

1. Created for Community

Texts: Genesis 2:18; Exodus 20:2-17; Isaiah 1:10-17; 1 Corinthians 13, 1 John 4:7.

Quotes:

- Only a life lived for others is worth living. *Albert Einstein*
- Happiness is a by-product of an effort to make someone else happy. *Gretta B Palmer*
- I am a part of all that I have met. *Alfred Tennyson*
- God creates men, but they choose each other. *Niccolo Machiavelli*
- Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has. *Margaret Mead*

Introductory questions

What does the fact that we are “created for community” tell us about God? Why is it “not good” for us to be alone? What went wrong in God’s plan for the cosmic community? What freedom of choice is there for individuals if we are to act as a community? On what fundamental principles are the best relationships based? How do we achieve true community?

Discussion ideas

It is not good for man to be alone, said God. In fact, after saying that everything was good, this is the first record we have of something “not good” in God’s creative process. Not that is a sign of imperfection, rather that more was needed for completion (an interesting perspective on perfection, by the way...)

The lesson quotes the comment “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.” It is not given attribution in the lesson, but it comes from English poet John Donne. In so many ways we are indeed part of a greater community. From the perspective of the Great Controversy, this community is not limited to us here on earth, but the wider community that includes all of God’s created beings throughout the universe. And that community is both observing and is part of God’s answers to the issues involved in the challenges to his government.

From this point of view the Ten Commandments and their social dimension also reflect God’s plan and purpose, being descriptive of the kind of people we should be. In fact, for God to have to spell out such blunt commands is a tragedy, for in a good world, who would ever want to the things proscribed? The sad fact is however that God does have to make it abundantly clear what is wrong, another awful consequence of the devil’s deceptive accusations.

In Tuesday’s lesson we are urged to do the following: “Contemplate the different ways Jesus revealed unselfish love toward others in contrast to how you relate to others. However, a word of caution: End your contemplation at the Cross, where Christ died to save those who have fallen so short of His example.” This raises many questions—and even which are the right questions to ask at this point! We’re referred to Matthew 10:37 where Jesus seems to be saying we need to “hate” our families if we are to follow him. What does this mean? From Thursday’s lesson: “A young woman, severely damaged by an abusive father, has found it all but impossible to develop long-lasting and meaningful relationships with anyone now. Why must she go to the Cross to begin the healing process? What would indicate that she would find healing there?

What does 1 John 4:7 tells us about the real issues involved?

Ellen White Comments

And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. Gen. 2:18.

Man was not made to dwell in solitude; he was to be a social being. Without companionship, the beautiful scenes and delightful employments of Eden would have failed to yield perfect happiness. Even communion with angels could not have satisfied his desire for sympathy and companionship. There was none of the same nature to love, and to be loved.

God Himself gave Adam a companion. He provided “an help meet for him”—a helper corresponding to him—one who was fitted to be his companion, and who could be one with him in love and sympathy. Eve was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she was not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him. A part of man, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, she was his second self; showing the close union and the affectionate attachment that should exist in this relation. {FLB 251}

The teacher can do much to discourage that evil habit, the curse of the community, the neighborhood, and the home--the habit of backbiting, gossip, ungenerous criticism. In this no pains should be spared. Impress upon the students the fact that this habit reveals a lack of culture and refinement and of true goodness of heart; it unfits one both for the society of the truly cultured and refined in this world and for association with the holy ones of heaven.

We think with horror of the cannibal who feasts on the still warm and trembling flesh of his victim; but are the results of even this practice more terrible than are the agony and ruin caused by misrepresenting motive, blackening reputation, dissecting character? {Ed 235}

Extra material

As I write this I'm sitting on the train from New York back home. Actually, I'm in the “quiet car,” where conversation is to be kept low, and no cell phones are meant to be used. One of my fellow passengers seems to be the self-appointed enforcer of the rules. He has already told half-a-dozen people to turn off their cell-phones. He is getting quite upset at one individual who is using a cell phone. He tells him in bluntly, “Sir, this is the quiet car. No cell phones!”

