LESSON 10 *May 30–June 5

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Repentance *and* Forgiveness



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 61:10; Hosea 6; Acts 3:18, 19; Exod. 34:1–10; Rom. 6:23; Matt. 22:1–14.*

Memory Text: **"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"** *(1 John 1:9, NKJV)***.**

The Promised Land seemed so far away to the Israelites, who camped beneath the pillar of cloud on the plain. Moses had ascended into the thick darkness, which had covered the top of the mountain many days earlier. Surely their leader had died by now, they reasoned, if not from starvation then perhaps from the consuming fire on its peak. This mixed multitude (the Israelites along with those who left Egypt with them on the Exodus) felt restless and impatient, ready to move on to the land flowing with milk and honey. Although these same people had, just a few days earlier, made a solemn covenant with God to obey Him, they wanted an image they could see. And so, they rallied around Aaron's tent and demanded that he create an idol for them. Fearing for his own safety, Aaron agreed. In Exodus 32–34, we read how this sad story unravels.

This account is just one story from Scripture that teaches us about repentance and forgiveness, the theme of this week's lesson study. Keep the theme of this week's memory verse in your mind as you go through each day's study. Yes, we sin, but thanks to Jesus' death on the cross, forgiveness is there for the sincere confessing and repentant sinner.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 6.*

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The Rush of Life

It had been a very busy week. Although she knew there was a lot to be done before Sabbath, the urgent seemed to consume the important, and before she knew it, the sun had gone down. The family shared a special Friday night meal and worship together.

But when Sabbath morning came and she woke up early, she couldn't help noticing the dirty bathroom, which she wiped down. Then she saw that her young son had wet the bed, so she threw his sheets into the washer with other clothes. As she prepared breakfast for her family, she realized there was no dessert for lunch, so she quickly baked some banana bread. She saw that her husband needed a shirt ironed for church, so she did that, too, then folded some clothes and took out the trash.

And then it hit her. *It's Sabbath—a day I love more than any other! Yet here I am, doing all these chores and allowing these things to distract me from what Sabbath is really about—drawing near to God.*

For just a moment, her mind started justifying her actions—these were all things that needed doing. Were they really? She realized that she was acting like Martha, "distracted with much serving" *(Luke 10:40, NKJV)*, but the words of Jesus echoed in her mind: " 'You are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her' " *(Luke 10:41, 42, NKJV)*. *That good part.* Sitting at Jesus' feet out of a deep love for Him—not just on Sabbath, but every day. She hadn't chosen that this morning.

She loved God, yet it was easy to forget that He had given her the Sabbath as a gift in time to make their relationship stronger. Silent tears fell from her eyes as she stood there in the kitchen.

The purpose of this example is not to focus on what we should or shouldn't do on Sabbath; rather it is a reminder of why it's important for us to notice the things that weaken or break down our relationship with God. When our hearts feel the pain of sin and separation and we call out to Him, Jesus is very close *(Ps. 53:2)*. In His bloodstained hands, He holds a white robe. He sees our tears of repentance and takes away our dirty clothes. He then wraps His pure robe of righteousness all the way around us. His purity covers our confessed sin—completely and perfectly. We can wash our robe in His blood *(Rev. 7:14)*.

How do Isaiah 64:6, Zechariah 3:4, and Isaiah 61:10 reveal the important truth of Christ's righteousness to us? Why must we always cling fervently to what God promises us in these verses?

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Holy Spirit Promptings

As he thought about the distance between himself and his wife, he knew that he had been wrong. He'd been unkind and harsh and had said some things he'd regretted. Yet, his next thought was, *Didn't she deserve it, even a little bit?*

Is this thought process familiar to you? It's easy to flip from a sense of remorse to a justification of our thoughts and actions. It's not always easy to say, "I'm sorry . . ." when we have done wrong, yet this is so essential to rebuilding or strengthening any relationship.

