

A Step in Faith



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Phil. 2:5–11; Matt. 4:18–20; Acts 9:3–6, 10–20; John 21:15–19; 1 John 3:16–18.*

Memory Text: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men” (*Philippians 2:5–7, NKJV*).

Jesus came to this world of suffering and death in order to reveal the Father's character of love, to win back the affection of the human race, and to redeem all humankind. “Never can the cost of our redemption be realized until the redeemed shall stand with the Redeemer before the throne of God. Then as the glories of the eternal home burst upon our enraptured senses we shall remember that Jesus left all this for us, that He not only became an exile from the heavenly courts, but for us took the risk of failure and eternal loss. Then we shall cast our crowns at His feet, and raise the song, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.’ Rev. 5:12.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 131.

The sacrifice that Jesus made for our salvation is incalculable. When we respond to His leading, accept His command, and unite with Him in reaching lost people for His kingdom, it calls for sacrifice. Although our sacrifices can never in any way compare to His, soul-winning ministry is a leap in faith for us, as well. It leads us out of our comfort zones into uncharted waters. At times our Lord calls us to make sacrifices, but the joys He offers are far greater.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 26.

Jesus' Self-Sacrificing Love

The apostle Paul encourages us to “let” or “allow” or “permit” the mind of Christ to dwell in us. This leads us to some fascinating questions. What was the mind of Christ like? What governed His thought patterns? What was the essence of His thinking?

Read **Philippians 2:5–11.** How do these verses reveal the heart of Christ’s thinking and the pattern that governed His entire life?

From all eternity Jesus was equal with God. Paul declares this eternal truth in these words, “who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God” (*Phil. 2:6, NKJV*). The word translated as “form” is the Greek word *morphē*. It means the very essence of a thing. It links two things that are of equal value. *The SDA Bible Commentary* puts it this way: “This places Christ on an equality with the Father, and sets Him far above every other power. Paul stresses this in order to portray more vividly the depths of Christ’s voluntary humiliation.”—Volume 7, p. 154. Speaking of His eternal nature, Ellen G. White adds, “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 530.

Jesus, who was equal with God from all eternity, “made Himself of no reputation” (*Phil. 2:7, NKJV*). This also is a fascinating Greek expression. It literally can be translated “emptied.” Jesus voluntarily “emptied Himself” of His privileges and prerogatives as God’s equal to take on the form of a man and become a humble servant of humanity. As a servant, He revealed heaven’s law of love to the entire universe and, eventually, performed the ultimate act of love on the cross. He gave His life to save ours, eternally.

The essence of Jesus’ thinking was self-sacrificial love. To follow Jesus means that we love as He loved, serve as He served, and minister as He ministered. Allowing Jesus through His Holy Spirit to empty us of selfish ambition will cost us something. It cost Jesus everything. But Scripture says of Jesus, “Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name” (*Phil. 2:9, NKJV*).

Heaven will be worth any sacrifice we make on earth. There will be sacrifices along the way, but the joys of service will outweigh them today, and the eternal joy of living with Christ throughout all eternity will make any sacrifice we make here seem insignificant.

When was the last time you truly had to die to self for Christ’s sake? What does your answer say to you about your Christian walk?

Commitment's Call

Imagine that you are Peter and John. The sun has just risen on a beautiful Galilean morning, chasing away the chill of the night air. Your thoughts are on one thing: catching fish, a lot of them. The fishing has been good recently, and you are looking forward to another day of great fishing. Then in the early morning light you see Him approaching, Jesus of Nazareth. Little do you know that in a few moments your whole life will change. You will never be the same again.

Read Matthew 4:18–20. **Why do you think Peter and John were willing to make such a radical commitment to follow Christ? What in the text indicates that Jesus was calling them to a higher purpose than catching fish?**

From the gospel of John we learn that these men already knew something about Jesus for more than a year, yet had not made a full commitment to Him. Still, there must have been a divine demeanor about Christ, something about His appearance, words, and actions that indicated to these Galilean fishermen that He was inviting them to a divine calling. The reason they left their boats, occupation, and familiar surroundings to follow Him was that they sensed the call to a higher purpose. These ordinary fishermen recognized that they were called for an extraordinary purpose. In the same way, God may not be calling you to leave your profession today, but He is calling you to an extraordinary purpose: to share His love and to witness of His truth for the glory of His name.

