for our differences.

Music and other forms of art, such as paintings, poetry, skits or other drama, and even what is displayed on the altar at church are an essential part of worship. It's best to have lots of different kinds, because people are different (God made us that way!) and you want to have something that will appeal to each and every individual in the congregation. Every song or picture or play doesn't have to be one *you* or *I* like; if they are given from an honest heart, God likes them all, and that's what counts!

Touch is another important way to show love. But we can't touch God, so how do we show love and worship by touch?

Have someone read Matthew 25:35, 36, 40.

Did you know that when you touch someone in need, you are touching Jesus? That's what He said. It's not that the person is Jesus, it's that Jesus has given us to each other to care for, and He feels it when we touch each other with love. On the other hand, when we touch each other with unkindness or cruelty, He feels that, too!

We also have another instruction in the Bible concerning touch.

Have three people read the following verses:

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Romans 16:16
2 Corinthians 13:12
1 Thessalonians 5:26

If this is repeated three times, does that mean it's important?
What do you think it means?

Discussion Questions

What is your favorite way to give and receive love to people? Can you adapt that to show love to God? (Remember, showing love to people is showing love to their heavenly Father, but we also want to demonstrate our love straight to God Himself.)

What kinds of gifts are given to God in your church's services?

Can you think of more ways to give gifts to God?

Do you think loving touch can be worshipful?

Is it the custom at your church to hug or kiss each other at the door? Why or why not?

What kinds of touch have you given and received this week that were godly in nature?

What does it look like when someone worships God with only part of their heart? Have you done that? How do you change to loving Him with all your heart?

Activity Suggestion

Come up with an artistic expression of love for God that you could share with your church this week. It can be anything your group comes up with—the sky's the limit. See what gifts God has given among you and how you can give them back to Him.

Loving with All Your Soul

Look back at Luke 10:25. What is the second way we are to love God?

"Soul" is another one of those all-inclusive words. Our soul is the combination of all we are. We believe that a living body plus the breath of God equals a living soul. So how do you love God with your whole soul, and show worship by doing that?

Well, usually when we talk about soul, we are especially talking of spiritual things. So of course worship music and everything we've talked about so far is part of that. But there are lots of other spiritual ways to show love and worship to God.

Listening to the sermon, reading the Bible or spiritual stories, thinking or singing or talking to and about God and salvation, all these things are worshipful activities. Some people especially love to go outside to a place where God's creation is on display, like a park, the woods, a lake or river, or by the sea. You can go alone, or with other spiritually-minded friends, and express your love for God there.

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You'll notice this takes time. And time is one of the best ways to show love to anyone, including God. As Adventists, we have not only daily devotional time, but we also have God's Sabbath—the wonderful gift of a whole day off from work and worry every single week of our lives! Taking that time with God shows love, is deeply, soulfully worshipful, and also prepares us to spend time working with God and loving others all week. Which is also worship!

Discussion Questions

How does your soul feel when you think about God?

What are some ways you spiritually worship?

Where is your favorite place in nature? How can you worship there?

How much of your daily time is spent with God? Don't count only worship and devotional time; count all time you are working and walking with God. But do be sure you get enough alone time with Him.

What does it look like when someone worships God with only part of their soul? Have you done that? How do you change to loving Him with all your soul?

Activity Suggestion

If possible, have everyone go outside, find a quiet place alone, and spend five minutes in prayer. Then come back and discuss how you felt, and any insights you had. Did you feel God with you?

Loving with All Your Strength

Go back to Luke 10:25 again and see what the third way is to love God.

Of course all our strength means body, mind, and spirit, but we could think of this especially as our physical strength, or loving and worshiping God with our bodies. That includes the loving touch we talked about above. Another important way to show love to God is by doing acts of service. This is where your spiritual gifts come in, as well as any work you do for God, others, or your church, whether it's particularly in your gift area or not.

Did you ever think about working for God as being worship? It is!

Have someone read Romans 12:1.