The same is true of us and God. The Holy Spirit often prompts our minds to think about the sins that we commit. Our hearts are moved because of these promptings, but it can be easy to push away that still, small voice as we justify why we acted a certain way. One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to " 'convict the world of sin' " *(John 16:8, NKJV)*. What an incredible gift from God *(Luke 11:13)*, for we need such convictions to repair the distance that can creep into our walk with Him!

Read Hosea 6. What specifically do you notice here about how God describes Himself in His appeal for repentance?

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Consider the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of grafting us back onto the Vine *(John 15:4)*. "We often sorrow because our evil deeds bring unpleasant consequences to ourselves; but this is not repentance. Real sorrow for sin is the result of the working of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit reveals the ingratitude of the heart that has slighted and grieved the Saviour, and brings us in contrition to the foot of the cross. By every sin Jesus is wounded afresh; . . . we mourn for the sins that have brought anguish upon Him. Such mourning will lead to the renunciation of sin."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 300.

The truth is, we can't grow in our relationship with God when chosen and cherished sins stand between us and Him. We've all fallen short of the glory of God, but we can—and should—repent of our sins when the Holy Spirit brings them into our minds *(Eph. 4:30)*.

When did you last hear a rebuke or a call to repentance? How did you respond? Spend some time right now in prayer, asking God to soften your heart and open your ears to His voice in His Word this week.

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Real Repentance

The secular world bombards us with messages of independence, indulgence, and self-promotion—the opposite of the principles of God's kingdom. Interestingly, the first words recorded in the Bible by John the Baptist and Jesus were similar. John said, " 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!' " *(Matt. 3:1, 2, NKJV)*. Jesus said, " 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel' " *(Mark 1:14, 15, NKJV; see also Luke 24:46, 47)*. Both Jesus and John called those listening to repentance because the kingdom of heaven was near. Could it be that this same message is equally as relevant to us today?

Read Acts 3:18, 19. Why is repentance so important in the process of spiritual growth? What is a time of "refreshing"?

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The kindness and goodness of God leads us to repentance *(Rom. 2:4)*. Repentance involves two steps: (1) sincere pain and sorrow for our sins; and (2) the honest decision to abandon sin. In the Bible, repentance is almost always connected to forgiveness. We genuinely repent; God forgives. It's that simple *(1 John 1:9, Rev. 3:19)*. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" *(2 Pet. 3:9, NKJV)*. As we personally prepare our souls for the Second Coming, God is giving us time to make things right with Him.

Jesus suffered, died, and rose so that when we repent, His grace can work a miracle in our lives. Contrary to the world, which tells us we are fine just the way we are, God asks that we turn to Him in repentance and faith *(Acts 20:21),* placing ourselves fully in His hands so that He can prune and beautifully shape our characters into His likeness, to testify of Him *(John 15:2, 8)*. We then grow and produce fruit in keeping with repentance *(Matt. 3:8)*.

"No repentance is genuine that does not work reformation. The righteousness of Christ is not a cloak to cover unconfessed and unforsaken sin; it is a principle of life that transforms the character and controls the conduct."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 555, 556.

Repentance leads to life *(Acts 11:18)* and is a vital part of growing in a relationship with God. In the process of surrender, repentance, and allowing God to prune you, what step is most challenging for you?

Sufficient Grace

When we feel the weight of our sin and allow the Holy Spirit to lead us to the foot of the cross, we should ask for God's forgiveness, knowing that "the LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy" *(Ps. 103:8, NKJV)*. This same verse was spoken by God Himself *(Exod. 34:6)* after His chosen nation had grieved Him.

Read Exodus 34:1–10. What crucial truth is found here?

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The fact that the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy is also the very reason Jesus died on the cross—so that our relationship with God could be made right again.

