



Personal Evangelism

Part Two: Giving Bible Studies

Walking with Jesus

iFOLLOW

The iFollow Discipleship Series

About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

Curriculum Development: The iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition curriculum development was lead by the **Center for Creative Ministry**. **General Editor:** Monte Sahlin; **Assistant Editor:** Debbonnaire Kovacs; **Directional Advisory:** Brad Forbes, Carole Kilcher, Ceri Myers, Cesar Gonzalez, Clayton Kinney, Curtis Rittenour, Dave Osborne, Dave VanDenburgh, Gerry Chudleigh, Jane Thayer, Jerry Thomas, John Appel, Jose Rojas, Kim Johnson, Nicole Chao, Paul Richardson, Rich DuBose, Shasta Nelson, William Sutton; **Pastoral Advisory:** Claudio Consuegra, Collette Pekar, Dave Hutman, Don Driver, Fredrick Russell, Jerry Nelson, Jesse Wilson, Leslie Bumgardner, Loren Fenton, Rebecca Brillhart; **Unit Authors:** Alberto Valenzuela, Althea Pineda, Corienne Hay, Debbonnaire Kovacs, Ed Dickerson, Gianluca Bruno, Gil Bahnsen, Greg Nelson, Jack Calkins, James Whibberding, Karen Collum, Monte Sahlin, Norma Sahlin, Pam Splawinski, Patty Ntihuka, Reinder Bruinsma, Ryan Bell; **Additional contribution** by Maria Ovando-Gibson; **Additional editing:** Dave Gemmell, Meredith Carter; **Graphic Design:** Mind Over Media; **Layout:** Paul D. Young; **Web Development:** Narrow Gate Media.

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www.ifollowdiscipleship.org

Personal Evangelism, Part Two: Giving Bible Studies

This is the second in a series of four units designed to provide basic training in personal evangelism.

Learning Objectives

1. Understand how potential church members learn the essential doctrines
2. Learn the skills of leading a person or family through the key Bible passages that relate to the fundamental teachings of the church
3. Learn to develop an outline for a Bible study
4. Learn to use the many tools and resources available for those who give Bible studies
5. Understand the Bible Worker or Lay Bible Minister role in the church

Content Outline

1. Methods for conducting a Bible study
2. The Gift Bible approach
3. Tools and resources for giving Bible studies
4. Lay Bible Minister program outline

Background Material for the Presenter

Public evangelism is often the only way we think of evangelism. There is also the evangelism that occurs in the privacy of one-to-one relationships and small circles in the home. Ellen White writes, “of equal importance with special public efforts is house-to-house work in the homes of the people.” In fact, she asserts that “there are certain classes that cannot be reached by public meetings.” She points out that “the work of Christ was largely made up of personal interviews. He had a faithful regard for the one-soul audience.”

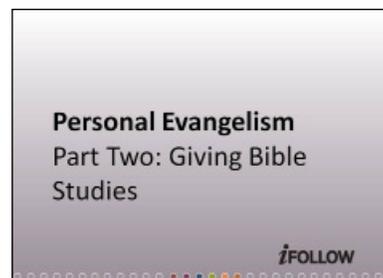
In the end, all evangelism must be personal. Individuals who attend seminars or come forward to make a decision for baptism at a public meeting require personal work in

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order to prepare them to join the church. A large evangelistic crusade always includes a team of personal evangelism workers.

How to Conduct Bible Studies

When a person accepts Christ through the witness of a Christian friend, it is imperative that they immediately be moved into Bible studies and a discipling process. In Matthew 28:19-20 the mission of the church is not just to share Christ, but to “make disciples.” This includes preparing the new believer for baptism and “teaching them all things.”

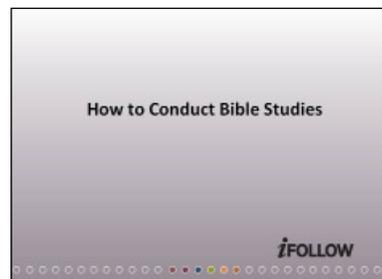
Sometimes the church member is prepared to conduct these Bible studies with their friend who has just accepted Christ. More often, a trained church member called a Lay Bible Minister or Lay Bible Instructor will conduct the Bible studies. Usually the pastor will not become involved until most of the doctrines have been covered and the new believer is ready to make a definite decision to be baptized into church membership.

There are other non-members who will also enroll in Bible studies. These include individuals who have been contacted by our media ministries, completed a Bible correspondence course or are regular readers of outreach magazines such as *Message* or *Signs of the Times*. The staff of the media ministry, an offer in the magazine or the Bible lessons, or your local Interest Coordinator may have garnered the request for Bible studies. Often these people are believers in Christ, and sometimes they are active members in another church or denomination.

The order in which various topics are taken up in the Bible studies will differ some depending on the type of individual involved. A person who has little religious background and has recently accepted Christ through friendship evangelism needs to begin with the basics such as how to pray, the Bible as the Word of God, the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the new believer, overcoming temptation, etc. A person who has been a Christian for some time and has already covered many Adventist teachings through broadcasts, literature or a Bible correspondence course needs to quickly move to the distinctive doctrines of the Adventist Church; the second coming, the Sabbath, etc.

The needs, personality and learning style of each individual also needs to be taken into consideration in deciding whether one-on-one Bible studies, family Bible studies or a small group Bible study is most appropriate. Each method is equally valid and can be the most effective in a given situation.

One-to-one Bible studies are always appropriate in the early stages of working with a



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new person. The individual attention helps to strengthen the relationship and anchor the non-member in the Bible study process. It also allows the Lay Bible Minister to assess the needs of the person, better understand their personality and learning style, and to deal with particular issues that are important to that individual. There are highly individualistic personalities that will never make a decision to join the church except in the context of one-on-one Bible studies, although it is almost always better for a person to get involved in group fellowship before they are baptized.

Family Bible studies are an excellent idea where a couple or a parent with children over 10 years of age is involved. It is best if the entire household joins the church at the same time. In any case, the other family members will have a strong influence on the interested person. If all or most of the family is included in the Bible studies these dynamics are easier to deal with.

Small group Bible studies have become very popular across North America in the last two decades. Millions of Americans and Canadians participate in Home Bible Fellowships, men's prayer breakfasts, women's Bible study and prayer groups, singles Bible studies, etc. The group setting not only allows a Lay Bible Minister to study with more people in less time than if he or she were to have individual appoints with each one, it also helps the new believer to learn how to behave in the context of Christian fellowship. In fact, one of the strengths of small group evangelism is the way in which it helps new converts overcome the highly individualistic and immature behaviors that often disrupt church membership soon after baptism. New believers come to see that various individuals have different opinions on many topics, and make a variety of choices about how to live the Christian life, yet still come together in Christ to worship God and cooperate in outreach activities.