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Presenting our bodies as living sacrifices means presenting our hands, feet, and minds to work for God and others. Unfortunately, many Christians over the centuries have been so dedicated and devoted (which is great) that they “pour themselves out for God” (which is also great) and they keep pouring until there’s nothing left (which is not so great)! The passage says we’re to be *living* sacrifices, not dead ones!

Have someone read 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20.

So, we’re all temples! (Remember, we’re the living stones that create the church of God on earth.) Presenting our bodies as living sacrifices also means taking good care of them, being sure to get enough sleep, good food, exercise, and so on. That’s taking care of the temple where the Holy Spirit lives, and that’s definitely worship.

That way, we’ll keep up our strength, so that we can continue using it to love and worship God for a long, long time.

Discussion Questions

What are some worshipful ways you use your body for God?

What are some things you do to keep yourself strong and healthy?

How does health affect your worship?

Are there ways you can use your body while in church?

What does it look like when someone worships God with only part of their strength? Have you done that? How do you change to loving Him with all your strength?

Activity Suggestion

Together as a group, come up with a physical way that you can worship God with all your strength. Perhaps it is a skit or drama, or perhaps a march or dance, or perhaps a work of service. Or all of the above!

Loving with All Your Mind

To tell the truth, this is the part many Adventists are best at. We love to think and study and discuss (and sometimes argue...) over God and Jesus and worship and theology. This is one of our great strengths,

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and we have used it well for God, mostly. Some Adventist young people have told me they are very surprised when they find out how many of their Christian friends don't think. They may love and worship God, but they don't know what they believe, or why, and they certainly can't show someone else in the Bible why they follow a certain doctrine.

Have someone read 1 Peter 3:15.

Adventists take this seriously, and we seek to be able to understand and share what we believe and why. This is one way to worship and love God with all our minds.

Which parts of the worship service do you think particularly use our minds? **[Take time for some answers.]**

This can become a weakness if we worship only with our minds and not with our hearts, souls, and strength, or worse yet, when we use our minds against other people. Using your knowledge of the Bible to prove someone else wrong *is not* what God gave you that knowledge for! If you look at Jesus' life, you'll find He only rebuked church leaders who thought they knew it all, but were not loving toward the people they were supposed to be leading toward God. He answered Bible questions for those who came and asked, such as His disciples, or Nicodemus. When He preached and taught to the common people, He always talked about God's love, and the kingdom coming.

So, we are to love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. But is this all really worship?

Have someone read John 4:19-26.

We are blessed beyond measure whenever we are studying something and it turns out we have a direct answer from the mouth of Jesus Himself. Let's discuss this in our discussion questions.

Discussion Questions

What does Jesus tell the woman at the well that worship is?
Is it something that happens at a particular place or in a certain style?

Does it require certain rituals?

Should all churches be the same?

What does it mean to worship "in spirit and in truth"?

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How do we worship with all our minds?

What way have you used your mind worshipfully this week?

What does it look like when someone worships God with only part of their mind? Have you done that? How do you change to loving Him with all your mind?

Activity Suggestion

Let each person make a chart with four sections labeled heart, soul, strength, and mind. Each can fill in ways they love to worship in each of these categories. Some should be things they do normally, and some should be new things they'd like to try. Try to use something from each category in the coming week, then come together and discuss the results. What does it do for your worship life? What does it do for your church?

2018 Junior Youth Week of Prayer

Day 7, Friday

Different is Good

What is a The Holy Seed Church?

Have you ever thought about the fact that identity is based on difference? You can only tell what a thing is, and therefore name it, by seeing what makes it different from another thing. Sometimes those differences are obvious. Most people can easily tell a dog from a cat, because they're very different. The differences are less if things are in the same general category. It takes a little more attention to detail to tell one kind of cat from another kind of cat. In the dark, if you could only see a silhouette, you could still tell you were looking at a cat. You could probably tell if it was a long-haired cat or a short-haired cat. But you might not be able to identify a calico cat from a Siamese cat. Then comes the final, most detailed category: being able to identify one single cat—your cat. If your pet cat is lost, you can describe it as having tiger-striped gray fur and green eyes, but only you and your family will be able to identify your own cat for sure when it is found.

