LESSON 3 *April 11–17

(page 22 of Standard Edition)

Pride Versus Humility





SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 John 2:15–17, Luke 18:9–14, 1 John 1:9, Heb. 11:24–26, Luke 22:24–27, Phil. 2:3–8.*

Memory Text: **" 'For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted' "** *(Luke 14:11, NKJV)***.**

We've all known people with big egos, those who think they are *never* wrong. Or perhaps you know someone who wants to be in control, who never is open to instruction or constructive criticism. Or someone who seems to be constantly in conflict or is a master of putting others down. Our minds might immediately think of others, but the real question is: *What about each one of us?* By pointing the finger at others and denying pride in our own life, we deceive ourselves.

We've all battled with pride. We've all experienced times we want to look, act, speak, or appear better than those around us because we believe that we *are* better than they are, at least in some way. Someone once said that pride emerges from the desire to show that our lives have value. Yet, we should already know that our lives have value because we were created by God, and we are those for whom Christ died.

This week we'll explore the impact that pride can have on our relationships with God and with others, and we'll look at what the Bible teaches us about humility before others and, of course, before God.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 18.*

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The Tight Fingers of Pride

Pride. When you think of this word, you might picture a proud politician, a rich or famous person, or a peacock. Pride is a feeling that you are more important or better than other people. Indeed, pride is a feeling—one that cannot, and should not, be relied upon.

Pride first began with Lucifer, the covering cherub, who was in close service to God. We don't know when or how those thoughts of selfishness crept into his heart, but we do know that these thoughts propelled the universe into what we know as the great controversy. We see that Satan is the opposite of God. *(Compare Isa. 14:12–14 and Phil. 2:5–11.)* As a result, our world has battled the consequences of sin ever since Satan planted doubt in Adam's and Eve's minds and then tempted them to love and trust self above God.

Read 1 John 2:15–17. What three main points does this passage teach you about pride and loving the world?

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Can pride ever be positive? Perhaps not in the context that we know it, although we might use the word positively, when speaking about a person's achievements or in the context of a deep appreciation for something someone has done ("I'm so proud of you!"). It's important to understand that pursuing excellence and acknowledging and appreciating the gifts and abilities God has given us is not necessarily being proud. According to Scripture, there is a proper kind of self-love (think about Jesus' command in Mark 12:31, where He says to love others as we love ourselves), but this is always *unselfish* love. People are also not proud when they have God's presence in their lives and have a purposeful direction *(see 1 Tim. 3:1)*. People are proud when they don't give God the glory for what He is doing in their lives.

We should be careful to remember that our possessions, abilities, and accomplishments don't determine our value. Instead, our value should always come from God, because everything that we have, even that which tempts us to pride, comes only from Him anyway. This is a point we must never forget.

Ask yourself: ***How prideful am I, really? How might personal pride be impacting my relationship with God and others?***

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Know Yourself

Two men go to church to pray. One is a respected elder who stands at the front before church begins, in front of the congregation so they can see him. He prays aloud, thanking God for his own perceived goodness. The other man, a fringe dweller of society, stands at the very back of the church. His eyes are blurry with tears because of the weight on his shoulders from his sins. In the back corner of the church, he falls to his knees, whispering in desperation, "Please, Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

Read Luke 18:9–14. What do you think of these two men? What did Jesus think? What important lesson is here for us all?

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It's very easy for us to exalt ourselves. Sometimes it becomes second nature to let others know of our accomplishments and how good we are. But these things, in and of themselves, make no difference to our reputation in heaven's eyes. In fact, it's actually contrary to what we might think, because " 'everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted' " *(Luke 18:14, NKJV)*. Jesus also counsels us to take the lowest seat and let the host elevate you if he or she so wishes *(Luke 14:8–10)*. This upside-down kingdom that Jesus teaches is the opposite of what we expect. "It is only he who knows himself to be a sinner that Christ can save."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 158.