It's when we are willing to acknowledge and confess our sin; when we say, *O, Lord, here I am again . . . " 'Be merciful to me a sinner!' " (Luke 18:13, NKJV)*, that Jesus—who has already been working in us and for us with the Holy Spirit before we even call out to Him—sees the weight and takes it from us. Our burdens are lifted at Calvary, and Jesus is surely very near when we come to Him and, even before, seeks us as the Good Shepherd and stands at the door and knocks *(Rev. 3:20)*. Let's not stay away from the Cross, looking at God from a distance. Let's run to Jesus and exchange our sins and burdens for His righteousness *(Zech. 3:4)*.

Slowly read the following verses. Write in your own words what they tell you about God's grace toward you:

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" *(Rom. 6:23, NKJV)***.**

"But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" *(Rom. 5:20, 21, NKJV)***.**

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" *(Rom. 5:8, NKJV)***.**

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The Most Expensive Robe

Nice clothing too often defines the rich by worldly standards. Some people say, "I dress this way to express who I am." But in heaven, everything other than our relationships will fade away *(Matt. 6:19–21, NKJV)*. Our personal identity should be wrapped up in Jesus and His perfect robe of righteousness.

Read the parable in Matthew 22:1–14 that Jesus told to explain this. What messages can you find in this parable?

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Jesus called the man without a robe "friend," and despite his lack of response, they must have had a relationship. The man must have known about the robe but had chosen not to wear it. Jesus' character is perfect and spotless, and He offers it to us that His church "should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white" *(Rev. 19:8)*, "not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing" *(Eph. 5:27)*.

The white linen "is the righteousness of Christ, His own unblemished character, that through faith is imparted to all who receive Him as their personal Saviour."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 310.

Adam and Eve wore a white robe of soft light before they sinned; after they sinned, they realized they were naked *(Gen. 3:7)* and made clothing of fig leaves. Then God replaced their fig leaves with clothing made of animal skins. There was a sacrifice that produced their garment. In a similar way, we accept Jesus' sacrifice by accepting His robe of righteousness. "Naked and ashamed, they tried to supply the place of the heavenly garments by sewing together fig leaves for covering. . . . Nothing can man devise to supply the place of his lost robe of innocence. No fig-leaf garment, no worldly citizen dress, can be worn by those who sit down with Christ and angels at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Only the covering which Christ Himself has provided can make us meet to appear in God's presence. This covering, the robe of His own righteousness, Christ will put upon every repenting, believing soul."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 311.

Reflect: We should daily choose to be clothed with Jesus' robe of righteousness. What does this really mean, and how do we do this?

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Further Thought: The Bible often uses agricultural metaphors to describe our spiritual condition. Hosea 10:12 is one example that captures what we have discussed this week:

> "Sow for yourselves righteousness;
> Reap in mercy;
> Break up your fallow ground,
> For it is time to seek the LORD,
> Till He comes and rains righteousness on you" *(NKJV)*.

We sow, reap, break up the hard soil, and seek God to come close to us. The hard soil of our hearts must be prepared and ready for the rain (Holy Spirit) to fall on it. God can give us the desire to prepare the soil, but, ultimately, a relationship with Him is a partnership *(see Phil. 2:12, 13)*. We have to turn our heads toward Him, reach out to Him, and cling onto Him. Then He works in us to do the rest.

One great example of what clinging to God means can be found in these verses: "Your eyes have seen what the LORD did because of Baalpeor: for all the men that followed Baalpeor, the LORD thy God hath destroyed them from among you. But ye that did cleave unto the LORD your God are alive every one of you this day" *(Deut. 4:3, 4)*.

Discussion Questions:

❶ "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" *(Matt. 6:13)*. Jesus specifically taught His disciples to pray this way, but do we keep this line of thought in our daily prayers? How regularly do you pray for protection against temptation and sin?

❷ How would you explain the precious gift of Christ's robe of righteousness to a non-Christian or a new believer?

❸ How does Christ's robe of righteousness connect to the message of the sanctuary, which is all about God forgiving and cleaning the repentant sinner? How well do you understand the beauty and richness of this message?