And the cat, of course, will be able to identify you, too—even better than you can identify it, because the cat has the help of scent and other details humans aren't good at.

Different from the World

Seventh-day Adventists are like that. Their first great difference is from the world of unbelievers. (Unfortunately, not all Adventists really believe in and trust in God. They may take the name without being

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one in heart. We will set aside that category of Adventists for God to identify and deal with, and we will talk of Adventists who are Adventists all the way through.)

In general, people are more interested than anything else in their own interests and desires. They may identify these desires in ways that harm those around them. It starts in small ways—children who are selfish with their things, or who throw tantrums or refuse to help their families do the necessary work of the home. If these children don't change, they grow up to be people who want what they want when they want it, and don't care how they get it. These people lie, cheat, steal, and even fight and kill. All war comes from this kind of thinking.

Where did this kind of thinking come from?

Have someone read Genesis 3:6.

Satan brought it! It really started even before that, in heaven, when Lucifer got selfish and wanted to be God. He refused to repent, so he got kicked out of heaven with his followers. He came to the new world we call earth, and convinced Adam and Eve that his selfish way was better than God's self-giving way.

And here we are.

Have someone read Genesis 6:5, 6.

It didn't take long, did it?

All godly people, The Holy Seed Church included, recognize this sinful desire for self to rule, and they turn decidedly away from that, giving it up to God and trusting Him to change them.

An The Holy Seed Church is, first of all, a Christian. Like other Christians, The Holy Seed Church accept that God is real, and live to love and serve Him. This is a difference from the general world that is usually visible, especially when someone is in trouble, and learns that her The Holy Seed Church friend is a safe person to turn to for comfort, help, and encouragement. The person may ask, "Why are you like that?" Or they may praise The Holy Seed Church and say how wonderful she is. This gives The Holy Seed Church a chance to say, "Oh, no—it's not me. But God is alive in my life, and that makes all the difference!"

Discussion Questions

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What are some ways you can see that Adventists are different from the unbelieving world?

Are there ways that you are different from other kids in your town or neighborhood?

If you had to give just one, central reason why the world is in so much trouble and turmoil, what would it be? Be prepared to explain your answer.

Do you think of yourself as an Adventist first, or as a Christian first? Why?

Activity Suggestion

Make a poster that shows the things that set apart a Christian from unbelievers. You can draw or paint, write, or cut pictures from magazines and paste them on like a collage. Decide on a title for your poster.

Sharing with other Believers

In our difference from the world, we are very similar to other Christians, just as cats are similar to other cats. There are some basic beliefs we have in common with all true believers. (Even people who are not Christian may share some of these beliefs. God knows who His own children are, whether we do or not—even in the dark!)

Have someone read 1 Corinthians 15:3-7.

This is one of the first “creeds,” or statements of belief. What are the basic elements of it? Do you think there is anything missing, and if so, what?

Now have someone read 1 Timothy 3:16.

Did this passage add some of what was missing to the first one? What other things do you think are basic to Christian belief?

Let’s list some. Christians believe there is a Creator God who did not make people to be sinners, but happy and whole. We chose to turn away from God and follow Satan and self instead, but God still loved us, sent prophets to teach us, and gave us the Ten Commandments and the

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sacrificial system. Finally, He sent His own Son to live and die for us. We believe Jesus rose again, reigns in heaven, sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in and with us, and will finally take us home to heaven.

There are differences from church to church in the details around these beliefs, but in general, we all agree on these. These are the first and foremost faith facts on which we need to build our lives, and when we talk to other Christians we should dwell first on what we have in common, because being a Christian is all about love, and that is the loving thing to do.

Different from other Believers

Yet, when it comes down to really identifying us, Adventists are also different from many other Christians.

Now, we must be careful in thinking about these differences.