To which he gets the answer “I'm not making any noise. I'm just listening to messages.” He turns away irritated, telling the whole car in a loud voice, “He's using his cell phone!”

He speaks to the conductor to complain some more. In a not very quiet voice in the quiet car, he points out the offender, and demands action be taken. The conductor replies that if the person is not making any noise, then he's not worried.

“But he's using a cell phone when he shouldn't,” he now irate passenger shouts. **“THIS IS THE QUIET CAR!!!”**

Sometimes, like you, gentle reader, I wonder if we are *all* created for community, and that perhaps some of us are better off with just our own company. For how is true community achieved? By rules and regulations: **NO PHONES IN THE QUIET CAR?** Or is it best achieved by mutual consideration and appreciation, of thinking of the other before ourselves, of truly loving those around us, even when they may be quite unlovable?

The “offending” passenger has now turned off his cell phone. All is quiet, except for the continued loud muttering of the Complainer: **“DID YOU SEE THAT! HE WAS MAKING CALLS ON HIS CELL PHONE. IN THE QUIET CAR! WHY CAN'T PEOPLE HAVE MORE CONSIDERATION...?”**

2. “Honor Your Father and Your Mother”

Texts: 1 Pet. 5:5; Exod. 20:12; Eph. 6:1-3; Gen. 22:1-14; Luke 2:41-52.

Quotes:

- Our earth is degenerate in these latter days; bribery and corruption are common; children no longer obey their parents; and the end of the world is evidently approaching. *Assyrian clay tablet 2800 B.C.*
- The longer we live the more we think and the higher the value we put on friendship and tenderness towards parents and friends. *Samuel Johnson*
- The commandment to honor parents was given to ensure that the elderly, although they may not feel wanted by family or society, are still given their appropriate reward. *Laura Schlesinger*
- Children are a great comfort in your old age—and they help you reach it faster, too. *Lionel Kauffman*
- Being a grownup means assuming responsibility for yourself, for your children, and—here’s the big curve—for your parents. *Wendy Wasserstein*
- The thing that impresses me most about America is the way parents obey their children. *Edward, Duke of Windsor, (Look, 5 March 1957).*

Introductory questions

Is there a guarantee that if you honor your parents you will live a long time? What is the basic message here? How does respect for your earthly parents affect your respect for God? If you have a very poor parental role model, what does this do to your relationship to God? What happens when parents are wrong? How does this relate to issues in the cosmic conflict?

Discussion ideas

“Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.” Exodus 21:17 NIV. Some are very keen to “take the Bible as it reads.” Why then do we not see the imposition of the death penalty for badmouthing parents? It’s interesting that we are selective in which parts we still apply literally, and the parts we think are to be reinterpreted according to culture and era.

The lesson (Sunday) advises: “Indeed, we can honor and respect those who are older than we are, even if we don’t necessarily agree with what they say or believe.” How exactly do we do this? How to avoid sounding condescending or as if we are just humoring them?

Significantly, the largest passage for study is Genesis 22, the story of Abraham and the intended sacrifice of Isaac. This is clearly a wonderful story of filial devotion, but there are so many questions here: Did Isaac know what was going on? Did he agree to become a human sacrifice? What was God intending? Does he demand such “gifts”? What difference is there between such a command to sacrifice Isaac and heathen gods? And so on.

“When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, ‘Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.’ ‘Why were you searching for me?’ he asked. ‘Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?’” Luke 2:48, 49 NIV. What did Jesus mean by this? Was he being rude to his parents?

In seeing God through parents, there is much that directly impacts issues in the Great Controversy. As J.M. Barrie wrote, “The God to whom little boys say their prayers has a face very like their mothers.” Many writers have commented that we first learn ideas about God through our parents, both directly and indirectly. Consequently, honoring parents parallels honor for God.