Consider the call of Matthew, the tax collector, in Matthew 9:9. **What do you see in this passage that is quite remarkable?**

Tax collectors in the Roman world were often extortionists who used their official power to oppress the common people. They were some of the most hated and despised characters in all of Israel. Christ's invitation, "Follow Me," presupposes that Matthew had heard of Jesus and in his heart had a longing to follow Him. When the invitation came, he was ready. He was amazed that Christ would accept him and invite him to be one of His disciples.

Deep within all of our hearts there is a longing for something more in life. We, too, want to live for something worthwhile, for a grander, nobler purpose. Hence, Christ calls us, like Matthew, to follow Him.

Think about what people have had to give up to follow Jesus. Why, in the end, will it always be worth it?

Paul: God's Chosen Vessel

When Paul accepted Christ, his whole life was radically changed. Christ gave him an entirely new future. He led him out of his comfort zone to experiences he could hardly have imagined. Through the Holy Spirit's guidance, the apostle Paul proclaimed the Word of God to thousands throughout the Mediterranean world. His witness changed the history of Christianity and the world.

Read Acts 9:3–6, 10–20. How do these verses reveal that Jesus had a divine purpose for Paul's life?

Jesus often chooses the most unlikely candidates to bear witness to His name. Think of the demoniacs, the Samaritan woman, a prostitute, a tax collector, Galilean fishermen, and now a fierce persecutor of Christianity. These were all changed by grace and then sent forth with joy in their hearts to tell the story of what Christ had done in their lives. Each never tired of telling the story. What Christ had done for them was so marvelous that they had to share it. They could not be silent.

Compare Acts 28:28–31 and 2 Timothy 4:5–8. What indications do we have in these verses that Paul never wavered from his commitment to give his entire life to Christ in soul-winning ministry?

At the end of his life, while under house arrest in Rome, Paul affirmed that “ ‘the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!’ ” (*Acts 28:28, NKJV*). The record says that he received all who visited him and preached the Word to them (*Acts 28:30, 31*). At the end of his life, he urged Timothy to do the work of an evangelist, and Paul could say of himself, “ ‘I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith’ ” (*2 Tim. 4:7, NKJV*).

Although our call may not be as dramatic as Paul's, God is calling each one of us to participate with Him in His work of changing the world. It is obvious that despite all the hardship he had faced over the years (*see 2 Cor. 11:25–30*), Paul stayed faithful to his calling in the Lord. The story of how this former persecutor of the followers of Jesus became the most influential and consequential advocate of the Christian faith (with the exception of Jesus) remains a powerful testimony to what the Lord can do through someone who dedicates his or her life to the work of the Lord.

What has God called you to do? Are you doing it?

The Demands of Love

Love always manifests itself in action. Our love for Christ compels us to do something for lost humanity. Paul stated it clearly when he said to the church at Corinth, “For the love of Christ compels us” (*2 Cor. 5:14, NKJV*). Christianity is not primarily giving up bad things so that we can be saved. Jesus did not “give up” bad things in heaven so that He could be saved. He gave up good things so that others could be saved. Jesus does not invite us merely to give our time, talent, and treasures to His cause; He invites us to give our lives.

In a morning meeting with the disciples on the shores of Galilee, Jesus brilliantly outlined the demands of divine love.

Read John 21:15–19. What question did Jesus ask Peter three times, and what was Peter’s response? Why did Jesus ask Peter this particular question three times?

Peter denied his Lord three times, and Jesus elicited a response of love from Peter’s own lips three times. In the presence of the disciples, Jesus was rebuilding Peter’s confidence that he was forgiven by divine love and that Jesus still had work for him to do in His cause.

Read John 21:15–19 again, this time especially noting Jesus’ response to Peter’s affirmation of his love for Christ. What did Jesus tell him to do in response?

Divine love is active, not passive. Genuine love is more than a warm feeling, more than a nice idea. It involves commitment. Love compels us to act. It leads us to reach out to a lost world of God’s children in desperate need. When Jesus said to Peter, “‘Feed My lambs,’ ” it was both a command and a comforting reassurance. The Master called for a response to love, and He also encouraged Peter that He still had a work for him to do even despite Peter’s truly shameful action when Jesus had been arrested. Peter not only denied knowing Jesus, exactly as Christ had told him that he would, but Peter also denied it with curses, as well.

