LESSON 9 *February 21–27

(page 68 of Standard Edition)

Reconciliation *and* Hope



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Col. 1:20–29, Eph. 5:27, Eph. 3:17, Rom. 8:18, Eph. 1:7–10, Eph. 3:3–6, Prov. 14:12.*

Memory Text: **"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him"** *(2 Corinthians 5:21)***.**

Paul continues the theme of reconciliation, which was so vividly highlighted in Colossians 1:20 *(see Lesson 8, Thursday)*. There he described its cosmic scope, while what follows it becomes personal and individual. Through His death on the cross, Jesus has accomplished reconciliation for everyone and everything, especially human beings, who were alienated from the life of God through sin, but now can be reconciled to Him through faith.

The process of individual reconciliation is unpacked in this week's passage. As with the cosmic sphere, it happens through the death of Christ. On the individual level, the cross, far from being a passive symbol, becomes an active reality, with God's love transforming people as they hear the gospel and receive Christ Himself, the hope of glory.

Paul also talks about "the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations" *(Col. 1:26, NKJV)*. What is this mystery, and what all does it envision—for the individual and for the universe? How does this "mystery" relate to the gospel that Paul has so passionately proclaimed?

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 28.*

Reconciled From Wicked Works

Read Colossians 1:21, 22. What is Paul alluding to with his reference to alienation and being enemies? And what is the expected end result of Christ's death *(see also Eph. 5:27)***?**

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Paul has always painted a dark picture of humanity, at least humanity apart from the righteousness of Christ. And who today, almost two thousand years later, could argue with that sentiment? Someone once said that the one Christian doctrine that doesn't need to be taken on faith is the sinfulness of humanity.

However, since the entrance of sin, God has taken the initiative to reconcile us, as bad as we are, to Himself. That is, from the start, God has worked to solve the problem of sin, even if the solution could be found only in His own death on the cross.

In Eden, He called out to Adam, His masterpiece of creation, "Where are you?" *(Gen. 3:9, NKJV)*. And today, He continues to seek His one lost sheep—us. He seeks us out one by one. He has a perfect plan to reach us, applying the embryonic gospel promise of Genesis 3:15, putting enmity between us and Satan.

Sometimes the gospel is made so complicated and theoretical that it has little practical meaning for twenty-first-century living. But it's really quite simple and straightforward.

The gospel has three parts:

First, because we are helpless to save ourselves, Jesus came and died for our sins. *(See Rom. 5:6–8.)*

Second, by accepting His death as ours through faith, repentance, and baptism, we are justified and set free from the condemnation of sin. *(See Rom. 5:9–11; Rom. 6:6, 7.)*

Third, the life we live now is the result of being united with Christ, experiencing His re-creating power, and His living His life in us. *(See 2 Cor. 5:17–21, Gal. 2:20.)*

These are not necessarily separate steps or events. They can happen all at once, as soon as we are ready to accept Jesus into our lives. And they can be renewed every day as we give ourselves to Him each morning. Regardless of how each one of us has experienced the saving work of Christ in our lives, the foundation rests always upon the death of Jesus. To that we must always return.

When you look at yourself, your character, and your innermost being, what does the sight tell you about your need of the Cross?

(page 70 of Standard Edition)

If You Continue in the Faith

Read Colossians 1:23 *(NKJV)***. What do you think Paul means by remaining "grounded and steadfast" in the faith?** *(See also Col. 2:5 and Eph. 3:17.)*

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There are four different types of "if" statements in Greek, each with different nuances. The one with which Colossians 1:23 begins assumes that the condition is true. That is, Paul encourages the Colossians with the thought that they will, indeed, continue in the faith. As Paul soon indicates, he has already seen evidence of their faith and steadfastness *(Col. 2:5)*. Nevertheless, their hope is still conditional on their persisting on the path of faith that they have entered.