Summary: Identifying our sins in response to the Holy Spirit's promptings and surrendering self in repentance are vital parts of having a thriving relationship with God. Knowing that we are completely forgiven and covered by Jesus' robe of righteousness is the most transformative experience for a human being. Not only do we feel the weight of sin lifted, but we feel the love of God surround us as we are drawn closer to Him. This binds us to God, strengthens us spiritually, and compels us to love Him with every fiber of our being.

Voice Speaks at a Cooking Pot

Miriam, a 41-year-old mother in Zambia, didn't feel well. Her head pounded. Her body ached. Dark sadness filled her mind.

With a heavy heart, she went to the opening night of a weeklong evangelistic meeting in Livingston. At the meeting, she was befriended by a Seventh-day Adventist woman named Majorie. Miriam poured out the pain of her heart and asked for prayer. Majorie prayed for her.

Then something unusual happened. The next day, Miriam was stirring a pot of maize porridge on a fire outside her house at 11 A.M. Like many Zambians, she did her cooking outdoors because a national power shortage had left many homes without electricity. As she stirred, she sensed a voice say, *Go and read the Bible right now. Leave your pot and read the Bible.*

Miriam didn't know what to read in the Bible. She went inside the house, opened her Bible, and read the first chapter that she saw. She was amazed. She felt like God was talking directly to her.

She closed the Bible and finished cooking the porridge outside. Then she returned and read another chapter. It seemed like God was telling her, "Do you know that I still love you? Live how I want you to live."

Joy flooded her heart. Her body aches disappeared, and her headache went away. She knelt down and prayed, "Forgive me, God."

Miriam returned to the evangelistic meeting in the evening. She darted over to Majorie and told her about what had happened.

Tears came to Majorie's eyes when she learned that Miriam had heard the voice telling her to read the Bible at 11 A.M. At that exact time, she had felt an urge to pray for Miriam at home.

"Find time to read the Bible every day, and don't forget to pray all the time," Majorie said. "The Bible and prayer are the key for everything."

Months have passed since Miriam began reading the Bible and praying regularly. Her head has stopped pounding. Her body has stopped aching. The dark sadness that once filled her heart has been replaced with sunny joy and a fervent desire to live for God.

"The Bible has encouraged me," she said. "God is working through the Bible. If the devil wants to bring confusion, I just claim the promises of the Bible and pray."



This mission story illustrates the "Mission For All" objective of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan, which says in part, "Christ mingled, showed sympathy, ministered to needs, won confidence, then invited people to follow Him. The goal is to take a genuine interest in people, leading them to Christ and inviting them to unite with the Seventh-day Adventist Church as disciples of Christ who make disciples." Read more at IWillGo.org. Watch a short YouTube video of Miriam at bit.ly/Miriam-IS.

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: *1 John 1:9*

Study Focus: *Gen. 3:7, 21; Exod. 34:1–10; 1 John 1:5–10; Isa. 61:10; Hosea 6.*

This week's lesson responds to last week's examination of the nature of sin. Last week, we considered the hopelessness that our sinful condition generates. This week we will consider God's response to the human problem of sin.

After humanity fell, God did not remain at a distance in heaven, indifferent to our misery. At the appointed time, Jesus, the Son of God, came down in the likeness of human flesh to undertake a rescue operation. God, in the person of His Son, died for our sins. At the cross, Christ paid the high price of justice for our salvation. Since that time, the Lord Jesus has interceded in heaven for us to secure our place with Him in His kingdom. And now, at the time of the end, Christ pleads with us through His Spirit to change our sinful ways, which lead to death, and to accept instead His gift of eternal life. The only solution to the problem of sin is to hear God's call to repent *(Hosea 6)*.