Remember, love comes first. Humans like to divide people into categories. We divide people by their age, or their gender, or their skin color or country of birth. We divide them into the educated and the uneducated. We even divide people—children of God, for whom Jesus died—into worthy and unworthy, or slave and owner, or powerful and powerless. In Bible times, two divisions were Jew and Gentile, and unfortunately, today we are far too likely to divide the world into The Holy Seed Church and non- The Holy Seed Church.

One of the things we believe is that *every person born on this planet is a child of God and is loved more than life by God*. That's the whole reason why Jesus came, and why the Godhead is doing more than we can even begin to imagine to try to gather *all* into the family of believers. It's not that God will love you anymore than He already does if you accept Him. But if you *know* it, it really makes a difference! You've noticed that, haven't you?

So as we think about what identifies The Holy Seed Church as different from other believers, we must be careful not to think this somehow makes us better or more worthy. These beliefs are gifts—things which will bless our lives and make us even more loving. We can share them out of joy, and without worrying that a Christian who doesn't agree is therefore not saved at all. That's God's business, and we already know He wants them to be saved.

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Have someone read 2 Peter 3:9.

He's the only one who knows hearts!

Our two main defining beliefs, of course, are right in our name.

We believe the seventh-day Sabbath is still a standing gift of God and has never been changed. (We find it hard to understand why anyone would turn down a guaranteed day off weekly, for life!) Can your class recite the Sabbath commandment together? If not...

...have someone read Exodus 20:8-11.

Unfortunately, over the years we and other Sabbath-keepers, beginning with the Jews of Jesus' time and before, have turned the Sabbath into a heavy, burdensome 'you'd-better-or-else! kind of thing, so it's partly our fault that people turn away from it and think we're being legalists. As a matter of fact, the Sabbath, kept rightly, is the very protection against legalism.

Have someone read Ezekiel 20:12.

Who sanctifies us? Does Sabbath-keeping sanctify us? Can we buy salvation, or work for salvation? No! So we have this weekly reminder to trust God and for one day, neither work nor buy and sell. Just trust and worship. What a gift!

The second belief in our name is that we believe that Jesus is physically coming to earth again.

Have three people read the following passages:

John 14:3

Acts 1:11

1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17.

This belief is now common among many churches (though again, there are differences in *how* they believe it), but in the early 19th century, it had been largely lost. All over the world, people began studying at around the same time, without knowing about the others at first. As they learned to believe in the nearness of the Second Advent, they came to be called "The Holy Seed Church"—without the capital A. In 2007 when our founders finally gave up on reforming their own churches (which they had been largely thrown out of), they took that word as part of their name.

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It was because of those early studiers of the Word that so many churches today have regained their belief in the Coming.

Another belief we have that identifies us as different from other Christians is that the dead don't go immediately to heaven or hell, and that there is no such thing as an ever-burning hell.

Have three people read the following passages:

Ecclesiastes 9:5.

Matthew 10:28.

1 Timothy 6:16.

We have some other uncommon beliefs, such as the sanctuary system and investigative judgment and the gift of prophecy as given to Ellen White, but this is enough to chew on for now.

Let's end by going back to the beginning. *The one, single, most important belief for every Christian is Jesus loves me, Jesus died for me, Jesus saves me entirely by His grace, and will be back to get me!*

Everything else simply adds depth, beauty, and richness to the Christian life. It's like being a violinist. When you get a violin and take lessons and learn to play it, you are a violinist. The littlest child playing "Jesus Loves Me" in Suzuki style on a one-quarter size violin is a violinist. As she grows and learns, she'll get better and better at it, and perhaps teach others someday. She'll become a *better* violinist, but she'll never be any *more* of a violinist than when she first began.

A Greek Orthodox man asked a The Holy Seed Church woman, "Do you believe you have to keep the Sabbath to be saved?"

The woman replied, "I don't believe you have to keep any commandments to be saved."

The man looked at her, startled.

"I believe we are saved by the grace of Christ, period."