Ellen White Comments

They [the scribes and the Pharisees] set aside the fifth commandment as of no consequence, but were very exact in carrying out the traditions of the elders. They taught the people that the devotion of their property to the temple was a duty more sacred than even the support of their parents; and that, however great the necessity, it was sacrilege to impart to father or mother any part of what had been thus consecrated. An undutiful child had only to pronounce the word “Corban” over his property, thus devoting it to God, and he could retain it for his own use during his lifetime, and after his death it was to be appropriated to the temple service. Thus he was at liberty, both in life and in death, to dishonor and defraud his parents, under cover of a pretended devotion to God. {DA 396-7}

The best way to educate children to respect their father and mother, is to give them the opportunity of seeing the father offering kindly attentions to the mother, and the mother rendering respect and reverence to the father. It is by beholding love in their parents, that children are led to obey the fifth commandment and to heed the injunction, [Exodus 20:12 quoted]. {RH, November 15, 1892}

Have you love for your child? Do you cultivate affection for the little ones you have brought into the world, and express that love in your words and manners? If your child is playing with something that is not a proper article for him to use as a toy, do not snatch it from him; but get him to exchange it for something that will be proper for him, and that will give him as much pleasure. Let your children have evidence that you love them, and that you want to make them happy. The more unlovely they are, the greater pains you must take to win their confidence and love; and when they realize that father and mother will use every justifiable means to make them happy, the barriers will be broken down. What a victory is gained when it is possible to mould the character of your children after the character of Christ! It should be the constant aim of parents to develop the capacities of their children in such a way that they will be fitted to honor God and bless humanity. {ST, April 30, 1894}

Extra Material

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images. It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them.

“Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent? Swords will flash in their cities, will destroy the bars of their gates and put an end to their plans. My people are determined to turn from me. Even if they call to the Most High, he will by no means exalt them.

“How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused.

I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God, and not man-- the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath.” Hosea 11:1-9 NIV.

Compare 2 Timothy 3:1-3 with the first quote on the previous page. What does this tell you?

3. Parenthood—Joys and Responsibilities

Texts: Ps. 127:3; Prov. 13:24; 23:13, 14; 29:15; Eph. 6:4; Phil. 4:9.

Quotes:

- The reason grandchildren and grandparents get along so well is because they share a common enemy. *Sam Levenson*
- Role modeling is the most basic responsibility of parents. Parents are handing life's scripts to their children, scripts that in all likelihood will be acted out for the rest of the children's lives. *Stephen R. Covey*
- Making the decision to have a child is momentous. It is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body. *Elizabeth Stone*
- If your parents never had children, chances are you won't either. *Dick Cavett*
- My parents really hated me. My bath toys were a toaster and a radio. *Unknown*

Introductory questions

What has parenting got to do with God anyway? Why study such ideas from the Bible when their views are so different from our modern world? In what ways does having children parallel Creation and God's experience? How do we "provoke children to wrath"? What do we learn about God from the perspective of both children and parents?

Discussion ideas

Interestingly the lesson quotes Psalm 127:3, but does not go on to cite the two following verses that speak appreciatively of a "quiver-ful"! So while children (especially sons, according to this verse) are a heritage from the Lord, maybe today we are praying for too many... Again, an insight into how circumstances and exact applications change, while the fundamental principles still remain the same.

The lesson points out that "The attitude of most people toward starting a family has changed drastically." Since this is so, what does this tell us about the way we apply Biblical commands and perspectives. Can we just pick and choose as we please—or is there something more significant and important? Most importantly, what do such ideas say about God. All too often those in Biblical times who were infertile were seen as being punished by God. How does such a view match with our ideas of God today?

Are there dangers in comparing human parenting with God as parent? What of the issue of corporal punishment? All too often in our experience, such beatings can be abusive, and serve more to satisfy the emotions of parents than of correcting children. From such a perspective, is God abusive? Does he punish in such a way? What would this tell us about his nature?