Many excellent study guides are available for use in conducting Bible studies. Some are highly-structured sets of lessons with the major presentation on video or audio cassettes and with filmstrips or overheads. The person conducting the Bible studies need only function as a facilitator, operating the audio-visual equipment, passing out the printed lessons, leading in prayer and answering the personal questions of the individual or group members.

Other study guides are reference books with lists of key texts on each topic, as well as commonly asked questions and brief suggested answers. The Lay Bible Minister will need to decide on the order of topics, and decide which texts to use in each study and in what order. This requires time in study and preparation. If the Bible study is not adequately prepared, a new believer may not be much troubled, but other interests with more Bible background may quickly lose confidence.

In the training of Lay Bible Ministers, they are encouraged to develop their own series of Bible studies. As they study and prepare these outlines, the material is fixed in their minds and it is shaped in a way that best fits their personality, social circles, etc. Of course, the first essential in teaching the Word of God is to know the Bible, and to have

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personal acquaintance with, and love for, the Author of the Book. Without this foundation there can be no success.

In the preparation of every Bible study, whatever the particular subject involved, there is to be one central theme, and that theme is “Christ and Him crucified as the foundation of the gospel.” Ellen White also points out that “Christ is the center of all true doctrine,” and urges every Adventist to “uplift Jesus as the center of all hope.” It is vital that Bible doctrines be studied in the context of a living faith in Jesus, otherwise the Bible studies will produce a legalistic approach or the participants will simply lose interest all together.

In sitting down to write out an outline for a Bible study you will lead, the place to begin is with the Bible material itself. Use the reference books, a concordance, the official statement of the 27 fundamental teachings of the Adventist Church, and Bible commentaries to compile a list of texts that touch on the topic you have selected. Then, before reviewing each text individually, write down the central theme of the study and the opening and closing statements you wish to make. Having marked out the parameters of your study, you can now examine each of the texts in your list and select those that you see to be most useful, laying them out in a logical pattern that best fits the individual or group with whom you will be studying.

In most cases, it will take at least 45 minutes to cover ten to 15 Bible texts. That may be about the memory capacity of most people, unless they have an above-average level of education and background in the Bible. Remember that you must allow time for comments and questions by the individual or group. An effective Bible study does not consist of a monologue by the leader.

A simple outline for your Bible study will include three points--introduction, body and conclusion. In this way it is not much different from a sermon or speech, but the manner of delivery should be decidedly different.

The introduction should be brief, serving to clearly identify the topic of the study. State the topic in a clear, simple and straight-forward manner. A clever “title” is not necessary. Perhaps you will need to add a sentence of definition or clarification for some words or concepts. For example, if your study is on the Millennium, you may need to say that “millennium” is the Greek word for one thousand years. In the introduction you should also state why a study of this topic is important to the Christian believer: what difference does it make in their relationship with Christ?

The body contains the Bible study itself. Here truth is presented link by link, each text leading to the next and interlocking the thought. The classic Christian method of instruction is to ask a question and then answer it with a Bible text. A more recent approach is to visually chart an array of concepts (each mentioned in a Bible text) that are brought together in the middle around a central theme. Other types of logic may be more appropriate in the cultural group or social context in which you minister.

The conclusion contains the desired outcome from the study. “Leave a very well-defined

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and clear-cut impression of some definite idea upon the mind,” counsels Alonzo J. Wearer, an early pioneer in Bible work. The close of the Bible study should include three things: (1) a quick summary of the study; (2) a clear, simple statement of the conclusion to be drawn from the study; (3) an appeal to action and acceptance. “It should be short, almost abrupt,” Wearer advises, “not tapering off with a number of good landing places, but come to a stop easily.”

Another experienced Bible worker suggests that the closing text furnish the climax to each study, so that the participant(s) will not want to stop at that point, but will be eager to go on to the next topic. “The secret of success in storytelling lies in stopping at the point of breathless anticipation. The same principle should be observed in preparing a Bible study.”

Often the beginning Bible instructor is so anxious to give the whole truth on a topic, that he or she presents too many texts. This can lead off into too many sub-topics and end up confusing and overwhelming the learner. Usually only one text should be given in answer to each question or in relationship to each point in the Bible study. Once in while an added text will lend emphasis, reinforcing a key point, but that method should be used very sparingly.

Be full of your subject, make thorough preparation, but do not attempt to tell all that you know on a topic at one session. Present your Bible study in a concise, defined and clear manner, but keep a large reserve fund of information ready to draw upon if questions are asked. Otherwise you run the risk of confusing and overwhelming the person or group you are studying with. This negative experience will turn off their interest and cause them to drop out.

The interaction that goes on during the study session is just as important (perhaps more important) than the outline that has been prepared in advance or the printed study guide. The words and behavior of the Lay Bible Minister must be focused on helping the non-member to learn. It is worthless to teach truth unless the hearers can grasp it.

Ellen White writes that Christ, in His teaching, “made truth beautiful by presenting it in the most direct and simple way.” Jesus often used parables and illustrations drawn from the common experience of the people to whom He was talking. He “met the people on their own ground as one who was acquainted with their perplexities.”

An effective Bible teacher constantly keeps in mind that each listener is asking, “So what?” In other words, what practical difference does this information make in the life of the learner? Especially among adults born in the second half of the 20th Century, there is a tendency to discard any idea that cannot quickly be related to how they live their lives. This is why interactive learning methods are so crucial. Truth is appropriated as the learner talks about it, shares feelings and responds to others.

In John 4 the woman came to the well for water, and Jesus engaged her attention by speaking of what she was deep interested in—thirst. Through the simple, interactive re-

quest for a drink, He broke down barriers and taught a divine lesson about “living water” that forever quenches the deepest thirst. To have approached her with a long series of texts or a sermon would have ended the conversation before it ever began.

“The Bible is its own expositor. Scripture is to be compared with Scripture.” This is the fundamental approach that Seventh-day Adventists take in understanding the meaning of Bible texts. Each Bible study should begin with a sincere prayer asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and then the Scripture should be allowed to speak for itself. The Word of God is a powerful, living word. A Bible study leader should never say, “This text means ...” When questions are asked about the meaning of a text, answer by asking the student to turn to another text, and let one Scripture explain the other with personal interpretation or individual opinion.