This idea of persisting is the meaning of the Greek word translated "continue" *(Col. 1:23, NKJV)*. It is used of the scribes and Pharisees who continued to demand of Jesus an answer as to what should be done with the woman caught in adultery *(John 8:7)*; also of Peter continuing to knock at the door after Rhoda recognized his voice but left it locked and ran inside to tell the others *(Acts 12:16)*. It is also used by Paul, who encourages Timothy to remain faithful to the doctrinal and practical instructions he has given *(1 Tim. 4:16)*. His meaning here is similar except that it is applied to believers generally.

As we will see in next week's lesson, Paul is concerned that the Colossians may chase after human-based ways of salvation instead of holding fast to the hope offered by the gospel *(see, for example, Col. 2:8, 20–22)*. The word "grounded" refers to having laid a solid foundation of faith and love based on God's Word *(see Matt. 7:25, Eph. 2:20, Eph. 3:17)*.

Related to this idea is the Greek word translated "steadfast," referring to an immovable structure and, by extension, to a Christian who cannot be "moved away from the hope of the gospel" *(Col. 1:23)*. The same word is used in 1 Corinthians 15:58: "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" *(NKJV)*.

Contrary to the common belief of "once saved, always saved," Paul is saying something completely different.

What has been your experience regarding the importance of continuing to exercise faith? That is, why must you always make a conscious choice to do that? What will happen if you don't?

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God's Eternal Plan

Read Colossians 1:24, 25. What does Paul say about his suffering for Christ's sake?

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Though Paul wrote Colossians while under house arrest in Rome, perhaps his greatest suffering came from not being able to labor intensively from place to place and house to house, as he had done previously *(Acts 20:20)*. These afflictions (or tribulations), which Christ forewarned of *(Matt. 24:9, John 16:33)*, "are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" *(Rom. 8:18)*. This is the bigger picture. As Paul had written to the Christians in Philippi, so now to the Colossians he rejoices over his sufferings, which are for their benefit *(Col. 1:24)*.

Paul may be in prison, but "the word of God is not bound" *(2 Tim. 2:9)*. While Paul was in this confinement, Philippians, Ephesians, and Philemon were also written. After his release, God inspired him to write the important counsels found in 1 Timothy and Titus. Then, during his final imprisonment in a Roman jail, he wrote 2 Timothy. In short, these final years provided Paul the opportunity to write a significant portion of the New Testament, which probably included Hebrews.

God's eternal plan envisioned all of this and more. The Greek word Paul uses in Colossians 1:25, generally translated "stewardship," is *oikonomia*. Used in a limited sense *(as, for example, in 1 Tim. 1:4)*, it refers to "God's way of ordering things."—Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), p. 164. That would include Paul's apostleship. But in a broader sense, it includes all the provisions God has made in the plan of salvation. The ministry of Paul, the other apostles, and even the prophets of the Old Testament *(Eph. 2:20, Eph. 3:5)*, including Moses, were designed "to fulfill the word of God" *(Col. 1:25)*, all in connection with this divine plan.

Although we will look more closely at this topic in tomorrow's study, it is helpful at this point to notice that Paul recognized his ministry as just one small part of a much larger, long-range divine plan that began being implemented "from the foundation of the world" *(Matt. 13:35, Eph. 1:4)*.

Think about your own life. How might the decisions you make (big and small) fit within God's larger plan? Can we really know whether a decision is actually "small"? How might it have larger ramifications that will become apparent only later?

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Mystery of God Revealed

Read Colossians 1:26, 27. Paul twice talks about "the mystery." What mystery?

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In another place, Paul refers to "the mystery of God," which is God's eternal purpose "ordained before the ages for our glory" *(1 Cor. 2:7, NKJV)* and revealed through the plan of salvation. Peter speaks of this truth as something that the prophets anticipated and that "angels desire to look into" *(1 Pet. 1:10–12)*. It was devised "before the foundation of the world" *(1 Pet. 1:20)* and "kept secret since the world began" *(Rom. 16:25)*. However, through Christ's life, death, and resurrection, this mystery has been unveiled *(2 Cor. 3:14)*.

How do the following references to the mystery of God illuminate various aspects of the plan of salvation?

1. *Eph. 1:7–10*_____

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2. *Eph. 3:3–6*_____

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Ultimately, "all things" in heaven and on earth will be brought together into complete oneness in Christ. This was the focus of Christ's prayer in John 17. Exactly how this would come about was a mystery that has now been revealed through the gospel.