The point? You may have desperately failed your Lord. You may have denied Him by your actions more than once. The good news is that grace is still available, and God is not done with you yet. There is still a place in His work for you if you are willing.

Like Peter, have you ever “denied” the Lord? If so, what does the story, not only of Peter’s denial but also of Christ’s words to Peter here, say to you?

Love's Commitment

At the end of the conversation between Peter and Jesus, we see two men walking on the beach. As the waves lap at the shore, Jesus tells Peter about the cost of discipleship. He wants Peter to know clearly what he will face if he accepts Jesus' invitation to "feed My sheep."

Read John 21:18, 19. What did Jesus tell Peter about the cost of discipleship? Why do you think Jesus revealed something so startling to Peter at this point in his life?

In these words, Christ foretold the martyrdom that one day Peter would experience. His hands would be stretched out on a cross. In this revelation, Christ offered Peter a choice. He offered him life's greatest joy: seeing souls won for the kingdom of God. On the day of Pentecost he would see thousands come to Christ. He would perform miracles in Jesus' name and glorify Him before many more thousands. He would have the everlasting joy of fellowship with Christ in His mission.

But that privilege would come with a price. It would demand a sacrifice, the ultimate sacrifice. Peter was asked to make the commitment with his eyes wide open. For Peter now knew that no sacrifice was too great to join Jesus in His mission to the world.

Read 1 John 3:16–18. For John, love is more than a vague abstraction. How does John define love's ultimate sacrifice?

In eternity, nothing we have ever done will seem like a sacrifice. Our investment of time and effort, the investment of our lives, will seem overabundantly rewarded. Yet, what a joy it is to turn love into action, to turn intentions into commitment. When we respond to divine love by holding nothing back as we reach out in service to witness to others as ambassadors of Christ, we fulfill the purpose of our lives and experience life's greatest joy. As Jesus so aptly put it, " 'If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them' " (*John 13:17, NKJV*). Life's greatest joy and lasting happiness come when we are fulfilling the meaning of our existence by glorifying God by the way we live and share His love and truth with the world.

It's hard to grasp the idea of eternity, when all we know is a tiny bit of time. But, as well as you can, try to imagine eternal life, an eternal *good* life—better than anything we can have here—and, thus, why nothing here, in this short spurt of time, would be worth losing the promise of eternal life that we have in Jesus.

Further Thought: “Those who have the spiritual oversight of the church should devise ways and means by which an opportunity may be given to every member of the church to act some part in God’s work. Too often in the past this has not been done. Plans have not been clearly laid and fully carried out whereby the talents of all might be employed in active service. There are but few who realize how much has been lost because of this.

“The leaders in God’s cause, as wise generals, are to lay plans for advance moves all along the line. In their planning they are to give special study to the work that can be done by the laity for their friends and neighbors. The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers.

“The salvation of sinners requires earnest, personal labor. We are to bear to them the word of life, not to wait for them to come to us. Oh, that I could speak words to men and women that would arouse them to diligent action! The moments now granted to us are few. We are standing upon the very borders of the eternal world. We have no time to lose. Every moment is golden and altogether too precious to be devoted merely to self-serving. Who will seek God earnestly and from Him draw strength and grace to be His faithful workers in the missionary field?

“In every church there is talent, which, with the right kind of labor, might be developed to become a great help in this work. That which is needed now for the upbuilding of our churches is the nice work of wise laborers to discern and develop talent in the church—talent that can be educated for the Master’s use.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 116, 117.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What is the main thought of the Ellen G. White quote above? What impact can it have on your personal witnessing and your church’s outreach?
- 2 How is genuine love always manifested? What are counterfeit forms of love that have little to do with genuine love?
- 3 In class, talk about the sacrifices that people have made for the Lord, including the loss of life. What can you learn from these stories?
- 4 Think about your answer to the question at the end of Sunday’s study, about what you have sacrificed for Christ. What, in fact, have you sacrificed? Why did you do it? Was it worth it? How could you explain to someone who is not a Christian what you did and why you did it?