Keep the study appropriately simple. Do not present the study in such a way that the person or persons involved conclude that they lack the education necessary to really understand the Bible. The purpose of Bible studies of this kind is to empower individuals from all walks of life to receive a direct message from God, to understand His character for themselves and to find a living faith. In today’s world in North America many people have significant levels of higher education and will want to dig deeper than others who have little or no formal education, or customarily get their information via television or other means rather than from reading books. Flexibility is required to bring the Bible to all kinds of people, but in every case it is the role of the Bible study leader to be a facilitator and not get in the way.

Resist the urge to preach or lecture. Avoid getting into the common pattern of “telling” all the time. The effective Bible study leader will stimulate thought in the minds of the participants by asking them to share their opinion. The best questions are the kind that cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or “no,” but require some thought and expression.

There is no need to get defensive when people express opinions that differ from your view of Scripture or even from the teachings of the church. Keep a positive attitude and avoid dogmatism. Do not make bombastic statements. A quiet, unassuming sense of conviction is more impressive. Say, “That’s one answer. There is another way to look at this question.” And then place another viewpoint before the individual or group. Do not press them to accept the correct view. Eventually the Holy Spirit will lead them to see the truth in the Scriptures. Remember that giving the other person the freedom to state and hold their opinions does not mean that you are giving away any of the truth.

As you progress from point to point in the Bible study, make sure that the participants understand each point before you move on. Give adequate time for questions. Take time to clear up any confusion that surfaces. If the discussion seems to head off in a direction that is outside of your plan for the study of the day, you may eventually want to say, “Perhaps we should get back onto the topic for today. An interesting subject has been raised here, and I promise you that we will spend an entire session on it within a few weeks.” (Don’t

forget your promise. If the “side track” seems to be particularly important to the feelings of your student or students, perhaps you should make it the topic of the very next Bible study even if that means a change in plans.)

Objections will be raised from time to time, and you will find that people you study with will not agree with you all the time. When a disagreement surfaces, try to avoid getting into an argument. Emphasize the element of truth in the topic that is mutually understood and agreed to. “You and I agree that ...” Allow both your view and their alternate opinion to co-exist while you continue to strengthen your relationship with the person and study other Bible topics where you may have greater agreement.

One way to answer objections is to ask, “Do we have all of the information about this topic on the table?” Then, ask the basic series of journalistic questions about the relevant texts—What, When, Where, How, Who, Why?

Another way to respond to an objection, particularly one that is based in strong feelings of the non-member more than in interpretation of texts, is the “feel—felt—found” method. You would make a series of three statements using the key words: “I can understand that you feel it is strange to go to church on Saturday. I met a couple across town two years ago that felt the same way you do. They decided to read some of the historical documents available at the library on this topic and they found that down through the history of Christianity many believers have worshiped on Saturday.” The purpose of these statements is to accept the opinion or feeling of your student without confronting it head-on, and then suggest that there is also an alternative way to view the same basic facts. This gives them the room necessary to possibly change their opinion as time goes by. It should also be said that few people will immediately change their opinion, but if you keep the relationship open and continue to fellowship with the person, after some weeks or months it is not uncommon for adults to change their viewpoints. This is especially true when they discover “new” evidence on their own.

In today’s world the vast majority of North Americans have little or no prior experience with the Bible, and that may present some specific problems. Traditionally, we expect the person we study with to have a Bible of their own. In many cases that may not be true. If so, it is best to take the person to a bookstore not affiliated with the Adventist Church and assist them in purchasing a Bible, but not pick it out for them.

Most adults today will have grave difficulty understanding the King James Version of the Bible unless they have considerable background in Bible study. There is a New King James Version that has updated the archaic words, as well as an array of very reliable newer translations. The New International Version (NIV) has become the most widely used among younger adults.

Your Bible student may not be able to find texts easily, not knowing where the books of the Bible are located. It may be a good idea for you to get a Bible with the same paging as theirs and use page numbers as you announce the texts. This has become standard practice in Revelation Seminars and public evangelism in recent decades.

The Gift Bible Program

For many years the Adventist Church has sponsored programs in which a free Bible is offered to people who will go through a set of Bible lessons. In part, this is done as a promotional device and in part because it is very helpful to provide people with a Bible that is paged to correspond to the lessons they are studying. In this way people who do not know the books of the Bible and the traditional references to texts can simply find a page number to locate the text related to a particular question in the lessons. Don and Marjorie Gray explain how to implement this approach to giving Bible studies.



1. Explain to the student that while they are more than welcome to use their own Bible, you are loaning them a Gift Bible to us because of the page numbering which makes it easy for them to locate the Bible texts quickly.
2. Tell them that when they have completed the set of lessons, the Bible will become theirs to keep.” Tell them that it is OK for them to underline or make notes in the Bible.
3. Tell the student to look up the texts and then to fill in each blank in the lessons with his answers. You will come back next week and bring the next two lessons and see how he or she is doing.
4. Make a definite appointment with the student for the following week. “What would be a convenient time for me to come by next week? Is this a good day and time?” Write down the time he or she says will be good. Give him or her your phone number and ask for their number. This will save a lot of time.
5. On the second visit, introduce yourself again and remind them that you have come to deliver the next two Bible lessons and check on their progress. Smile and act as if you expect to be let in. If he or she does not let you in, you might say, “Perhaps it would be easier if I just step in for a few minutes and go over your lessons with you.”
6. Good questions to ask: “How did you get along with the lessons this week? ... Did you learn anything new from the lessons? ... Did you enjoy using these lessons to study the Bible?”
7. Regardless of the answers you get, take out your notebook and Bible and tell the student that you have studied the lessons yourself and you would like to quickly go over the lessons together. You could say, “Perhaps it would be easier and quicker if I just read the questions and you read the answers you wrote down. OK?”
8. When the student has his or her lessons in hand and you are ready to go, say something like this: “I would love to have a short prayer before begin our study.” Quickly bow your head and say a short prayer. You might say, “Our Father, we pray that you will send

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your Holy Spirit to be us today as we study the Bible. Help us to understand your plan for this world and for our lives. In Christ's name, Amen.”

Now, you are ready to begin the actual Bible study. Without further comment, simply read the first question from the lesson and turn to the student for him or her to read their answer. Go through the entire lesson, reaching each question and letting the student read his or her answers. This is extremely important! You cannot know for sure what he or she is thinking if you do not do this. Also, this gives opportunity for the two of you to get acquainted.