Why God would love us so much that He would give Jesus, heaven's priceless treasure, for our salvation, will be our study throughout eternity. But we know this: Christ "died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" *(2 Cor. 5:15, NKJV)*. As a result, all who believe in Christ, both Jews and Gentiles, share equally in the promises of God through the gospel and have been brought together into one body, the church.

"Christ in you" *(Col. 1:27)* refers to Christ's dwelling in the heart by faith *(Eph. 3:17; compare Gal. 2:20)*. This spiritual union with Christ enables believers even now to "sit together in heavenly places" *(Eph. 2:6)* and taste "the powers of the world to come" *(Heb. 6:5)*. Through Christ's presence in our lives, He is already beginning to unite us with heaven. It is the gospel working in the hearts of believers that "has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light" *(Col. 1:12, NKJV)*.

Power of the Gospel

Read Colossians 1:28, 29. What is Paul's focus? Why do you think "everyone" *(ESV)* is repeated three times?

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The focus of Paul's preaching was Christ and Him crucified *(1 Cor. 1:23)*. According to Ephesians 5:27, the purpose of Christ's sacrifice is "that He might present her [the church] to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" *(NKJV)*. Thus, the aim of Paul's gospel preaching is to "present everyone mature in Christ" *(Col. 1:28, ESV)*. He does this by teaching and warning—teaching the various points of Christian doctrine and practice *(2 Thess. 2:15, 1 Tim. 4:11, 1 Tim. 5:7, Titus 1:9)* and warning of the consequences for rejecting the gospel and of the dangers of false teachers *(Acts 20:29–31, Rom. 16:17)*.

This is how we grow to be mature Christians, by accepting the teachings and heeding the warnings of Scripture. Maturity is an important concept. The parents of a newborn baby celebrate every milestone—first words, learning to walk, and learning to read. What parent would not be alarmed if their child, after several years, was still unable to walk or talk? Growth and development are normal and expected. The same is true of the Christian life.

The Greek word translated "mature" *(teleios)* means perfect and without defect. Through the process of Christian growth, we become keenly aware of the depth of God's law and that its requirements are "exceedingly broad" *(Ps. 119:96, NKJV)*. We understand it extends to "the thoughts and intents of the heart" *(Heb. 4:12)*.

But we need to be careful, which is why Paul used the word "warning" in Colossians 1:28. The way that "seems right . . . is the way of death" *(Prov. 14:12, NKJV)*. Spiritual discernment comes from a Spirit-guided knowledge of God's Word. False teachings usually have some truth but either add to or take away something of what the Bible says *(see Isa. 8:20)*. The latter often succeeds, if not by directly doubting what God says, then at least by questioning whether it is really possible or whether it is applicable to our day. We must be wise as serpents but harmless as doves when it comes to discerning doctrinal truth from error.

How do you understand what it means to be "perfect in Christ Jesus" *(Col. 1:28)*? How does an understanding of what Jesus accomplished for us at the cross help in knowing what it means to be "perfect in Christ Jesus"?

Further Thought: "We have no righteousness of our own with which to meet the claims of the law of God. But Christ has made a way of escape for us. . . . If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned.

"More than this, Christ changes the heart. He abides in your heart by faith. You are to maintain this connection with Christ by faith and the continual surrender of your will to Him; and so long as you do this, He will work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. . . .

"So we have nothing in ourselves of which to boast. We have no ground for self-exaltation. Our only ground of hope is in the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and in that wrought by His Spirit working in and through us."—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 62, 63.

"The light given me has been very forcible that many would go out from us, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. The Lord desires that every soul who claims to believe the truth shall have an intelligent knowledge of what is truth."—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 363.

Discussion Questions:

❶ Read again the memory text: "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" *(2 Cor. 5:21)*. What does this mean? What does it mean that Christ became sin for us, and how should that help us understand the substitutionary nature of the Cross? Also, what does it mean to be "made the righteousness of God in him"?