In first realizing our true state of sinfulness and our desperate need of Christ, we can come to Him knowing with confidence that 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 closer we draw to Christ, the more we realize our sinfulness and unworthiness. "In one way only can a true knowledge of self be obtained. We must behold Christ. It is ignorance of Him that makes men so uplifted in their own righteousness."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 159.

So, what does God think of the proud? First Peter 5:5 tells us that "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." It couldn't be clearer.

When did you last experience God's grace in your life? (Indeed, we should experience this grace daily.) We should also show grace to others. Spend some time in prayer right now, asking God to humble you under His mighty hand, that He alone may exalt you in due time.

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Moses, Humble Servant

The grand halls of the Egyptian palace boasted of opulence, pleasure, and ease. " 'Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds' " *(Acts 7:22, NKJV)*. A life of power, riches, and popularity were his for the taking; yet, Moses chose something very different. "As historian, poet, philosopher, general of armies, and legislator, he stands without a peer. Yet with the world before him, he had the moral strength to refuse the flattering prospects of wealth and greatness and fame, 'choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.' "—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 246.

What does Hebrews 11:24–26 tell us about why Moses chose a different path and humbled himself?

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Moses' later humility is remarkable, considering the powerful man he was and where he had come from. Yet, through an impulsive sinful act *(Exod. 2:12)*, he lost his self-confidence and self-sufficiency. With mountains as his classroom walls and with pride swept aside, for 40 years Moses was taught by God what he needed to know to lead a nation out of slavery into the Promised Land. The power and riches of what could have been another life in Egypt paled in significance when Moses considered eternity. God had called him very specifically, and Moses followed.

Perhaps most significantly in light of this topic, Numbers 12:3 tells us: "Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth" *(NKJV)*. Moses, one of the great patriarchs of the Bible, is known for his humility, his meekness. Consider how different his life and leadership would have been had pride crept into each of these big events in his life: the burning bush, the plagues in Egypt, crossing the Red Sea, manna falling from heaven, talking directly to God, receiving the Ten Commandments, and hearing God's words after he struck the rock.

Reflect back over your life. If someone were to describe you, would they include "humble" or "meek" in the list of adjectives? Why or why not? The truth is that we can't be humble in and of ourselves. Sin is part of our lives, which is why we need Jesus so much. Listen to, read, or sing the words in the hymn "I'd Rather Have Jesus," and consider these words in relation to Moses' life and yours.

The Greatest Offense

Imagine being a disciple of Jesus. You travel with Him, eat with Him, sleep near Him, and learn from Him as He transforms countless lives, including yours. People clamor after Him, and you realize how special it is that He chose you to be one of the 12 closest to Him. Then you start to wonder: Who really is the greatest of all the disciples?

In Luke 22:24–27, read Jesus' response to the disciples' dispute about what greatness means. Which statement captures the heart of Jesus' message in these verses?

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One would have thought that after all this time of being close to Jesus, this kind of debate would have been the last thing on their minds. But that is not what happened.

Instead of these men being content with their calling, pride rose in their hearts to where each one thought he was better than the others. It's easy to allow such thoughts to dominate our minds. But we are told that "there is nothing so offensive to God or so dangerous to the human soul as pride and self-sufficiency. Of all sins it is the most hopeless, the most incurable."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 154.

This is very serious for us. Our pride offends God more than *anything else*, and it's a character trait that is difficult to overcome because we often don't see it for what it is. In our state of self-sufficiency, we choose not to self-evaluate, for surely pride is king. We need to stop, self-diagnose, and ask that God will open our eyes to our true state, because pride may be the number-one factor that keeps us from having a close relationship with Him today.

If you realize that God alone can do the work to remove pride and selfishness from your soul, pause and pray this prayer right now: "Lord, take my heart; for I cannot give it. It is Thy property. Keep it pure, for I cannot keep it for Thee. Save me in spite of myself, my weak, unchristlike self. Mold me, fashion me, raise me into a pure and holy atmosphere, where the rich current of Thy love can flow through my soul."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 159.