After going through all of the questions, be sure to ask the person, “Is there anything that you did not understand? Do you find any of this difficult to believe?” You do not need to have immediate answers to questions that may come up. If you cannot think of a good answer at the moment, simply say, “That is a great question! I have not thought about that. I will do some research and get you some more information next week.”

Don't stay too long. Don't forget to leave the next two lessons. Make an appointment for next week and leave them with this comment: “I will be praying for you as you study the Bible this week.”

Handouts in this Package

1. Tools for Conducting Bible Studies
2. Background Knowledge for Lay Bible Ministers
3. Seven Rules for a Successful Bible Study Outline
4. One Way to Deal with Differences
5. Do's and Don'ts of Giving Bible Studies
6. Bible Studies Ministry Description
7. Basic Bible Studies based on the Baptismal Vows



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Additional Resources

General Conference Home Missionary Department (1962). *Training Light Bearers*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Gray, Don and Marjorie (2003). *You Are My Witness: Sharing Jesus in the 21st Century*. Keene, TX: Seminars Unlimited.

Gray, Don and Marjorie (2004). *A Simple and Easy Way to Study the Bible With Others*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association.

Kleuser, Louise (1949). *The Bible Instructor in Personal and Public Evangelism*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Smith, Calvin (1995). *Giving Bible Studies*. Lincoln, NE: AdventSource.

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Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important for potential new members to study the Bible personally with a church member or minister?
2. What are the key elements in a Bible study of this kind?
3. What are the most important tools and resources available for this task?
4. What experience do you have with Bible studies?
5. How does this approach need to be adapted to work effectively in the context of contemporary culture?

Group Activity

Purpose: To practice the actual behaviors involved in giving a Bible study. This help the participants feel greater confidence in their ability to give a Bible study after a “dry run.”

Preparation: It is best to have a room equipped with movable chairs, not fixed pews. It is also good to have some tables as well as chairs because some of the most self-conscious participants will feel more comfortable sitting at a table. It is important to have a set of Bible lessons or Bible study outlines. Only one set if needed because it is best for each practice team to use a different Bible study instead of all of them using the same topic. A supply of Bibles will be needed unless the participants are told to bring a Bible.

Assignment: Work in teams of two. Decide who will be the Bible worker and who will be the student. The purpose of the exercise is for the Bible worker to practice giving a Bible study on the assigned topic to the student.

Time: Take three to five minutes for the participants to pair off in teams of two, find places to work together out of ear-shot of the others and decide who will be the Bible worker and who the student. Then, announce that the practice Bible study will begin and they will have at least 20 minutes. Monitor the teams without intruding and decide if 20 minutes is enough time or whether to allow up to 30 minutes. Bring the Bible study to an end and give the student five minutes to give feedback to the practice Bible worker. Then, ask each team to trade their roles and go another 20 minutes so that the other person can practice. At the end, give the teams another five minutes for feedback. Then, bring the whole group together again and spend at least 15 minutes for everyone to share what they have learned and answer questions they may have.

Handout 1

A Basic Bible Study that Introduces Christ

A more complete listing of current Bible study materials can be found at www.plusline.org where you will need to type “Bible studies” into the search feature.

Bible Lessons

Come Alive and Stay Alive—Very simple, straight-forward study guides available from Hart Resource Center. These are excellent for use with new believers who have little background in the Bible.

In His Word—A complete series of 24 lessons cover all of the Bible doctrines taught by Seventh-day Adventists. These printed lessons are designed to go with the *New Beginnings* DVDs and another version is available in Spanish. A training manual, training DVD and CD with PowerPoint slides are also available—all from Seminars Unlimited.

Discover—A new set of 26 lessons published by the *Voice of Prophecy Bible School* for use both in the correspondence school program and by local churches. These lessons can also be accessed on line at www.bibleschools.com and studied in that way. In addition, there is a DVD version of the same lessons with teaching presentations by Lonnie Melashenko.

New Beginnings Personal Bible Study—A set of Bible study presentation on DVD with a total of 26 lessons. This version is designed for use with individuals or couples. Available from the Adventist Book Center. It can also be accessed on line at www.itiswritten.com/resources/studies and studied via computer.

In His Steps—A baptismal manual with lessons that cover the 28 fundamental beliefs of the Adventist Church developed by the General Conference Ministerial Association. Available from Seminars Unlimited.

Powerful Promises—A series of six lessons developed by the New York City Van Ministry and published for many years on paper. Now available on line at www.powerful-promises.com with questions at the end of each lesson.

Prophecies of Hope— A brand-new (2005) set of 26 full-color Bible lessons developed by *Hope Television* for use with their evangelism programs. Available from your Adventist Book Center.

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20th Century Bible Course—A revised set of 30 lessons that has been used as an Adventist standard for many years. Available from your Adventist Book Center.

Encuentro—A series of 20 lessons on video cassettes covering the Adventist doctrines in the Spanish language.

The Teachings of Jesus—A set of 27 lessons based on the 27 Fundamentals of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, can be used one-on-one or with a small group Bible study. Comes as a master set to be photocopied for use as often as needed.

The Search—A set of 20 lessons that present the Adventist message in a non-traditional format through documentary videos and print lessons that can be reproduced from the photo copy masters supplied with the cassettes. Available from the Center for Creative Ministry.

Amazing Bible Truths—A set of 14 Bible studies on DVD in American Sign Language designed for use with the deaf. Available from www.deafbibleschool.com or Adventist Deaf Ministries, P.O. Box 6114, Mesa, Arizona 85216.

Shema Israel—A series of 15 lessons designed for people from a Jewish background, written by Dr. Jacques Doukhan, a seminary professor at Andrews University with a doctoral degree in Hebrew and Jewish Studies. Available from the *Voice of Prophecy* Bible School at (877) 955-2525.

Think on These Things—A series of 24 lessons designed for prisoners. The lessons and answer sheets can be downloaded in PDF format at 3tm.org online.

Bible Studies Published Online

These are print materials that you can download from websites and make as many copies as you need for your use, time and time again.

DiscipleTree—A total of 45 Bible studies in four separate series that can be used for personal evangelism or small group ministries written by Dr. Jim Park, a professor at the Adventist seminary in the Philippines. The first 13 lessons are correlated to the chapters in the book *Steps to Christ* and introduces the student to salvation in Christ and how to be a follower of Jesus. *Ten Practical Lesson in Discipleship* covers the spiritual life and introduce several basic spiritual disciplines for new Christians. *New Horizons* consists of 12 lessons about the major doctrines of the Adventist Church. *27 Beliefs Workbook* includes 10 lessons covering the fundamental teachings of the Adventist Church and is designed to prepare people for baptism. Each of these can be downloaded in PDF form at www.discipletree.com in English.