Last week, we learned that, as sinners, we are in a lost condition apart from Christ and, thus, are walking in darkness *(1 John 1:6)*. This week, we will learn how to walk out of darkness into God's marvelous light *(1 John 1:7)*. Without the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, our sin is unforgivable, and we are slaves to sin and death *(Gen. 2:17, Rom. 5:12)*. In this week's lesson, we will explore how we stand alive in Christ, amazed at God's wonderful gift of grace *(Exod. 34:1–10)*. Without this gift, we are like Adam and Eve at the Fall, ashamed of our nakedness *(Gen. 3:7)*. This week, we also will see how God's grace covers us as it covered a penitent Adam and Eve *(Gen. 3:21, Rev. 7:13–17, Matt. 22:12)*.

Part II: Commentary

God's Call to Repentance *(Hosea 6)*. The Hebrew word *shub* refers to the physical action to "return." This verb also expresses the spiritual concept of "repentance."

The verb *shub* is a keyword in the book of Hosea. Repentance is a major theme throughout the book. The verb *shub* refers to the return of the prophet Hosea's wife, Gomer, who has become a prostitute and has strayed

from her husband *(Hos. 2:7)*. Gomer's unfaithfulness to her marriage vow symbolizes Israel's unfaithfulness to God. So, *shub* also is used to refer to the return (repentance) of Israel to God *(Hos. 3:5)*.

In Hosea 6, the verb *shub*, "return," appears in the beginning of the chapter *(Hos. 6:1)*, where it refers to the repentance of Israel toward God, and then again at the end of the chapter *(Hos. 6:11)*. This "inclusio" is a literary device that connects the repentance of Israel to the promise of her return from the exile. Again, the actual situation of the prophet with his adulterous wife is used as a visible metaphor to represent the similar situation of Israel toward God. In this passage, the prophet reminds Israel of her present "torn" condition because of God's tearing Israel apart *(Hos. 6:1)*, just as a lion would do to its prey *(Hos. 5:14)*. Then the prophet promises that God will revive Israel on the third day, which is an allusion to God's spiritual resurrection of Israel.

In the ancient Near East, it was believed that a deceased person could be declared dead only after three days of corruption. The reference to the "three days" implies that the revival was, indeed, a resurrection, as it were, from the dead. The same analogy is applied in the New Testament to the resurrection of Jesus Christ on "the third day according to the Scriptures" *(1 Cor. 15:4, NKJV)*. (Note that in ancient Jewish counting, three days are counted as if the third day has been engaged in full.) The parallel between the two resurrections, Israel's and Christ's, does not just allow for a typological reading of the passage relating the resurrection of Israel (returning from captivity) to the resurrection of Christ. From the New Testament perspective, the parallel also contains the spiritual lesson that repentance would ensure the promise that God would "revive" His people, just as God resurrected His Son *(1 Cor. 15:20; compare with 1 Cor. 15:23)*.

Walk in God's Light *(1 John 1:5–10)*. In Hosea, we heard God's call to repent, to walk back to God. In John's letter, we hear God's call to walk in God's light. John's letter begins with a reference to the "beginning" *(1 John 1:1),* an allusion to the event of Creation, "concerning the Word of life" *(1 John 1:1, NKJV)*. The same association of thoughts is found in the prologue of John's Gospel, in which the beloved disciple uses the phrase "in the beginning" *(John 1:1)*, thus alluding to the first word of Genesis, *bere'shit*, "in the beginning" *(John 1:1; compare with Gen. 1:1)*. In John's Gospel, light and life are connected: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" *(John 1:4, NKJV)*. Likewise, in his letter, John speaks about the God of life *(1 John 1:1, 2)* as being the God of light *(1 John 1:5)*. John uses the cosmic event of Creation as an argument to convince us to walk in

God's light. Because God, the Creator and Source of life, is "light," we must walk in His light *(1 John 1:7)*. Another reason this principle is important is predicated upon the fact that outside of God's light, we are not only in darkness, unable to see the right way; we are also sinful, and, therefore, in absolute need of Christ's cleansing and forgiveness *(1 John 1:9)*. John insists, then, on the fact that we all sin. No one can claim anything to the contrary *(1 John 1:10)*.