"Young People must Decide for Themselves," says Wednesday's lesson. What are the implications of this statement? Again, as we apply this to God, what do we see? God as parent seeks our very best, wants to help us, and pleads with us to make the right choices. He will also correct and discipline us from the best of motives. But it is also true in God's relationship with us that he has to allow us to decide for ourselves, whatever those choices may be.

Paul writing to Philippians (4:9) can sound rather arrogant and self-centered. What did you think he meant? How does Paul's comment relate to us today? What can we learn from each other, and most of all what do we learn about God from his role as parent to each of us?

Ellen White Comments

I would say your son now needs a father as he has never needed one before. He has erred; you know it, and he knows that you know it; and words that you would have spoken to him in his innocence with safety, and which would not have produced any bad results, would now seem like unkindness and be sharp as a knife. . . . I know that parents feel the shame of the wrongdoing of a child that has dishonored them very keenly, but does the erring one wound and bruise the heart of the earthly parent any more than we as the children of God bruise our heavenly Parent, who has given us and is still giving us His love, inviting us to return and repent of our sins and iniquities and He will pardon our transgression?

Do not withdraw your love now. That love and sympathy is needed now as never before. When others look with coldness and put the worst construction upon the misdeeds of your boy, should not the father and mother in pitying tenderness seek to guide his footsteps into safe paths? I do not know the character of your son's sins, but I am safe in saying, whatever they may be, Let no comments from human lips, no pressure from human actions, of those who think they are doing justice, lead you to pursue a course which can be interpreted by your son that you feel too much mortified and dishonored to ever take him back into confidence and to forget his transgressions. Let nothing cause you to lose hope, nothing to cut off your love and tenderness for the erring one. Just because he is erring, he needs you, and he wants a father and a mother to help him to recover himself from the snare of Satan. Hold him fast by faith and love, and cling to the all-pitying Redeemer, remembering that he has One who has an interest in him, even above your own. . . .

Do not talk discouragement and hopelessness. Talk courage. Tell him he can redeem himself, that you, his father and mother, will help him to take hold from above to plant his feet on the solid Rock, Christ Jesus, to find a sure support and unfailing strength in Jesus. If his fault be ever so grievous, it will not cure your son to press this constantly upon him. A right course of action is needed to save a soul from death and keep a soul from committing a multitude of sins. {CG 266-7}

Extra material

When it was announced that we were to write a book on parenting, the response from our delightful offspring was a roar of laughter. Not, as they explained after the hilarity subsided, that we didn't know something about being parents, but we were hardly experts. Then the discussion ran to what an expert would be. A qualified child development practitioner? A medical authority? A clinical psychologist? All of which would be good, it was agreed. But not necessarily operating from the perspective of a daily-challenged parent. For you could be an expert on parenting without being a parent.

So in the end, the kids' conclusion was it was better to be a parent than to know the theory of parenting. Not that you couldn't gain much from studying, they also conceded, but the most important qualification was to be a parent.

For example, as one of us was deep in a book on parenting, Rebekah came up and announced: "First rule of parenting—pay attention to your children!" In that situation what could you do but put the book down and pay her attention, as she grinned in the knowledge she had scored another small victory.

In the words of Joseph Wood Krutch, "It is... sometimes easier to head an institute for the study of child guidance than it is to turn one brat into a decent human being." For all the theory is no substitute for the practice—the highly practical day-to-day experience of being a parent.

In terms of real impact and importance, the title of "parent" is surely one of the most significant. As a parent, you have the greatest opportunity to influence another life, to build and create, or to demean and destroy. A child in all his or her own potential is a wonderful gift, not to be disparaged or misused. The consequences of being "parent" are great—in both senses of the world.

Most of all, when we recognize the amazing truth that God identifies himself in terms of parent. In describing the way He is, God chooses the closest and most intimate of human relationships—those of the family. Knowing this, and how we are God's children, then as parents we must also understand that we reflect God to our own children. From the introduction to *Parenting: The Nuts and Bolts* by Ana and Jonathan Gallagher.