The man looked relieved. "Oh, well, yes, but—"

The woman went on, "After that, your relationship to the fourth commandment should be exactly the same as your relationship to the other nine."

The man looked thoughtful. "I never thought of it that way..." he mused.

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The woman has always wondered what the Holy Spirit was able to accomplish, and what the man did with that conversation. But she hopes, at least, that he remembers an Adventist as a loving and kind person, not someone who argues and tries to convince him he's wrong.

Discussion questions

Can you think of other beliefs we share with many Christians? Can you think of any we share with Buddhists or Hindi or any other people in your region?

Can you think of other beliefs that we hold that are different from those other people groups?

How can you share these truths in loving and gentle ways?

What does it mean to you to be an Adventist?

Do you have family or local church customs that are part of how you identify yourselves, like potlucks and certain Sabbath activities, or certain songs? How are these different from *beliefs*?

Activity Suggestions

Make another poster, this one representing the things we believe that are uncommon.

Divide into pairs and role play ways to share beliefs in non-threatening and non-argumentative ways.

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Day 8, Sabbath The Wedding Day

The Bride of Christ

Many places in the Bible, God refers to His people as His wife or His bride. In the Old Testament, He called Israel His wife. In the New Testament, He calls the church His bride.

Have three people read the following passages.

Isaiah 61:10

Hosea 2:19-20

Revelation 21:1-4.

In fact, Jesus is planning a big wedding—a *big* wedding!

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Have someone read Revelation 19:6-9.

How many people will be at this “marriage supper”? Millions and millions! All the saved from all the ages of the earth, plus all the angels! But why is it called a marriage or a wedding? That’s a funny image, isn’t it? Why would God call a church a bride? For that matter, why is the bridegroom a Lamb?

We know that last one, right? Jesus is called “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” because He gave Himself as the one great and perfect sacrifice for us all. And the fact that this symbolic term is used here gives us a hint that “bride” and “marriage” are symbolic, too.

So, let’s think about what a bride is. Technically, a bride is any woman who is about to get married or has just gotten married. But in this sinful world, there are many women, and even little girls, who are made to marry against their will. This is not God’s plan and is not what we mean by bride! **Note to editors: I debated about putting this here, but given the reality in which many of our children live, I thought a brief mention might be in order. You can take it out if you think it’s inappropriate.** A true bride is a woman who is thrilled and delighted to be marrying the man she loves with all her heart.

What does a bride do?

She thinks all the time about her groom. She loves to spend time with him and can’t wait to be with him always. She usually changes her name to match his (though not all women do now.) She buys or makes new clothes for the wedding and for when she is a wife. She also makes or collects the things they will need for their new household. Many of these things are given to the couple by friends and family. The couple talk a lot about how it will affect their lives and their work when they are living together. They plan for children and for their future when they will grow old. The bride and groom plan a trip together, if they can afford it. Most of all, they want to live a long and fruitful life together.

How are these things like a church and its relationship to God?
Let’s look at each one.

A bride thinks all the time about her groom. She loves to spend time with him and can’t wait to be with him always.

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As we've said so many times, a church is not a building, it is people. You are the church. So if you want to be a part of the great marriage supper of the Lamb, ask yourself this: what do you spend the most time thinking about? You know how it is when you like someone a lot. They kind of take over your thoughts. You think about that person even when you are supposed to be doing something else.

Is that how it is with you and Jesus? Do you think about Him a lot? Do you like to spend time with Him?

And what does it mean to spend time with Jesus, anyway? God is everywhere all the time, right? So everybody is always "with" Him. But most of us are not really "with" Him that much, if you know what I mean. Someone can be walking alongside you all day long and if you never look at them or pay attention to them or talk to them, they might as well not be there. Maybe once in a while that person reaches out and grabs you because you almost walked out in front of a car. Then you notice, and you say, "Thank you, thank you!" But you soon forget again.

This is not the way a bride thinks. She can pick out her man in any crowd. She misses him even if they are apart for a day. It doesn't mean she can't live without him, or suffocates him with constant need, but they are both happiest when they are doing things together.

