

LESSON 1 *March 28–April 3

Reality Check



Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week's Study: [Rev. 3:14–22](#); [Rev. 4:9–11](#); [Gen. 2:7](#); [Gen. 3:8–10](#); [Jer. 31:3, 4](#); [John 15:1–11](#); [Rom. 8:9–11](#).

Memory Text: “‘As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love’” ([John 15:9, NKJV](#)).

How would you describe your relationship with God today? Is it vibrant and strong? Do you spend time investing in this relationship, searching His inspired Word, and talking to Him as a Friend? If so, how much time do you spend doing it?

Also, are you compelled to share with others about your relationship with God because it's the most wonderful relationship in your life? Or, instead, has your relationship with God waned over time? It's there, yes, and you check in from time to time, but to be honest, it's not as strong as it used to be. Or, perhaps, you're somewhere in between, what the Bible calls “lukewarm” ([Rev. 3:16](#)).

Have you ever wondered if angels ponder why we don't live in adoration of our Savior and Redeemer, with hungry hearts and eager minds to grow closer to God every day? But, truly, a relationship with God changes everything—both here and into eternity.

This week, let's consider the current state of our relationship with God and what the Bible's advice is for us. Indeed, we can't move from where we are to someplace better until we take an honest reality check of ourselves and listen to the solution that Jesus describes.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 4.*

SUNDAY March 29

Our Condition

Have you ever wondered what Jesus might say if He were to describe your relationship with Him right now? Perhaps He'd say it is strong or that it has been stronger in the past. Have you ever wondered what Jesus might say if He were to describe His people in these last days? In [Revelation 3:14–22](#), Jesus actually does describe them.

He begins by stating that He's the “ “Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God” ’ ” ([Rev. 3:14, NKJV](#)). A faithful and true witness doesn't lie but speaks plainly and honestly.

Read [Revelation 3:14–17](#), where Jesus describes the spiritual condition of His people today. How well do these verses describe you personally?

Jesus tells us, Christian individuals who live in the last days, that He knows us. We're neither hot nor cold, because, from our vantage point, we don't need anything. The days and weeks pass by, and we spend a little time with God here and there, and we think that's enough. But it's not. Instead, we actually need Him far more desperately than we realize. If only we could love and live for Jesus wholeheartedly or not at all. That would be better from God's perspective than being lukewarm. Jesus says that He'll vomit us out of His mouth because we taste as bad as we are. But He hasn't yet done this, and He asks us to make some bold choices right now.

What is His advice to us in [Revelation 3:18, 19](#)?

In ancient times, “buying” something meant bartering or exchanging goods. Here, Jesus generously offers an exchange: our apathy for His gold, for His white garments, and for His eye salve. He wants to make us rich in His eyes; He wants to cover us with His perfect robe of righteousness; and He wants to open our eyes to see the truth of how an abiding relationship with Him will change absolutely everything. He offers us all that we need, especially because what we need, we can't provide for ourselves. He alone can, and will, but only if we are willing.

If you find it painful to look at yourself and your own spiritual condition, what hope is offered you in these verses for today?

MONDAY *March 30*

Rebuke, Repent, and Reward

“ ‘As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten,’ ” Jesus tells us in [Revelation 3:19](#). “ ‘Therefore be zealous and repent’ ” (NKJV). None of us, for even a second, could justly say that Jesus doesn’t care about us or our future. How much easier it would have been for Jesus to give up on humanity and not travel the painful road He chose on this earth. It’s precisely because He loves us so deeply that He rebukes us in our current state. He wants a much stronger, deeper relationship with us. He’s not satisfied with our on-and-off attitudes, our “I’ll come to Him when I need Him” approach.

Instead, Jesus rebukes us for our own good. He tells us to repent. But we can’t repent unless we realize that there’s something wrong. Yet, He’s told us exactly what’s wrong with us: we think we’re rich, but we’re actually “ ‘wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked’ ” ([Rev. 3:17, NKJV](#)).

Read [Revelation 3:20](#). What are we promised here? But what must we do to receive that promise?

This is such a beautiful and extraordinary word picture. The God of the universe wants to sit down over a meal with you, with me. He desires mutual engagement and conversation over good food. He wants a close, abiding relationship, and Jesus invites us to have this with Him.

Jesus stands patiently waiting and knocking at the door of your heart. Perhaps you’ve seen pictures of this in children’s books—a tall, graceful Savior, knocking gently. He doesn’t barge in and force you to talk with Him. He doesn’t impose on your time or your busy life. Time is short; so, if you hear Him, open the door. He will be there to step into your life.

This metaphor illustrates the kind of relationship Jesus wants to have with each of us. But one day, when you meet Jesus face-to-face, when you cast your crown at His feet in adoration and praise with thousands upon ten thousands of others in worship to the Creator ([Rev. 4:9–11](#), [Rev. 5:11–14](#)), when you think back to your earthly trials and see that they dim into insignificance—do you think at that point you’ll ever regret the time you spent with Jesus on earth?

Right now, Jesus is knocking. He is calling. You, though, have to make the conscious choice to open your heart to Him. How can viewing the Cross and thinking about what it means inspire you to make that choice?