Bible 7 Net—A total of 69 Bible studies in four separate series. Each is designed to be photocopied on two sides of a single sheet of paper. Good News includes 32 lessons that cover all of the doctrines of the Church. Standing on the Promises consists of 15 lessons focused on family life and relationship issues. Great Controversy is 10 lessons with an apocalyptic focus covering the key ideas about the second coming, millennium, Mark of the Beast, and remnant church. *Revelation Now* has 22 lessons covering the chapters of the Book of Revelation in the Bible.

Jewish Heritage Scripture Studies—A series of 19 Bible studies used by the Beth El-Shalom Congregations and designed for Jewish people. They can be printed out from the following web site: www.jewishheritage.net/article.php?id=17

Reference Guides

Studying Together—Developed by Mark Finley, this pocket reference guide includes 30 doctrinal Bible studies and 14 on practical Christianity, as well as brief notes on the beliefs of major denominations and faiths. Available from Hart Resource Center.

Bible Chain Referencing Set—Keyed to Studying Together covers 36 topics. Color-coded and printed on self-adhesive clear acrylic to place in your Bible. Comes with a master index.

Bible Handbook—Written by Stephen Haskell during the time when the concept of “Bible studies” was invented and first published in 1919. Includes 220 Bible studies, many more topics than are usually covered today. Available from your Adventist Book Center.

Bible Marking Guide—A 32-page booklet that guides you through marking your Bible in chain reference for 26 Bible studies covering major doctrines. Available from Hamblin Outreach Publishing at www.handbills.org or (800) 274-0016.

How to Use and Interpret the Bible and the Writings of Ellen White—A self-study course in basic theological skills needed for giving Bible studies and answering questions that come up during Bible studies. The author is Dr. James Zackrison, a veteran missionary and theology professor who retired as Director of Personal Ministries for the General Conference. Available from AdventSource.

Small Group Study Guides

Breakthrough Series—The first two guides cover the doctrines of the church in 26 sessions. The third study guide is on the life of Christ, also designed for six to 13 sessions. Available from your Adventist Book Center or AdventSource.

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Sharing Scripture—Many different books of the Bible and themes are each covered in 13 relational Bible studies. The leader packet includes masters to photocopy and hand out to the group. Available from the Center for Creative Ministry.

Training Resources

Many local conferences conduct training programs for Lay Bible Minister or Lay Bible Worker certification. This kind of training teaches how to give Bible studies and may include other skills related to personal evangelism.

There are online training courses specifically on Basic Bible Study Methods and Introduction to the Bible taught by Dr. Lee Gugliotto, a veteran Seventh-day Adventist minister and teacher. The computerized nature of this training makes it available to you no matter where you are or what your schedule or situation may be. You can get more information at www.biblestudyinstitute.org on line.

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Handout 2

Background Knowledge for Lay Bible Ministers

Lay Bible Minister (LBM) training provides a general background of knowledge that makes it easier to develop a Bible study outline on your own instead of being dependent on published lessons or study guides. This background information includes:

1. Principles of interpretation for the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White.
2. A general orientation to the Bible, including the historical overview of the various major time periods during which books of the Bible were written, the author and purpose of each book, etc.
3. The history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and key events in the rise and progress of the denomination.
4. The 28 fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
5. A brief summary of the beliefs of each of the major, contemporary denominations and religions, especially those areas in which they share beliefs with the Adventist Church or differ significantly.

All of this information makes it much easier for a church member to conduct Bible studies and answer questions. It provides the ammunition for a persuasive evangelistic ministry.

Generally, it will take about two years to cover the complete LBM training curriculum, attending one weekend per quarter. If your conference does not provide such training, there are correspondence courses available from Home Study International, the denomination's K-12 school and university located at the General Conference headquarters.

Handout 3

Seven Rules for a Successful Bible Study Outline

Long experience shared by thousands of Bible workers has resulted in these seven guidelines that will be helpful as you prepare an outline for a successful Bible study.

1. Use the most convincing text first. A first impression is always the strongest, and the most likely to become permanent. Prove your point at the start, and the battle is more than half won. A strong statement in beginning a study carries conviction to the minds of your hearers as to your ability to prove what you assert.
2. Use no word or text that is hard to comprehend. In spiritual things the average North American with little religious training finds it hard to understand many traditional terms and concepts. As you present truth, use simple forms of speech, and select Bible texts that clearly state just what you claim. At least, avoid the more obscure texts until your student has learned something about how to study the Bible on their own and principles of interpretation.
3. Use as few questions as possible. Each question that you ask or point that you make in the Bible study will not only involve looking at a Bible text, but also some discussion by the person or group you are studying with. If you include too many points, you may run out of time or exhaust the attention span of those involved. Six or seven questions or points is about right. Never include more than about a dozen. Thirty to 45 minutes is about what the average person can take at one setting.
4. Let the Bible text answer the questions you ask. Do not give a wordy answer yourself, but immediately read the text or ask another person to read the text. Be brief in all that you present. The power is in the Word of God. Use just enough words to make the principles of truth shine out clearly; then let the convicting power of the Spirit do the rest. Give your student(s) plenty of time to ask their questions and “think out loud” about the new information they are being introduced to, perhaps for the first time.
5. Construct each question so that the Bible text answers it. The classic method of Christian instruction is to ask a question, and then read a Bible text that clearly answers the question. Of course you cannot change the Bible text to fit your needs, but you can and should re-write each question until it clearly fits with both the chain of logic in your Bible study and the immediate text that will provide the answer. Do not ask questions that require an answer in your own words, otherwise you open yourself (properly) to the charge, “That’s what you say, but that’s not what the Bible says.”

Your task is not to make assertions of your own opinion, but to open the Word of God to people so that they may learn for themselves.

6. Use just one Bible text per question or point. Avoid complications. Keep it simple. The goal is for your Bible student to easily and quickly remember the truths they learn from Scripture. Too much information is confusing and covers up the truth.

7. End the study with a Bible text that clinches the points made. Leave nothing for people to guess at, and about which it is possible to come to wrong conclusions. Complete the topic before you leave it, so that your students may be able to review the texts and find the truth on their own. Prove fully what you promised in the introduction. Awaken interest in the next topic, perhaps by simply saying, "Next week it might be a good idea for us to study _____. What do you think?"

