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Editorial Office 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904
Come visit us at our website at <http://www.absg.adventist.org>.

Principal Contributor
Mark Finley

Editor
Clifford R. Goldstein

Associate Editor
Soraya Homayouni

Publication Manager
Lea Alexander Greve

Editorial Assistant
Sharon Thomas-Crews

Pacific Press® Coordinator
Tricia Wegh

Art and Design
Lars Justinen

The teachers edition components were written by the following:

The Overview, Commentary, and Life Application, Lessons 1–13: Mark Finley, assistant to the president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Md., USA.

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Making Friends for God: The Joy of Sharing in God's Mission



There are times when grasping a single thought makes a profound difference in our lives. A number of years ago, I sat in a ministerial meeting with some of my colleagues. The discussion turned to sharing our faith, witnessing, and evangelism. One of my friends expressed this thought, “Mission is primarily the work of God. He is employing all of the resources of heaven to save our planet. Our work is to cooperate joyfully with Him in His work of saving lost people.” It seemed as if a heavy burden was lifted off my shoulders. It was not my job to save a lost world. It was God’s. My responsibility was to cooperate with Him in what He was already doing.

The idea that mission is God’s work is clarified throughout Scripture. Solomon states it this way, “He [God] has put eternity in their hearts” (*Eccles. 3:11, NKJV*). When an individual is born into this world, God places a desire for eternity deep within the fabric of that person’s being. As Augustine once said, “Lord, we were made for thee, and our hearts will never find rest until they find rest in thee.” According to John’s Gospel, Jesus is the Light that lights every person born into this world (*John 1:9*). Not only has God placed within each one of us a longing for Himself, but He also sends His Holy Spirit to draw us to Himself.

Every desire to do right and every conviction of sin is prompted by the Holy Spirit. Every desire for goodness and inclination toward kindness and unselfishness is motivated first by the Holy Spirit. Even though we may not fully understand or

realize it, the Holy Spirit is working in our lives to draw us to Jesus (*John 16:7-15*). But Jesus Himself is the greatest gift of all.

When the human race was hopelessly lost in sin, condemned to eternal death, the love of God took the initiative. Luke writes, “ ‘For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost’ ” (*Luke 19:10, NKJV*). The apostle Paul adds, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (*Rom. 5:8, NKJV*). God took the initiative in our salvation. Christ left the glory and splendor of heaven and came to this sin-darkened world on a redemptive mission.

Before we ever took one baby step toward Him, He took a giant leap toward us. Before we ever gave Him our life, He provided salvation to us through His death. We were His enemies, but He was our Friend. We turned our backs on Him, but He turned His face toward us. We cared little for Him, but He cared immensely for us.

In Luke 15, He is pictured as the Good Shepherd relentlessly looking for His lost sheep, a woman frantically looking for her lost silver coin from her dowry, and an old father recklessly running to meet his lost boy. Ellen G. White makes this marvelous statement worth contemplating: “The great plan of redemption was laid before the foundation of the world. Christ did not stand alone in this wondrous undertaking for the ransom of man. In the councils of heaven, before the world was created, the Father and the Son covenanted together that if man proved disloyal to God, Christ, one with the Father, would take the place of the transgressor, and suffer the penalty of justice that must fall upon him.”—*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 15, 1898.

Contemplate it for a moment. We have the incredible privilege and the awesome responsibility as well as the eternal joy of participating with Christ and cooperating with Him in His mission. That’s what these lessons are all about this quarter.

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A native of Connecticut, USA, Mark Finley, an internationally known evangelist, was a vice president at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists from 2005 to 2010. After retiring from full-time employment, he became an assistant to the president of the General Conference. Pastor Finley and his wife, Ernestine, have three children and five grandchildren.

How to Use This Teachers Edition

“The true teacher is not content with dull thoughts, an indolent mind, or a loose memory. He constantly seeks higher attainments and better methods. His life is one of continual growth. In the work of such a teacher there is a freshness, a quickening power, that awakens and inspires his [class].”

—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 103.

To be a Sabbath School teacher is both a privilege and a responsibility—a privilege because it offers the teacher the unique opportunity to lead and guide in the study and discussion of the week’s lesson so as to enable the class to have both a personal appreciation for God’s Word and a collective experience of spiritual fellowship with class members. When the class concludes, members should leave with a sense of having tasted the goodness of God’s Word and having been strengthened by its enduring power. The responsibility of teaching demands that the teacher is fully aware of the scripture to be studied, the flow of the lesson through the week, the interlinking of the lessons to the theme of the quarter, and the lesson’s application to life and witness.

This guide is designed to help teachers to fulfill their responsibility adequately. It has three segments:

- 1. The Overview** segment introduces the lesson topic, key texts, links with the previous lesson, and the lesson’s theme. This segment deals with such questions as Why is this lesson important? What does the Bible say about this subject? What are some major themes covered in the lesson? How does this subject affect my personal life?
- 2. Commentary** is the chief segment in the teachers edition. It may have two or more sections, each one dealing with the theme introduced in the Overview segment. The Commentary segment may include several in-depth discussions that enlarge the themes outlined in the Overview segment. The Commentary segment provides an in-depth study of the themes and offers scriptural, exegetic, and illustrative discussion material that leads to a better understanding of the themes. The Commentary segment also may have scriptural word study or exegesis appropriate to the lesson. To facilitate participation, the Commentary segment may have discussion leads, illustrations appropriate to the study, and thought questions.
- 3. Life Application** is the final segment of the teachers edition for each lesson. This section leads the class to discuss what was presented in the Commentary segment as it impacts Christian life. The application may involve discussion, further probing of what the lesson under study is all about, or perhaps personal testimony on how one may feel the impact of the lesson on one’s life.

Final thought: What is mentioned above is only suggestive of the many possibilities available for presenting the lesson and is not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive in its scope. Teaching should not become monotonous, repetitious, or speculative. Good Sabbath School teaching should be Bible-based, Christ-centered, faith-strengthening, and fellowship-building.