❷ Dwell more on the question of "once saved, always saved," which many Christians believe. Why do we believe that this is a false doctrine? What obvious dangers does it present to someone who believes this? How can we, even while rejecting that doctrine, still have assurance of salvation?

❸ How "grounded and steadfast" *(Col. 1:23, NKJV)* in your faith are you? How well do you know what you believe and why you believe it? What can you do to know better what you believe? And why is it so important that you are "grounded and steadfast" in the faith?

INSIDE *Story*

Moving the Two-Day Weekend

After losing two jobs because of his Seventh-day Adventist faith, Rene prayed to God again in the Philippines. "Lord," he said, "it seems that being Adventist is only for the rich. I can't find a job that doesn't require me to work on Saturdays. How can we survive?"

Even though he had a university degree, Rene took odd jobs at construction sites. The pay, however, wasn't enough to feed his growing family. He now was the father of two young children. He prayed again, "God, can You help me find a job that will support my family?"

Then he saw an advertisement for an accounting job in the Middle East. He would have to leave his family in the Philippines. He applied for the position and, after an interview, was hired. It was a challenging time.

When Rene arrived, he learned that the national weekend was on Thursdays and Fridays. That meant people were required to work on Saturdays and Sundays.

While Rene had to go to the office on Saturdays, he didn't actually have to work. He read the Bible and Ellen White's writings. His boss only came in on Saturday nights, so Rene didn't work during the day. But he still felt bad. He was at work on Sabbath. He felt as though he was compromising his faith, and he longed to go to church on Sabbath. "God," he prayed, "if You give me a chance to go to church on Saturday, I will keep the Sabbath holy until I die."

For two years, he prayed this prayer. Then he spoke with his boss.

"Please give me Saturday for my Sabbath rest," he said.

"No, I can't allow you," his boss replied. But he allowed for an exception, saying, "If my king declares Friday and Saturday to be the weekend, then you are free to rest."

Rene prayed, "You heard what my boss said. Can You please help?"

Three months later, Rene's boss was in Europe when the king signed a decree that the country's weekend would be moved to Friday and Saturday. Rene, who had been praying the whole time, didn't hear the news and went to the office as usual at nine o'clock on Saturday morning. After sitting down, he checked his email to see if any important messages had come in. It was then that he saw the message from his boss. He read, "Rene, I heard the news from my king. I remember my promise to you that you are free to rest if my king declares Friday and Saturday to be the weekend." Rene closed the office and went to church. He was so happy that he cried.



Rene Tucaldo is chief financial officer of the 1000 Missionary Movement, whose headquarters in Silang, Philippines, were constructed with the help of a 1996 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering. Read more next week.

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

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *2 Corinthians 5:21*

Study Focus: *Col. 1:20–29, Romans 5, 2 Cor. 5:18–21*

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul teaches that we have all things in Christ. Jesus is our Creator and Redeemer. The apostle elaborates on this idea by ascribing to Jesus titles that reflect what He has done for us. Jesus is the Head of the church, the Beginning, and the Firstborn from the dead, resulting in His preeminence in all things *(Col. 1:18)*. Paul says that "it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell" *(Col. 1:19, NKJV)*. In other words, Paul is asserting that Jesus is God! Simply put, Paul is telling us that Jesus does what He does because He is who He is! As fully God, He is able to create and redeem. In Colossians 1:19, 20, Paul implies that God was pleased with two things: (1) that in Jesus all His fullness should dwell, and (2) that through Jesus all things should be reconciled to Him. These two ideas indicate that Jesus' divine status and His work of reconciliation are inseparable.

This week's lesson emphasizes three major themes:

1. God takes the first step in reconciling us to Himself. For that purpose, He sent Jesus into the world to bring humanity back to Him. But, in response, we must "continue in the faith" and not be "moved away from the hope of the gospel" *(Col. 1:23)*.
2. In our work for Christ, we must remember that we are merely His agents in a much bigger divine plan.
3. The power of the gospel causes us to mature for salvation in Christ.