A bride usually changes her name to match her husband's.

When we choose to follow Jesus and learn to live with Him day by day, we change our name. We call ourselves Christian. Once you have taken that name, people are watching. What kind of a Christian are you? Are you rigid and judgmental, looking for every mistake you or someone else makes? If so, they don't want to come to that marriage feast of the Lamb, thank you.

Are you getting more and more loving and kind and merciful? That's the kind of thing that makes people want to be part of the bride of Christ, His church.

Discussion Questions

What do you like to think about most?

In order to be spending time with Jesus, do we have to be thinking literally religious thoughts all the time?

What kinds of things do engaged couples do together? How can we symbolically apply this kind of thinking to being with Jesus, working with Him, using our gifts, etc.?

Have you taken the name Christian?

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Tell some stories (without names or details) when you have seen people who claimed to be Christians acting unchristian. Tell some stories about seeing them act in ways that drew you to God.

Activity Suggestion

Let people look up what their names mean, if they don't already know. Are the meanings ones they want to live up to? If so, how can they do that? If the names have meanings they don't like, how can using Christ's name as a Christian help them? Come up with three ways to show Christlikeness to others this week.

Planning for the Marriage

A bride buys or makes new clothes for the wedding and for when she is a wife.

Do we get new clothes when we become Christians?

Did you notice that in two of the "bride" texts we read, in Isaiah 61 and Revelation 21 (you can look back at them if you want to) it was said that the bride was given fine linen to wear? What do you think this represents?

Here is a more detailed description.

Have someone read Zechariah 3:3-7.

What are the filthy clothes Joshua was wearing? What do the fine clothes the angel gives him represent?

Every single person on the planet is offered a pure robe of Christ's righteousness to wear. They don't have to buy it, work for it, or make it. It's a gift. Yet how few accept!

We do have to take off our filthy rags in order to wear it.

Have someone read Ephesians 4:22-24.

Fortunately, we don't have to take these off by ourselves. Did you notice that God told the angel to take the filthy clothes off Joshua? Jesus will take these things from us if we ask Him to and cooperate.

A bride makes or collects the things they will need for their new household.

In times past, and perhaps in some places now, it was the custom for girls to begin when they were young to save up things for their future households. These were often kept in trunks called "hope chests." They embroidered sheets, curtains, and tablecloths. They saved dishes

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and pots and pans. Often families and friends gather to give new households some of the things they will need.

What kinds of things are we gathering for our new life in heaven? Obviously we can't take physical things with us to heaven. But Jesus did say to "lay up treasure in heaven."

Have someone read Matthew 6:19-20.

What kinds of treasures can we collect here and lay up in heaven? Did you know the only thing we'll take with us to heaven is our character? So we can be laying up kind deeds, words of love and comfort, and actions of love and faithfulness. The best thing is, these things aren't laid away in trunks to be used "someday." They are in use now, every day, growing stronger and more beautiful as we wait for our Bridegroom to come.

The couple talk a lot about how it will affect their lives and their work when they are living together.

One of the most important things a human couple can do is discuss carefully the ways their life together will affect their daily lives. Too many people assume that if they love each other, differences in habit and manner and thinking won't matter. But they do.

It's the same with our Christian life. We don't just say, "Okay, I'm a Christian now," get baptized, and go on living the same old life. Everything changes.

Our words, our habits, even our likes and dislikes. Things that used to seem really important, like what other people think of us, don't matter much anymore. What matters is what our Groom thinks of us.

When a man and woman come together to get married, they do bring their characters with them. Just so, Jesus does not expect you to be someone other than you are. In fact, the reason the Bible says we are "a new person" is actually because now we are allowing the Spirit to make us into the person God originally intended us to be! If you are a quiet, solitary soul, you still will be. But you won't be afraid to talk to anyone who asks about your new Friend, Jesus. If you are a lively, excitable type, you will still be so, but you won't be disruptive or uncontrollable, and you'll never use humor against people. Jesus will make you into a better you. (It may take longer than you wish...)