4. Marriage Is Not Out of Date

Texts: Gen. 2:18-25; John 2:1-11; Eph. 5:22-33; Heb. 13:4; 1 Pet. 3:1-7.

Quotes:

- One advantage of marriage It seems to me Is that when you fall out of love with him Or he falls out of love with you It keeps you together until maybe you fall in again. *Judith Viorst*
- The conception of two people living together for twenty-five years without having a cross word suggests a lack of spirit only to be admired in sheep. *Alan Patrick Herbert*
- Marriage is not a word; it is a sentence. *King Vidor*
- They say love is blind...and marriage is an institution. Well, I'm not ready for an institution for the blind just yet. *Mae West*
- Nearly all marriages, even happy ones, are mistakes: in the sense that almost certainly (in a more perfect world, or even with a little more care in this very imperfect one) both partners might be found more suitable mates. But the real soulmate is the one you are actually married to. *J.R.R. Tolkien*

Introductory questions

Why was marriage instituted in the first place? What significance is there in God using the idea of marriage to describe his relationship with us? How is physical love to reflect our divine relationship? What happens when our marriages are far from perfect, and when problems arise? Is adultery still such a sin today? What is the meaning of Ephesians 5?

Discussion ideas

Monday's lesson comments, "Many of today's younger generation have a problem in making long-term commitments, whether it comes to church membership and or to sealing a love relationship with a marriage vow." Would you say this is true? Why/why not?

What of the deeper question of commitment to God and a long-term relationship with him? Is this just as problematic, or are there differences here? In so many ways, our issues of relationship between ourselves reflect our deeper alienation and separation from God.

Physical love and sexual expression has long been a source of contention. The use of temple prostitutes in pagan religions does reflect the concept that ecstasy and joy are seen as aspects of a "higher connection." If there is this "joy of sex" that the lesson speaks of, why have Christians so often had problems with the physical expression of sexuality? How does this relate to God our Creator and our deepest expression of commitment to our Lord?

The issue of adultery is addressed in Wednesday's lesson. In today's world, how is this still significant? What are the fundamental issues involved in such actions? God used an adulterous relationship (Gomer to Hosea) to express his response to the broken relationship with his people. How does this reveal the issues in the Great Controversy.

The wedding in Cana (John 2) suggests that Jesus both respected and endorsed marriage, and was happy to be present at such festivities. His involvement reflects the Edenic vision of man and woman together in mutual harmony, supportive of one another.

Without getting into too much extraneous discussion, what of the whole issue of gay marriage? Can this be seen as mutual commitment, or is it unbiblical and evil? How should we speak for the best and most winsomely witness for the God we love?

Ellen White Comments

Few have correct views of the marriage relation. Many seem to think that it is the attainment of perfect bliss; but if they could know one quarter of the heartaches of men and women that are bound by the marriage vow in chains that they cannot and dare not break, they would not be surprised that I trace these lines. Marriage, in a majority of cases, is a most galling yoke. There are thousands that are mated but not matched. The books of heaven are burdened with the woes, the wickedness, and the abuse that lie hidden under the marriage mantle. This is why I would warn the young who are of a marriageable age to make haste slowly in the choice of a companion. The path of married life may appear beautiful and full of happiness; but why may not you be disappointed as thousands of others have been? {AH 44}

Love . . . is not unreasonable; it is not blind. It is pure and holy. But the passion of the natural heart is another thing altogether. While pure love will take God into all its plans, and will be in perfect harmony with the Spirit of God, passion will be headstrong, rash, unreasonable, defiant of all restraint, and will make the object of its choice an idol. In all the deportment of one who possesses true love, the grace of God will be shown. Modesty, simplicity, sincerity, morality, and religion will characterize every step toward an alliance in marriage. Those who are thus controlled will not be absorbed in each other's society, at a loss of interest in the prayer meeting and the religious service. Their fervor for the truth will not die on account of the neglect of the opportunities and privileges that God has graciously given to them. {AH 50-1}