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Handout 4

One Way to Deal with Differences

One topic about which many Christians have different viewpoints today is the timing and manner of Christ's second coming. Here is an approach to the scriptural material on the second coming using the basic journalistic questions:

1. How will Christ come? (Acts 1:11, Matthew 25:31)
2. When will Christ come? (Matthew 24:36, 33)
3. Where will Christ come? (Matthew 24:26-27, Revelation 1:7, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)
4. Which Jesus will come? (Acts 1:11)
5. What will be the sign of His coming? (Matthew 24:14, 29-30)
6. Who will see Him come? (Revelation 1:7)
7. Why will Christ come? (John 14:2-3)

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Handout 5

Do's and Don'ts of Giving Bible Studies

Select a Bible study you understand and are comfortable using. Students will lose confidence in what you are saying if you are confused about the lesson.

Pray before you get there, before you open the Bible, while you are studying, and when you end the study. Bathe your study in prayer, and listen for the Holy Spirit to guide.

Don't argue. You'll likely win the battle, but lose the war.

Make Christ and salvation the center. Don't just share information; share Jesus Christ, His great love, and what He has done to save us.

Don't be mechanical. Use this opportunity to win a heart and gain a friend.

Be kind and patient. Never make your students feel uncomfortable if they do not immediately grasp what you are saying.

Don't consistently correct erroneous understanding. Allow your students to come to a clearer understanding of biblical truth as the Spirit enlightens their minds.

Don't allow the study to get off track. Inform students that their questions pertaining to other topics will be covered in a future lesson.

Make an appeal following each lesson. It reveals where your student is spiritually, and if they don't understand or are struggling with certain areas.

Don't stay longer than an hour. This overwhelms the hearer. Keep the lesson simple, and be considerate of their time.

Remember, it is the power of God's Word that converts hearts and transforms lives, not your human effort. Your success in giving Bible studies depends on your willingness to be an instrument in God's hand, filled with His spirit, and revealing His great love.

(Source: PlusLine material by Lillian Torres)

Handout 6

Introduction

The last words of Christ before His departure from this world to those whom He had trained to carry on His work are of utmost importance to the church today. Notice His exact words: ““But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth”” (Acts 1:8 KJV). This command was given not only to all those who heard Him speak, but also to all who would accept Him in the ages to come. They were to make known to the world the story of the Father’s love and salvation.

Revival and church renewal take place when members use their Bibles to witness for Christ. Ellen White has written of “a great reformatory movement among God’s people . . . Hundreds and thousands were . . . visiting families, and opening before them the Word of God. Hearts were convicted by the power of the Holy Spirit, and a spirit of genuine conversion was manifest. On every side doors were thrown open to the proclamation of the truth. The world seemed to be lightened with the heavenly influence. Great blessings were received by the true and humble people of God” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 9, page 126).

Duties of the Lay Bible Minister

The work to which a person is called when he or she becomes a lay Bible minister can best be described as follows:

- 1. Bible studies.** Most of the time that the lay Bible minister has available will be used to conduct personal Bible studies with individuals and families who have expressed an interest in studying the Word of God. Each study will take one or two hours a week. A regular routine of appointments is important in order to build relationships and help people grow in discipleship.
- 2. Inquirers class.** Lay Bible ministers assist with the pastor’s Bible class and bring their students to this class as they begin to attend church. (Sometimes the special Sabbath School class for prospective members is called the discovery class or visitor’s class. It is often led by an elder or a lay Bible minister because the pastor has two or more congregations to work with each Sabbath and cannot attend Sabbath School.)
- 3. Missing member visits.** From time to time the pastor may assign the names of former or missing members to visit. This will give you contact with people with

whom you will be able to study after you gain their friendship and confidence.

4. An under shepherd. The lay Bible minister will help the pastor seek and find the lost. He or she provides the pastoral caring and attention which the pastor will not have the time to give to each prospective member. Often people turn to Christ and begin to think of joining a church at times of crisis in their lives. This means that the lay Bible minister must help to meet their emotional, economic and social needs as well as their spiritual needs and religious questions. Much time may be spent just listening. Time will also be invested in helping prospective members to make friends among church members, attend classes that are important to their growth, such as stop-smoking programs or family life seminars, and make use of the aid provided by Adventist Community Services and other social services.

5. Finding prospects. A lay Bible minister is constantly on the alert for people who may be ready to enter into Bible study. He or she will be sensitive to possibilities among friends, relatives, work associates, visitors at church, newcomers in the community, participants in outreach seminars and those who respond to Adventist media ministries and awareness activities. And he or she will learn to invite prospects to begin Bible studies.

Source: *Responsibilities in the Local Church* (2002, Church Resources Consortium, North American Division of Seventh-day Adventist Church)

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Handout 7

Basic Bible Studies based on the Baptismal Vows

There is one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a unity of three coeternal persons.

The Trinity is one of the foundational doctrines of Christian faith. It is specifically mentioned several places in the Bible—Matthew 28:19, 1 Peter 1:2, 2 Corinthians 13:14.

The trinity is hinted at in the Old Testament.

1. Many times God is a plural noun. – Genesis 1:1,26; 3:22; 11:6,7; 20:13; 48:15; Isaiah 6:8.
2. Genesis 11:7 is concerned with the tower of Babel and God is going to go down to see it. The verb “come” is plural and this requires a plural speaker. The speaker is speaking to two or more. “Come let us go down....”
3. Lord is distinguished from Lord. – Genesis 19:24, Hosea 1:7.
4. The Lord has a Son. – Psalm 2:7
5. Genesis 1:1,2, mentions that God created and that the Spirit moved upon the waters.
6. Genesis 6:3, “And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man....”

While the trinity is hinted at in the Old Testament the Trinity is taught in the New Testament.

1. In the baptismal scene we see the Trinity clearly. – Matthew 3:16,17: Christ is being baptized, The Father is speaking, and the Holy Spirit is descending.
2. John depicts the trinity quite clearly in John 14:16,17. In this text we see Christ asking the Father to send the Spirit.

The death of Jesus Christ on Calvary is the atoning sacrifice for sin and through faith in His shed blood comes salvation from sin and its penalty.

The problem of evil or “sin” is a fundamental problem in humanity recognized by

many writers, thinkers and artists over the centuries from all beliefs and backgrounds.