Part II: Commentary

Illustration

"Elizabeth Barrett Browning's parents disapproved so strongly of her marriage to Robert [Browning] that they disowned her. Almost weekly, Elizabeth wrote love letters to her mother and father, asking for a reconciliation. They never once replied. After ten years of letter writing, Elizabeth received a huge box in the mail. She opened it. To her dismay and heartbreak, the box contained all of her letters to her parents. Not one of them had ever been opened!

"Today those love letters are among the most beautiful in classical English literature. Had her parents opened and read only a few of them, a reconciliation might have been effected. The Bible is God's letter of reconciliation to us. We should open and read it thoroughly and often."—Michael P. Green, *1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), p. 297.

Reconciliation, Faith, and Hope

The Bible clearly indicates that God initiated the process of reconciling humanity to Himself. When our first parents fell into sin, God visited the Garden of Eden to seek them *(Gen. 3:9)*. Paul says that "our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies" *(Rom. 5:10, NLT)*. This teaching echoes Paul's sentiment in Colossians 1:21, 22. Notably, God's initiative in bringing about reconciliation is a pervasive theme in Romans 5:5–11, as one can see in the table below.

Rom. 5:6 *(ESV)*	"While we were **still weak,**	at the right time Christ died for the ungodly."
Rom. 5:8 *(ESV)*	"While we were **still sinners,**	Christ died for us."
Rom. 5:10 *(ESV)*	"While we were **enemies**	we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son."

There is a close parallelism between verses 6, 8, and 10 *(see also Eph. 2:4, 5)*. When we were still weak, when we were sinners and enemies, Christ died for us, thereby reconciling us to God. Paul also touches on this theme elsewhere, with minor adjustments, as the table below shows.

Passage	Ultimate Agent	Action	Patient	Beneficiary	Intermediate Agent
2 Cor. 5:18 *(ESV)*	God	reconciled	us	to Himself	through Christ
2 Cor. 5:19 *(ESV)*	God	was reconciling	the world	to Himself	in Christ
Col. 1:20 *(ESV)*	God	reconciled	all things	to Himself	through Him [Christ]
Eph. 2:4, 5 *(ESV)*	God	loved, made alive	us		together with Christ

God is always the ultimate Agent and Initiator of the reconciliation process. In Galatians 4:4, 5, Paul uses adoption language to refer to God's initiative in reconciling us to Himself. As John eloquently states, "We love Him because He first loved us" *(1 John 4:19, NKJV)*. Reconciliation is made possible through the death of Christ *(Rom. 5:6; 2 Cor. 5:21; Col. 1:20; Eph. 2:13, 16; etc.),* and it results in peace with God *(Eph. 2:14–19)*. Because we have been adopted as God's children *(Rom. 8:15; Gal. 3:26; Gal. 4:4–6; 1 John 3:1, 2)*, our elevated status, through faith in Christ, results in access to Him *(Rom. 5:2, Eph. 2:18, Eph. 3:12, Heb. 10:19–22)*.

In response to God's initiative, we must "continue in the faith" and not be "moved away from the hope of the gospel" *(Col. 1:23, NKJV)*. Faith and hope are Christian virtues that go hand in hand *(1 Cor. 13:13, Gal. 5:5, 1 Thess. 1:3, 1 Thess. 5:8, 1 Pet. 1:21)*. We believe and hope in God for salvation *(1 Pet. 1:21)*, not in human achievements.

Players in a Much Bigger Plan

In Colossians 1:25, Paul states that he "became a minister according to the stewardship from God . . . to fulfill the word of God" *(NKJV)*. Paul knew that his ministry was not an end in itself. He was just a player in a much bigger plan. Otherwise, how could he rejoice in his sufferings *(Col. 1:24)*? Only someone who knows that our afflictions in this world are but a momentary pang, when compared to the "exceeding and eternal weight of glory" God is preparing for us *(2 Cor. 4:17, NKJV)*, is able to rejoice in them. Paul affirms that the fulfillment of the Word of God has to do with "the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints" *(Col. 1:26, NKJV)*. Truly, Paul understood that he was really an actor in a story much bigger than himself.

