

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

Family Seasons
Lesson 1: “The Rhythms of Life”

I'm glad God changes the times and the seasons, aren't you? Just think how dull things would become if He didn't.

Each of the seasons of life offers fresh and vital insights for those who take time to look and to think. Hidden beneath the surface are colorful yet silent truths that touch most every area across the landscape of our lives. The Master is neither mute nor careless as He alters our times and changes our seasons. How wrong to trudge blindly and routinely through a lifetime of changing seasons without discovering answers to the new mysteries and learning to sing the new melodies. Seasons are designed to deepen us, to instruct us in the wisdom and ways of our God, to help our character grow strong like a tree planted by the rivers of water.

Our hope is to grow stronger and taller as our roots dig deeper in the soft soil along the banks of the river of life. And let's not fear the winds of adversity. The gnarled old twisted trees, beaten and buffeted by wind and weather along the ocean shores, tell their own stories of consistent courage. God will make us strong as the winds whip against us.

We're talking about growing a Christian character through the “rhythms of life” this quarter; not just individual character, but family character, church families' character, and denominational character as the people of God made in His image. Genesis 1:27, 28 describes the beginnings of the family like this: “So God created man in His own *image*; in the *image* of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.’”

The Bible shares in the first chapter of the first book that God created the family, emphasizing the high importance this basic unit in society has for God, and us.

Despite God's plan for the happiness of the family, we all know things have not always worked as well as they were supposed to. Husbands and wives often do not get along. Parents and children are often angry at each other. Church families have issues and our denomination is certainly struggling now with immense challenges. These experiences are often confusing because what we anticipated would bring a sense of happiness, warm feelings, and security has been the opposite for many people in our world today.

In Monday's lesson “The Rhythms of Life” we reference Ellen White, writing of God's providential ordering of our lives: “Our plans are not always God's plans. ...”

“In His loving care and interest for us, often He who understands us better than we understand ourselves refuses to permit us selfishly to seek the gratification of our own ambition. ... Often our plans fail that God’s plans for us may succeed. ...

“In the future life the mysteries that here have annoyed and disappointed us will be made plain. We shall see that our seemingly unanswered prayers and disappointed hopes have been among our greatest blessings.” [1]

Temptations are “the unexpected” (Tuesday) “bumps” in the road of life. Ellen White says in line with the 1888 message, that “the correct understanding of the ministration in the heavenly sanctuary is the foundation of our faith,” [2] “the central pillar that sustains the structure of our position at the present time.” [3] Unless we understand it clearly, “it will be impossible ... to exercise the faith which is essential at this time.” [4] The only true deterrent to sin is that “faith”—in the ministry of Christ in His sanctuary.

The Good News is that the Gospel of Jesus Christ brings to view the possibility of character perfection in one’s life. Commenting on the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, Ellen White wrote, “A character formed according to the divine likeness is the only treasure that we can take from this world to the next. ... The heavenly intelligences will work with the human agent who seeks with determined faith that perfection of character which will reach out to perfection in action.” [5] In fact, that perfection of character is a reflection of the loving character of God.

As servants of God become more and more like Christ, they receive “the Spirit of Christ—the Spirit of unselfish love and labor for others.” As a result, she concluded, “your love [will] be made perfect. More and more you will reflect the likeness of Christ in all that is pure, noble, and lovely.” [6]

Yes, Christ gives His perfection in order to overcome sin. While recognizing that human nature will remain affected by sinful inclinations until the moment of glorification, Ellen White nonetheless affirmed the possibility of victory over sin. “We can overcome. Yes; fully, entirely. Jesus died to make a way of escape for us, that we might overcome every evil temper, every sin, every temptation.” [7]

No one can claim freedom from temptation and sin in this life since this is what sinful human nature entails, yet the goal of the Christian life remains the same: to reflect Christ’s character. This aspect of the 1888 message connects the High Priestly ministry of Christ with the power to “transform one into a perfect Christian.” Writes E. J. Waggoner, “... consider the Apostle and High Priest ... Christ Jesus. ... to consider Christ continually and intelligently, just as He is, will transform one into a perfect Christian.” [8]

Alonzo T. Jones agrees, “Perfection, perfection of character, is the Christian goal—perfection attained in [not of!] human flesh in this world.” Christ “having attained it, has

become our great High Priest, by His priestly ministry in the true sanctuary to enable us to attain it.” [9]

This becomes all the more important for Ellen White when discussing last-day events and a vital aspect of the 1888 message. She connects perfection with Christ’s High Priestly ministry. “Now, while our great High Priest is making the atonement for us, we should seek to become perfect in Christ. Not even by a thought could our Savior be brought to yield to the power of temptation. ... He had kept His Father’s commandments, and there was no sin in Him that Satan could use to his advantage. This is the condition in which those must be found who shall stand in the time of trouble.” [10]

Fear of sickness or accidents or of “the time of trouble,” even of death and hell itself, is not a strong enough motivation for enduring “faith.” We can drum away with the fear motivation endlessly, but it will not hold our young or old in times of temptation: “We may dwell upon the punishing of every sin, and the awfulness of the punishment inflicted on the guilty, but this will not melt and subdue the soul.” [11]

Christian character perfection is a deepening appreciation of the love of God, through “The Rhythms of Life”, revealed in Christ’s ministry and particularly in His death on the cross to put us right before God. Faith motivated by Divine love hates sin and appropriates the sinless life of Christ.

—Paul E. Penno

Endnotes:

[1] Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing*, p. 473, 474.

[2] Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 221.

[3] Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 4, p. 244.

[4] Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 488.

[5] Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 332.

[6] *Ibid.*, 68.

[7] Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 144.

[8] Ellet J. Waggoner, *Christ and His Righteousness*, p. 7 (Glad Tidings ed.). Quoted in Robert J. Wieland, *Ten Great Gospel Truths That Make the 1888 Message Unique* (The 1888 Message Study Committee, 1998), p. 25.

[9] Alonzo T. Jones, *The Consecrated Way*, pp. 88, 89 (Glad Tidings ed.). Quoted in Robert J. Wieland, *Ten Great Gospel Truths That Make the 1888 Message Unique*, p. 26.

[10] Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 623.

[11] Ellen G. White, “Peril of Trusting in the Wisdom of Men,” *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 844.

Notes:

(1) Pastor Paul Penno’s video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/6tRpOgz8w1Y>

(2) You may subscribe to the e-mail version of *Sabbath School Today* by sending a request to sabbathschooltoday@1888message.org