1. All have sinned and are under the curse of evil and death. – Romans 3:23
2. Adam brought death, Jesus brings life. – Romans 5:18-19
3. Jesus bore the curse of sin for us. – Galatians 3:13
4. Jesus experienced death for us. – Hebrews 2:8-9
5. Jesus “became sin,” or took its penalty, for us. – 2 Corinthians 5:21
6. As we repent, Jesus forgives. – Acts 3:19, 1 John 1:9
7. Through grace by faith we are saved. – Ephesians 2:8
8. As we receive Christ by faith, we become sons/daughters of God. – John 1:12
9. Salvation (liberation from the problem of evil) is a gift of God for all who believe (trust) in Jesus. – John 3:16, 1 John 5:11-13

Why is there a sin problem?

1. God created human beings in His image. – Genesis 1:27-31
This includes the power of autonomy to think, to choose and to act.
2. Sin destroys our relationship with God, so we run from His presence. –
Genesis 3:8, Isaiah 59:1-2
3. Separated from God we sink into self-destructive evil and deserve only eternal destruction. – Romans 6:23

God, in Christ, has forgiven sin and gives the believer a new attitude to renounce the sinful ways of the world.

God is quick to freely and completely forgive us for our evil thoughts and ways.

1. God freely forgives. – 1 John 1:9, Micah 7:18-19
2. He blots out our transgressions and no longer remembers them. – Acts 3:19, Hebrews 8:12, Isaiah 44:22, 55:7

3. Forgiveness is rooted in the character of God. – Colossians 1:14
4. Forgiveness brings happiness. – Psalm 32:1

To accept Christ has savior and follow him is to join Christ's side in the great conflict between good and evil.

1. Always do those things that please God. – John 8:29
2. Inner happiness comes from knowing and doing God's will. – John 13:17
The grace of Christ provides a new start in life with new goals, new values.
1. "Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus." – Philippians 2:5
2. Christ's values – Romans 12:1-2, Philippians 4:7-8, Psalm 11:5
3. Live as simply as possible. – 1 Timothy 2:9-10, 1 Peter 3:2-5

Christ is Intercessor in heaven and His transforming grace and power enables the believer to live a loving, Christ-centered life in the home and before the world.

Salvation in Christ involves his role as our "intercessor" or advocate in the judgment.

1. Everyone must give account of themselves to God. – Romans 14:12, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Jeremiah 2:22
2. The "judgment" is pictured throughout the Bible. – Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, Daniel 7:9-10, Matthew 12:36, 25:31-46, Acts 24:25, Revelation 14:6-7, 20:4-15
3. The only way to overcome the judgment is through Jesus. – Romans 8:1
4. Christ is described as our "High Priest" in "the heavenly sanctuary," meaning advocate or intercessor for those who accept his salvation in God's judgment. – Hebrews 7:24-25

Christ sends the Holy Spirit to be part of our lives and help us live according to God's will.

1. The Holy Spirit provides encouragement and guidance in holy living. – John 14:26

2. To reject the Holy Spirit is to reject Christ. – Matthew 12:31-32

The Bible is God's inspired Word, the only rule of faith and practice for the Christian.

1. The Bible is inspired by God. – 2 Timothy 3:16
2. The authors who wrote the 66 books of the Bible over a period of 1,500 years were all inspired by God. – 2 Peter 1:21
3. God has preserved His Word through the centuries. – Psalm 12:6-7
4. The Bible makes us wise to salvation. – 2 Timothy 3:15
5. As we compare the various Bible texts on the same theme, we will discover the basic teachings of the Bible. – Isaiah 28:9-10, 1 Corinthians 2:13
6. If we approach the Bible with an open mind, God will guide us to understand the truth that it contains. – John 7:17, John 17:17, John 16:13

The Ten Commandments are a transcript of the character of God and a revelation of His will, including the fourth commandment, which requires the observance of the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath of the Lord and the memorial of creation.

The Ten Commandments are the best, most concise expression available of God's eternal law which is basic to defining what is right and good throughout all time.

1. God's law is eternal. – Psalm 111:7-8
2. Sin is defined as breaking God's law. – 1 John 3:4, Isaiah 59:1-2, Romans 6:23
3. God's law leads us to see our guilt and drives us to Christ. – Romans 3:20

Keeping the law does not earn salvation, and salvation by faith does not mean we can ignore God's law because we are under grace.

1. God's law is not a means of salvation. – Romans 6:14, Ephesians 2:8
2. When we are saved by grace, we desire to keep God's law. – Romans 3:28-31, Hebrews 10:7, John 8:29, John 14:15

3. The followers of Jesus want to keep His commandments. – Hebrews 8:10, Psalm 40:8, Revelation 12:17, 14:12

The only one of the Ten Commandments about which there is any disagreement among Christians is the Sabbath commandment. There is no Bible basis for setting aside this commandment or changing the Sabbath from the seventh day (Friday night and Saturday) to another day. Unfortunately, the idea of moving the Sabbath to Sunday has its roots in a long, sorry history of antisemitism among Christians.

1. The Sabbath was set apart at creation as a day of spiritual rest and renewal, a basic, eternal need of human beings. – Genesis 2:1-3
2. The Sabbath is designed to help us remember that we are created by God and to spend time reconnecting with him regularly, setting aside the secular concerns of making a living, getting ahead, etc. – Exodus 20:8-11
3. Jesus was a faithful Sabbath keeper. – Luke 4:16, Matthew 12:8
4. Paul both kept the Sabbath himself and met to worship God with both Gentile and Jewish believers on the Sabbath. – Acts 13:42-44
5. When the first apostolic council decided that Gentiles were welcome to join the Christian church and did not need to be circumcised as Jews in order to become Christians, it was assumed that the churches of Gentile believers would continue to keep the Sabbath. – Acts 15, especially verses 19-21

After all these centuries, how can we still know precisely which is the seventh day?

1. We know which day Christ was resurrected on: Sunday
2. Christ died on Friday, rested in the grave during the Sabbath, and was resurrected on Sunday. – Luke 23:54-56, 24:1

Note: Luke was a Gentile Christian who wrote near the end of Paul's life, addressing his two books—The Gospel of Luke and The Acts of the Apostles—to Gentiles, yet he specifically identifies the death and resurrection of our Lord around a Sabbath-keeping background without any hint of change.

The return of Christ is the blessed hope when “this mortal shall ... put on immortality. The believer is preparing to meet the Lord and will witness to His loving salvation by using his or her talents in personal soul-winning and endeavor to help others to be ready for His glorious appearing.