For the fulfillment of His eternal purpose, God has called many characters throughout the centuries to enact their role in the story of redemption. For instance, Joseph did not realize, at first, that God was guiding events to preserve the people through whom the promised Messiah would come. Yet, this orchestration of events was precisely what God was doing. On the way to Egypt, "for a time Joseph gave himself up to uncontrolled grief and terror. But, in **the providence of God**, even this experience was to be a blessing to him. He had learned in a few hours that which years might not otherwise have taught him."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 213, emphasis added. Finally, the years taught Joseph that God was leading all the events " 'to save many people alive' " *(Gen. 50:20, NKJV)*.

What about other biblical characters? There are so many that it is impossible to talk about them all *(see Hebrews 11)*. For instance, what about the book of Ruth? In light of the broader biblical narrative, Ruth's story shows that God is working, even when it seems He is not. Ruth played an important role

by becoming the great-grandmother of David, the great king of Israel *(Ruth 4:13, 21, 22)*. She was but a character in a much bigger story. God made a covenant with David by promising that He would set up his seed after him and "establish the throne of his kingdom forever" *(2 Sam. 7:12, 13, NKJV)*. This promise is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus, the eschatological Son of David *(Matt. 1:1)*. God is leading all the events on earth for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose in Jesus Christ! This purpose is the mystery that was hidden but has now been revealed *(Col. 1:26)*.

Maturity in Christ

As Christians, we are called to grow in maturity by believing and putting into practice the Word of God. Paul indicates that the goal of the gospel is to "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" *(Col. 1:28, NKJV)*. God wants us to grow as we prepare ourselves for the Second Coming, knowing that "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" *(Phil. 1:6, NKJV)*.

Spiritual growth involves at least three things. First, we must grow in faith. When writing to the Corinthians, Paul made it clear that he expected their faith to increase *(2 Cor. 10:15)*. Similarly, in 2 Thessalonians 1:3, Paul thanks God for the Thessalonians because their "faith grows exceedingly" *(NKJV)*. Second, we must grow in knowledge. Peter warns us to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" *(2 Pet. 3:18, NKJV; see also 2 Pet. 1:3)*. Likewise, Paul urges the Colossians to "walk worthy of the Lord" and increase "in the knowledge of God" *(Col. 1:10, NKJV)*. Third, we must grow in love. Thus, Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 3:12, "May the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you" *(NKJV; see also Phil. 1:9)*. Obviously, spiritual growth comes from God. Believers are called to grow "with the increase that is from God" *(Col. 2:19, NKJV; see also Phil. 1:6; 1 Cor. 3:6, 7; 2 Cor. 9:10)*.

Part III: Life Application

Meditate upon the following themes. Then ask your students to answer the questions at the end of the section.

It is incredibly encouraging to know that God takes the initiative in our salvation, isn't it? Without His initial outreach, would we even be able to approach Him on our own? Surely not! As Wilson Tozer persuasively said, "Before a man can seek God, God must first have sought the man."—Tozer and W. L. Seaver, *Prayer: Communing With God in Everything—Collected Insights From A. W.*

Tozer (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2016), p. 238.

The Bible shows that God took the initiative, not only on a cosmic level by reaching out to the only sheep that went astray (our planet, earth) but also on a personal level. After all, isn't this exactly what Jesus did with the Samaritan woman at the well *(John 4:1–42)*, Nathanael *(John 1:48)*, and many others?

While God takes the initiative to save us, we must not forget that He expects us to respond to His love by loving Him back and playing our part in His divine plan of cosmic salvation. God can use us despite our weaknesses and limitations. In His power and strength, we can do more than we think we can. Yet, we have to keep in mind that we are merely actors in a divine story much bigger than our own particular narrative threads. One day, we will be able to comprehend more fully the role our individual stories played in the grand narrative of redemption. Until that day comes, God wants us to grow in faith, knowledge, and love, as instruments of reconciliation and hope!

Questions:

1. **In what ways has God sought you in the past? Share an experience with the class.**

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2. **What part do you have in the grand scheme of salvation? With whom have you shared your story of God's redemptive love? How has your story already impacted the lives of others in a meaningful way?**

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