Everlasting Love

After depicting our apathetic condition, Jesus tells us that this is something to be overcome. “ “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” ’ ” (Rev. 3:21, NKJV). For some of us, it may be the greatest battle we ever face—simply realizing our weak, selfsufficient condition; accepting Jesus’ rebuke; repenting; and receiving Jesus’ robe of righteousness over us.

What is so amazing is that Jesus understands our apathetic, lukewarm condition and identifies with us (not that Jesus was ever lukewarm). He says, “ “To him who overcomes . . . as I also overcame” ’ ” (Rev. 3:21, NKJV). Because He died to save us, Jesus has overcome sin and its penalty. He understands the battles of sin that we face and promises to help us.

Many people in the Bible responded to God’s invitation to be in a covenant relationship with Him. This is the overarching narrative or theme of the entire Bible. When we look at some of these people, we can see that God interacted differently with them at different times.

What do these accounts teach us about how God interacts with people in various situations?

[Gen. 2:7, Gen. 3:8–10](#) _____

[Gen. 5:24](#) _____

[Gen. 6:13](#) _____

[Gen. 12:1–4](#) _____

[Exod. 34:29](#) _____

Whether God physically walked with His children or whether He just talked with them, the truth is that He has always desired to be close to humanity. No matter what your relationship with God is like today, God wants to be close to you. We can read about this idea in Jeremiah 31:3, 4 below:

“The Lord has appeared of old to me, saying: ‘Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you. Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt’ ” (NKJV).

Whether your day is beginning or ending right now, God is seeking you and waiting, wanting to draw you closer to Him. He wants to build—or rebuild—your relationship with Him. If it’s not happening, the fault is on your end, not His.

What are the things in your life right now that, unless overcome, can and do hinder your relationship with God?

Abide

The disciples followed Jesus down the stairs from the upper room onto the street below. As they walked together to Gethsemane, on what was one of the most significant nights in earth's history, they probably didn't realize how poignant some of Jesus' last words to them in the upper room really were.

What did Jesus say in [John 15:1-11](#)? What does that mean for us?

These words, spoken by Jesus Himself, describe what a close relationship with God is like. Notice the word that is repeated, not just twice but ten times: abide. To abide in Jesus is to live in connection with Him.

As He faces the Cross, not only does Jesus emphasize the great importance of this abiding in Him, but He clearly and simply states the practical aspects of what it looks like in our lives.

Which is: Jesus is the Vine, we are the branches. As a result of our abiding with (being connected to) Him, fruit will grow on our branches. We can't make fruit grow ourselves. Sometimes we might look as if we're abiding, but the evidence will be in our lack of fruit, and eventually our branches will dry up. If we're withered, the Vinedresser will eventually cut off the branches. Regardless of whether we bear fruit or not, our branches will be pruned.

At the same time, we all face challenges and painful moments. If we abide in Him, these moments will produce more fruit long-term. Fruit-bearing confirms who we are: His disciples. We bear fruit to bring Him (not ourselves) glory. Abiding in Jesus means keeping His commandments, which are a reflection of His beautiful character of unselfish love. Abiding in Jesus brings great joy. Abiding in Jesus means doing what He asks of us, as a response to Him. "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3, NKJV).

If you think about it, abiding in Jesus is one of the antidotes to our Laodicean condition (Rev. 3:20, John 15:4). It's the great secret of a fulfilled and meaningful life on earth and into eternity; yet, somehow we so easily forget Jesus' counsel.

Ultimately, Jesus says to each of us, " 'As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love' " (John 15:9, NKJV). The love of Jesus is the most compelling cord that draws us to Him, and when we know this love, we will be deeply moved to respond with love to God and to others.

However much we detest the idea of slavery in any form, and wish that Paul would have condemned the practice, how do we come to terms with what Paul says here? (How fascinating that, during slavery in the United States, Ellen G. White specifically told Adventists to defy the law that ordered people to return escaped slaves.)

THURSDAY *April 2*

Linked to the Vine

Abiding in Christ can sometimes feel like one of the hardest things to do. We might know that it's what we need, but the rush of life pulls us into its stream, and it all feels too hard. Following God can seem like the biggest burden ever, especially for those badgered by someone trying to get them to follow Jesus. This kind of religion can feel like drudgery because it's all about external actions rather than what's in the heart. Nothing could be further from what God desires, which is a relationship whose foundation is mutual love, not just rules; a chosen relationship (in which He first chose you) based on love and free choice.

Sometimes we might be partly connected to the Vine but not really abiding with every fiber of our being. We might go to church, pray, and do what we know is right, but inside we feel shriveled up. The truth is this: we can't make ourselves abide in Jesus any more than a branch can make itself connect to a vine. God loved us first; He made the first move. Our response is always a reaction to what God has first done for us.

If you, meanwhile, look at how a grapevine survives through winter, you'll learn a fascinating fact—the buds on the branches become dehydrated and isolated from the growing system until spring. When the soil warms up, the roots absorb water, and sap flows up through the trunk of the vine into the buds and then initiates growth. Without the sap flowing through the vine, no growth will happen.