In the book of Ecclesiastes, we find the same warning. After having shown the state of confusion that characterizes the search for wisdom *(Eccles. 7:10–18),* the wise man warns that it is impossible for men to find wisdom by themselves *(Eccles. 7:23)*. The only certainty that he has found in this life is that "God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes" *(Eccles. 7:29, NKJV)*. Therefore, Ecclesiastes emphasizes that no one on earth can merit salvation, because we are all sinners *(Eccles. 7:20)*. Solomon, therefore, concludes that the only way out of this trouble is through God *(Eccles. 7:18)*.

God's Character *(Exod. 34:1–10)*. God is the One who initiates the first move in reconciling us to Himself. He is the One who extends the offer of forgiveness to us. Israel experienced this reality after they worshiped the golden calf *(Exod. 32:1–6)*. This "great sin" separated them from God. No human action or merit could bridge the chasm between heaven and earth. To symbolize this separation, Moses broke the tablets of the law, which he had just gotten from God's hands *(Exod. 32:15, 16)*. Moses then stood before God and pleaded with Him to forgive the people for their "great sin" *(Exod. 32:31–35)*. To Moses, who asked God to reveal Himself in His glory *(Exod. 33:18)*, God responded by revealing the grace of His forgiveness *(Exod. 33:19)*. The text under consideration, Exodus 34:1–10, is the fulfillment of that promise. The focus and emphasis of God's declaration in these verses are based on His grace, which is expressed through five words:

- "Merciful," from the Hebrew word *rekḥem*, "womb," evokes the intimacy of the bond of an expectant mother with the baby in her womb.
- "Gracious" relates to the idea of something that is given "for free" (*kḥinam*).
- "Longsuffering" (lit. "long of nose") refers to the immense span of God's patience.
- "Goodness and truth" together refer to the tension between love and justice.

On the day of judgment *(Dan. 7:9–15, Dan. 8:14)*, God's grace ensures His forgiveness and mercy to His people.

New Robe *(Gen. 3:21, Rev. 7:13–17)*. The reason Adam and Eve felt the

vulnerability of their nakedness is that they lost the original garment of light that clothed them. This garment of light reflected the divine appearance *(see Ps. 8:5; compare with Ps. 104:1, 2)*.

Adam and Eve's solution to the problem of their nakedness was to cover themselves, an error that Paul will denounce as righteousness by works *(Gal. 2:16)*. By doing so, the human couple was, in fact, taking God's place. This usurpation was repaired later when God came to clothe them *(Gen. 3:21)*. Indeed, the event of God's clothing Adam and Eve is told in Genesis 3:7, in terms that recall the human manufacture of garments. The same verb in the same form, *wayya'asu/waya'as*, "they made"/ "He made," is used in both passages. The echo of this verb in both verses means that only God has the right and the capacity to cover sinners. God inculcated this lesson through the institution of sacrifice, pointing to the future sacrifice of Christ. God's use of the skin of an animal implied that the animal was killed or that it was sacrificed *(Lev. 5:5–10, Lev. 7:8)*. Thus, the sacrificial garment, loaded with its Messianic promise, replaced the human-made garments.

The story in Genesis of the change of garments made by God has typological significance. Figuratively, it points to the future robe of righteousness that God will grant to the saved ones *(Rev. 3:5, Rev. 3:18, Rev. 19:8)*, who will attend the marriage supper of the lamb *(Rev. 19:9; compare with Matt. 22:12)*.

Part III: Life Application

Teacher's Tip: What is the relationship between love and justice? To begin an exploration of this profound question with your class, ask for a volunteer to read the short reflection on this topic below. Then discuss the following questions.

For Reflection: Love and Justice. In Hebrew, the word *tsedeq* means "love" or "justice," depending on the context.

1. Why is justice without love not justice, and love without justice not love?
2. Ask your students to find examples from the Bible, history, or current events that illustrate this truth. Invite them to present their findings to the class.

Notes