Marriage, a union for life, is a symbol of the union between Christ and His church. The spirit that Christ manifests toward His church is the spirit that the husband and wife are to manifest toward each other. If they love God supremely, they will love each other in the Lord, ever treating each other courteously, drawing in even cords. In their mutual self-denial and self-sacrifice they will be a blessing to each other. . . . {AH 95}

Extra material

Woman—a foe to friendship, an unescapable punishment, a necessary evil. John Chrysostom (Greek Christian writer, 345-407).

All wickedness is but little to the wickedness of a woman. Ecclesiasticus (Apocrypha)

The judgment of God upon your sex endures even today; and with it inevitably endures your position of criminal at the bar of justice. You are the gateway to the devil. Tertullian (Roman theologian c. 160-240)

A woman is a temple built over a sewer. Tertullian (again).

Women should not be enlightened or educated in any way. They should, in fact, be segregated as they are the cause of hideous and involuntary erections in holy men. Augustine.

Nothing is so much to be shunned as sex relations. Augustine

I feel that nothing so casts down the manly mind from its height as the fondling of women and those bodily contacts which belong to the married state. Augustine.

(Women are) Demons that make us enter Hell through the door of Paradise. Anon.

[Be it resolved] that all women, of whatever age, rank, profession, or degree; whether virgin maids or widows; that shall after the passing of this Act, impose upon and betray into matrimony any of His Majesty's male subjects, by scents, paints, cosmetics, washes, artificial teeth, false hair, Spanish wool, iron stays, hoops, high-heeled shoes, or bolstered hips, shall incur the penalty of the laws now in force against witchcraft, sorcery, and such like misdemeanours, and that the marriage, upon conviction, shall stand null and void. *Act of Parliament, 1670.*

5. Friendship

Texts: 1 Samuel 20; John 15:12-15; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Philippians 2:3-8.

Quotes:

- Your friend is the man who knows all about you, and still likes you. *Elbert Hubbard*
- Who finds a faithful friend, finds a treasure. *Jewish saying*
- Don't walk in front of me, I may not follow. Don't walk behind me, I may not lead. Just walk beside me and be my friend. *Albert Camus*
- The only way to have a friend is to be one. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*
- Friends are the sunshine of life. *John Hay*
- The best mirror is an old friend. *George Herbert*
- There can be no Friendship where there is no Freedom. *William Penn*
- It's the ones you can call up at 4:00 a.m. that really matter. *Marlene Dietrich*
- The language of friendship is not words but meanings. *Henry David Thoreau*
- It is easy enough to be friendly to one's friends. But to befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy is the quintessence of true religion. The other is mere business. *Mahatma Gandhi*

Introductory questions

Friendship is portrayed as one of the highest gifts. Why is that so? Is there anything negative about friendship? Why is it important to know God is our friend—isn't it enough that he is God and will save us? What is Jesus' reason for identifying his disciples as his friends? How do we show our true friendship with God? Why is this important in the Great Controversy?

Discussion ideas

The lesson gives some Biblical examples of friendship, for example David and Jonathan; Jesus and his disciples. In fact this is the first time I remember seeing any lesson discussion of John 15:15! In this context Jesus makes it clear that he calls us friends because we *know* God and his “business”—his nature and character. As part of the demonstration of the truth about God that is so vital to the outworking of the Great Controversy, this friendship with God is vitally significant. It does not speak so much about us, but rather the truth and rightness of God himself.

What of those “bad” friends the lesson comments on (Monday). As we look at how we relate to those we consider friends, how do we know whom to trust? This is the same kind of relationship issue as our response and attitude to God—is he trustworthy and true, and how do we know? Can God be trusted? Is he really our friend? Or is the arch-accuser right?