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How much time do you spend talking with Jesus about the changes you'd like to see in your new life together?

Discussion Questions

What are you making or collecting for your life with Jesus in heaven?

How are these things in use every day now, while also being saved for their greatest fulfillment in the New Earth?

How much time do you spend discussing your now and future Christian life with Jesus?

How does it affect your daily life—school, work, family friends—that you walk with Him?

Suggested Activity

In teams of 3-4 (or as a group if your meeting is small) read over Colossians 3:5-15. Make illustrated lists—they could be posters—of what you “put off” and “lay aside” and what you “put on” or “take up” as Christians.

Planning for Growth

The couple plan for children and for their future when they will grow old.

Most families want to have children. They will be the legacy that the couple leaves on earth when they die. The children could be born to them or adopted, but in either case, they are a heritage from the Lord.

Do we have “children” as Christians? Every time we pass on the Good News of God’s love to someone else, and they listen, that’s another new child for the kingdom of God. When we live our lives as godly people, others may notice, and there may be new births we don’t even know about. God does. He is counting every soul with joy and excitement, and longing for the time when we will be together with Him forever.

There is another way for Christian life to be fruitful, too.

Have someone read John 15:1-5.

What do you think these fruits represent? Once again, in a different way, we are symbolizing the acts of kindness and compassion, the ways we use our gifts to grow the kingdom, the ways we serve our

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local churches, and the good habits we build. All of these are fruits in the life of the Christian, and again, they lead to fruit in others as well. People see our kindness and are inspired to be kind, also. They see us returning God's love, and they look up, and see His love for themselves.

This is the best of a strong marriage, and it's the kind of spiritual "marriage" Jesus is looking for with His church.

The Wedding Day!

*The bride and groom plan a trip together, if they can afford it.
They want to live a long and fruitful life together.*

Here it comes—the Big Day arrives at last! The bride has her gown and her flowers, the place is chosen and decorated, the friends are gathered. The groom and his friends watch and wait. The bride comes—never has she seemed so beautiful to the waiting groom! The vows are spoken—but they are really only saying aloud before God and friends what is already true in their hearts. Then off they go, together forever.

Our wedding day is coming, too. Jesus is away, getting the house ready. There will be room for you! Are you going? I can't wait, can you? Is your gown ready?

Have someone read Revelation 22:14.

What does it mean to wash your robes in the blood of the Lamb? As odd and backward as it sounds, it's Jesus' blood which makes us clean. His perfection is given to us, just for the asking! In Him, we are counted as perfect, as if we never sinned.

Better yet, as we've walked and talked with Him, He's been teaching us to actually *live out* that perfection of His! His perfect, unwavering faith has found a home in us, and we are not afraid anymore. We've seen how He loves us, so we've passed on that love to everyone we've met. We've honestly confessed when we have not been loving, and have asked forgiveness. We've passed on that mercy and forgiven those who hurt us.

And now...we have our white robes ready. We are adorned with virtues we don't deserve, which grew in the heart of our Bridegroom, and which He made into crowns and necklaces for us. He's prepared the place. His friends are around Him.

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Our friends, the angels, are gathered around us.

At the Gates of the City, we speak the vows aloud that were already true in our hearts. And we enter in And (for once it's really true)

We live happily ever after!

Discussion Questions

Do you know whether or not you have "children" in the faith? That is, has anyone that you know of accepted Jesus because of your invitation?

How can you plan to be fruitful as you grow in Christ?

What kinds of spiritual fruit have you seen growing in other Christian lives around you?

Are you ready for the wedding? If not, what do you need to do to get ready? (Remember, you don't have to "get good" first—in fact, you can't. Only Jesus can make you good, and He does that as soon as you ask. Then He spends the rest of your life teaching you to live it out.)

What is the Christian "honeymoon trip"?

Suggested Activity

Make a little skit to act out Revelation 22. Take your time, use your creativity, and make it a good one. Then, if you like, you can offer to share it with the whole church.

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