The sap in a grapevine is like the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We might be like a dead branch, but when we choose to spend time with God, the Holy Spirit enters into us like the sap from the roots and brings us to life so that we start to grow. In the same way that we need to make a conscious choice to want to abide in Jesus, we must also ask for the Holy Spirit (the sap) to flow into our lives.

Read [Luke 11:13](#) along with [Jeremiah 31:3](#), [1 John 4:19](#), and [Romans 8:9–11](#). What is the essential message here for us?

It's actually the Holy Spirit who brings growth and ensures that we're thriving and connected to the Vine. We need to ask daily for the Holy Spirit, who is here with us on earth to:

- be our Comforter ([John 14:16–18](#)),
- reveal Jesus to us ([John 15:26](#)),
- convict us of sin ([John 16:7, 8](#)), and
- guide us into all truth ([John 16:13](#)).

Read this list again. How can each aspect of what the Holy Spirit does impact your relationship with God?

FRIDAY April 3

Further Thought: Before we were born, God loved us; He had a plan to know us and for us to know Him. He seeks us out, like a good Shepherd, and invites us to abide in Him every day. We merely need to choose to respond to Him, and then to exchange our wretchedness and our Laodicean condition for His good gifts (see Rev. 3:18, 19).

Like the slow growth of a grapevine's branches, our relationship with God might grow slowly, or it might come in bursts as a result of much-needed rain. Regardless of the pace at which we grow and the abundance of fruit that is produced in our lives, we need daily "sap," or the Holy Spirit, to ensure that we're remaining connected to Jesus.

"Abiding in Christ means a constant receiving of His Spirit, a life of unreserved surrender to His service. The channel of communication must be open continually between man and his God. As the vine branch constantly draws the sap from the living vine, so are we to cling to Jesus, and receive from Him by faith the strength and perfection of His own character."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 676.

"How is the dry disconnected sapling to become one with the parent vine stock? How is it to be made a partaker of the life and nourishment of the living vine? Only by being grafted into the vine, by being brought into the closest relationship possible. Fiber by fiber, vein by vein, the twig holds fast to the life giving vine until the life of the vine becomes one with the branch, and the branch produces fruit like that of the vine."—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript 67*, 1897.

Discussion Questions:

- 1. Reflect back over your life. Can you identify any life events that have lulled you into a Laodicean spiritual condition? What events have drawn you closer to God?**
- 2. Ellen G. White talks about "a constant receiving of His Spirit." How often do you pray for the Holy Spirit? What might change if you received the Holy Spirit every day?**
- 3. What might change if we, as a church, were to pray for the Holy Spirit more earnestly and more regularly?**
- 4. Be brutally, even painfully, frank with yourself over your relationship with God. What conscious choices do you need to make in order to have the closeness with Him that He wants but that you hinder?**

Summary: Before we can start growing in a relationship with God, we first have to pause to consider what our current relationship with Him is like. If it's Laodicean or if our branches are not flourishing, Jesus has the perfect solution for our spiritual condition: to abide in Him.

Business of Being a Blessing

Kavono Kivatsi Samwele loved playing the drums in his village in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It was a good life, playing the drums while his wife sang, as he waited to become village chief.

But then Kavono, who was in his early 20s, got an idea. It would be even more fun to accompany his wife on the drums if he could write the songs that she was singing. To do that, he needed to learn how to read and write. He noticed that a Seventh-day Adventist school had opened in a neighboring village, and he enrolled in the first grade.

At the school, he learned to read and write, and he also learned about the God of heaven. As he studied, he felt called by God to become a pastor. So, he gave up his claim as village chief and became an Adventist pastor. He also had a son named Kasereka Maghulu Kavatsi.

As a boy, Kasereka accompanied his father on pastoral trips and felt called also to engage in mission. But his talent was in entrepreneurship, so he went into business, establishing a farm, expanding into fishing, and then opening a clothing store. His businesses grew into a thriving empire.

Kasereka did not forget the Bible truths he learned from his father, and he returned a 10 percent tithe. After marriage, the couple's first tithe amounted to US\$10,000. Kasereka's wife, the daughter of a church evangelist, said they also needed to give an offering of 10 percent. Kasereka had long been uncertain about how much to give for offering, and her appeal persuaded him. The couple gave another \$10,000 for offering. After that, they regularly gave a 10 percent tithe and 10 percent offering, and they never lacked anything. "When you help the church, you get a blessing back," Kasereka said.

Seeking to do his part to proclaim Jesus' coming, Kasereka distributed copies of *The Great Controversy* to fellow business leaders and government officials. He opened an orphanage. He sponsored orphans and others in their studies, including helping them obtain master's degrees and doctorates.

As he sought to bless others, blessings always returned to him. He put more than 100 people through graduate school, but many of the graduates couldn't find work because of a lack of highly qualified jobs in the country. So, Kasereka ended up hiring them to work for him, and their skills proved to be a blessing to his businesses.

"You cannot outgive God," he said.



Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, also known as the Quarterly Mission Project Offering, will support projects in the Democratic Republic of Congo and elsewhere in the East-Central Africa Division. Thank you for your generous offering to help proclaim Jesus' soon coming.

Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.