1. Jesus promised that He would return. – John 14:1-3
2. When Jesus returns, it will **not** be a secret event, known only to believers, but a public event for all to see. – Matthew 24:26-31
3. At the return of Christ, the dead believers will be resurrected and caught up into the sky with the believers who are alive. – 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17
4. At His return, Christ will appear as King of Kings leading the armies of heaven, triumphant over evil. – Revelation 19:11-16
5. Believers will be delighted to see the return of Christ, but unbelievers and evil people will be overcome with fear. – Isaiah 25:9, Revelation 6:14-17
6. The return of Christ is called the “Blessed Hope” of a lost humanity in a self-destructive world. – Titus 2:13

The Bible teaches spiritual gifts and believe that the gift of prophecy is one of the identifying marks of the remnant church.

1. Each follower of Christ is given “gifts” of grace to enable them to serve God and to build up the Body of Christ. – Ephesians 4:7-16
2. There are many different kinds of spiritual gifts and each has a role within the Body of Christ. – 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12:4-8
3. The spiritual gifts continue in the church until the return of Christ. – Revelation 19:10

The organized church represents the mystical Body of Christ and needs the support of believers through tithes and offerings, and by personal effort and influence.

1. Regular fellowship with other believers is key to maintaining a growing relationship with Christ. – Hebrews 10:24-25
2. The Body of Christ (the church) is the arena in which believers grow to spiritual maturity and learn to serve in Christ’s name. – Ephesians 4:11-13
3. Every believer has a role to play in the church. – See the previous study on Spiritual Gifts (1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12)
4. We are ambassadors for Christ. – 2 Corinthians 5:20

5. The kingdom of God is to be our primary goal in life. – Matthew 6:33
6. Every believer has a responsibility to support Christ's mission through tithes and offerings. – Malachi 3:8-11, Acts 5:1-11

The human body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and the believer honors God by caring for it, avoiding the use of that which is harmful; abstaining from all unclean foods; from the use, manufacture, or sale of alcoholic beverages; the use, manufacture or sale of tobacco in any of its forms for human consumption; and from the misuse of or trafficking in narcotics or other drugs.

1. God wants you to have good health. – 3 John 1:2
2. Physical health is important to spiritual growth, especially as the physical body impacts upon our ability to think clearly and control our emotions. – 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Romans 12:1-2, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, 10:31
3. Alcohol has long been recognized as the cause of cognitive, emotional and social problems. – Proverbs 4:17, 20:1, 23:29-32, Isaiah 5:11
4. Self-prescription or recreational use of mind-altering substances is simply an extension of the same issues related to alcohol. The same Bible principles apply.
5. Tobacco is the single most devastating public health problem in the world today. Although it was unknown at the time of the Bible, certainly Bible principles apply. Tobacco has no redeeming value of any kind.
6. The original diet that God designed for human beings was vegetarian. – Genesis 1:29

Note: There is no indication that the Bible requires or even urges a vegetarian diet. In fact, the New Testament implies that Christ did not follow a vegetarian diet since he took part in the Passover feast and may have eaten fish. Nonetheless it may be good Christian stewardship to follow a vegetarian diet both because it helps to manage a number of dietary health problems and because it helps to combat world hunger.

Note: It appears that early Christians, including Gentile Christians, continued to follow a "kosher" diet, even after the decision of the Council of Jerusalem which

supported Paul's teaching that circumcision (becoming Jewish) was not necessary for Gentiles to become Christians. – Acts 15:19-20

The New Testament teaches baptism by immersion and believers are to be so baptized as a public expression of faith in Christ and His forgiveness of their sins.

1. A person who believes and is baptized, will be saved. – Mark 16:16, John 3:5
2. There is one Lord, one faith and one baptism. – Ephesians 4:5
3. Jesus “went into” and “came up” out of the water. He was immersed. – Mark 1:9-10
4. Baptism is symbol of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ through which our salvation has been made possible. – Romans 6:3-6, Colossians 2:12
5. Baptism is into the body or church. – 1 Corinthians 12:13, Acts 2:46-47

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is the remnant church of Bible prophecy and people of every culture, race, and language are invited and accepted into its fellowship.

The Adventist Church came out of events in the early 19th Century when a Baptist evangelist by the name of William Miller made a wide impact across America, preaching again, for the first time in hundreds of years the Bible truth of the return of Christ. Miller’s sermons were re-printed on the front page of the *New York Times*. Longfellow wrote of hearing Miller preach. Historians estimate that about 10 percent of Americans believed Miller’s message. But, it all came apart after the “the Great Disappointment” on October 22, 1844, when Miller had said that Jesus would return. Miller went into seclusion and died a few years later.

In the aftermath of this debacle, a small number of young adults began to gather and re-evaluate all Christian traditions from the Bible and the Bible alone. They determined to start afresh with an authentic Christian faith and a new fellowship. Among other things they found no Bible basis for observing the Sabbath on Sunday, and re-discovered the Bible teaching of spiritual gifts. They were social activists, taking positions against slavery, alcohol and war, also seeking reform in the medical care and nutrition habits of the time, as well as schools. From 1850 through 1863, they took progressive steps to organize the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The Adventist Church has, from the beginning, taken a position against any “time-setting” with regard to the return of Christ. Christ says clearly, “No one knows about that day or hour.” (Matthew 24:36) The denomination sees its prophetic role as calling Christians to see the goal of their faith in the return of Christ and His promised

kingdom. (Revelation 14:6-13) In Revelation 7:9-12 the Bible speaks of “a great multitude” drawn from “every nation, tribe, people and language,” so the Church has deliberately become a very diverse fellowship with congregations in almost every nation on the globe. The Adventist Church requires affiliated congregations to accept and value individuals of every race, social status and background.

The Adventist denomination has grown to more 25 million adherents. It sponsors the largest Protestant school system in the world, with accredited programs from preschool through universities that offer MD, PhD and other doctoral degrees. It also sponsors hundreds of hospitals and an international relief and development agency which is a recognized NGO (non-governmental organization) at the United Nations.

1. At the end of the Bible story, there is a reference to a “remnant” or “the rest of the offspring” of the woman which symbolizes the followers of Jesus throughout Christian history. This “remnant” is described as “those who obey God’s commands and hold to the testimony of Jesus.” — Revelation 12:17
2. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has seen its unique identity in this symbol from its beginning as a prophetic minority calling Christendom back to its original, authentic beliefs, practices and purpose as salvation history comes to an end.

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