Philippians 2:3-8. This is quoted as basis for friendship, which in the text leads to Jesus' death on the cross. What does this say about God and his friendship? The lesson suggests that Jesus went out to make friends. Is this the way you see it? In the examples given, what is Jesus looking for? What is the basis for his actions? How is this more than our “just being friends”?

2 Corinthians 6:14 states that Christians are not to be “unequally yoked with unbelievers.” How should this affect the way we treat others who do not believe as we do?

The lesson recommends “*Read John 15:12-15*. What did Jesus call His disciples? What does it mean to say we are “friends” with God, as opposed to servants? What's the difference? What kind of relationship does He seek with us? What can we learn from our friendship with God that can help us with other friendships? At the same time, what is unique about our friendship with God that we can have with no one else (*see, for instance, verse 14*)?” Is this it?

Ellen White Comments

The Holy Spirit is an educating power wherever it is found. To have the higher education is to have the religion of Christ, the sanctification of the Spirit of God. It is to have close friendship with God, to be in that place where we can have communion with him, and work under the ministration of his Spirit. {RH, April 8, 1909}

Christ the Life Giver, Christ the Redeemer, Christ the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, points you to a nobler world. He brings it within range of your vision. He takes you to the threshold of heaven, and brings you to contemplate the glories of eternal realities, that your aspirations may be quickened to grasp the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. As you contemplate heavenly scenes, desire is kindled in your heart to have friendship with God, to be wholly reconciled to him. {ST, July 17, 1893}

You have the Pattern, Christ Jesus; walk in His footsteps, and you will be qualified to fill any and every position that you may be called upon to occupy. You will be "rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving." You are not to feel that you are a bondsman, but a son of God; that you are highly favored in that you have been regarded of so great value that God has made you His by paying an infinite ransom for your freedom. Jesus says, "I call you not servants; . . . but I have called you friends." When you appreciate His wondrous love, love and gratitude will be in your heart as a wellspring of joy. {FE 303-4}

The earnest toil, the unselfish work, the patient, persevering effort, will be abundantly rewarded. Jesus will say, Henceforth I call you not servants, but friends. [SEE JOHN 15:15.] The approval of the Master is not given because of the greatness of the work performed, but because of fidelity in all that has been done. It is not the results we attain, but the motives from which we act, that weigh with God. He prizes goodness and faithfulness above all else. {GW 267}

Extra material

Abraham reveals his understanding of God in what he says to his Friend: "Surely you won't kill the innocent with the guilty. That's impossible! You can't do that." (Genesis 18:25 TEV). Can you imagine talking to God in such a way: "God, you just can't *do* that! It's impossible." Telling God what he can and cannot do—surely we can only do that if we really are good friends of God. We only take "advice" like that from friends, and even then it's easy to get offended. Some good believers would shrink away in horror from such an idea, for we are surely not meant to question God, to call him to account. After all, he is God, we are mere specks of dust—so how could we dare to argue with him?

Isn't God always right? Doesn't he have perfect knowledge and absolute justice on his side? So how could we ever affect one of his decisions anyway? Might as well keep quiet and just do as he says. No point in even discussing it. Really? Does God want us to just bow our heads and say "Yes" to everything he says and does? Are questionings wrong? Must we keep our misgivings to ourselves and be "yes-men" in God's government? Or does God actually *like* when we start asking questions? Does God prefer us to think for ourselves? Is he pleased when we come and ask him for good reasons for what he says and does?

Was God offended when Abraham raised his questions? Here's some mere mortal challenging his divine decision. Did he thunder back: "How dare you question my decisions? Do you know who you're talking to?" Was he upset by such terrible impudence? Like the Queen of Hearts in *Alice in Wonderland* did he shout in response: "Off with his head"? No. Of course not. Because God is not like that. And Abraham *did* know whom he was talking to. He knows the true character and personality of God. He knows that "The judge of all the earth has to act justly." (Gen. 18:25 TEV).

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