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Look at Him

Read Luke 22:27 again. What is the key message for all of Christ's followers here?

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In stark contrast to the disciples' desire to be superior and their belief that they were better than the next guy, we see Jesus—the ultimate example of humility. Jesus, who said, " 'Yet I am among you as the One who serves' " *(Luke 22:27, NKJV)*. Jesus, who every day gave to those in need around Him because He was filled with compassion and saw the multitudes as sheep without a shepherd. He knew that humanity needed Him more than anything else in life, though few realized this simple truth. Jesus, who gave up heaven to die for the human race in the hope that they would understand His act of grace and respond to His invitation to have a relationship with Him.

Read Philippians 2:3–8. What do these verses tell us about how we should live in light of the Cross?

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Jesus did it *all*. He bore all. When we pause long enough to see Him—truly and purely—we can't help realizing our impurity, our filth, and our desperate need of Him in our lives today.

When we look to Him, everything else (especially ourselves and our own perceived greatness) pales into complete insignificance. Who Jesus is, what He has done, and how much He loves His creation becomes front and center. Self will surely disappear when we look at Him.

Jesus. What a beautiful, mighty name. He is the epitome of humility. When our open hearts learn about Him, when we understand what He has done for us, and when we allow His words of life to seep into our minds, we realize how proud and wretched we really are. If His own disciples, who lived and learned from Him, struggled with pride, we can't fool ourselves that we are any different. Ultimately, we can grow in our relationship with Jesus only when we are humble.

Spend some extra time with Him right now. Take your Bible, a pen, and a journal or some paper and find somewhere quiet—perhaps even outside. Invite God to soften and speak to your heart. Write out Psalm 138, word for word. As you write, what words especially stand out to you?

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Further Thought: "The nearer we come to Jesus and the more clearly we discern the purity of His character, the more clearly we shall discern the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the less we shall feel like exalting ourselves. Those whom heaven recognizes as holy ones are the last to parade their own goodness."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 160.

"Before honor is humility. To fill a high place before men, Heaven chooses the worker who, like John the Baptist, takes a lowly place before God. The most childlike disciple is the most efficient in labor for God. The heavenly intelligences can co-operate with him who is seeking, not to exalt self, but to save souls. . . .

"When men exalt themselves, feeling that they are a necessity for the success of God's great plan, the Lord causes them to be set aside. . . .

"It was not enough for the disciples of Jesus to be instructed as to the nature of His kingdom. What they needed was a change of heart that would bring them into harmony with its principles. . . . The simplicity, the self-forgetfulness, and the confiding love of a little child are the attributes that Heaven values. These are the characteristics of real greatness. . . .

"The sincere, contrite soul is precious in the sight of God. He places His own signet upon men, not by their rank, not by their wealth, not by their intellectual greatness, but by their oneness with Christ."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 436, 437.

Discussion Questions:

❶ What additional insights do the following verses have about pride and humility: Matthew 23:12; Psalm 25:9; Psalm 149:4; and James 4:6, 10?

❷ Think honestly: When did you last "parade your own goodness"? How did this impact your relationship with God or those before whom you paraded it?

❸ What might you need to change in your life to humble yourself before God in order to strengthen your walk with Him?

Summary: Pride can be one of the greatest blocks to growing in a relationship with God. If we feel self-sufficient and don't realize our need of this relationship, we simply won't pursue it. In contrast, Jesus was the humblest Man on earth and the most perfect example of how to have a close relationship with God.

INSIDE *Story*

"We Like to Help"

A mother with three little girls walked up the path to Iolanda's home in Belo Jaridin, a Brazilian city of 80,000 people.

Iolanda saw them coming. She was standing at the door, giving rice and beans to a stranger who had stopped by to ask for food. Her house was located on a busy street, and people regularly came to the door to ask for help. She was sure that the approaching visitors also needed a hand, so she waited after the stranger left.

When the mother and girls reached the door, Iolanda's eyes fell on the children's feet.

"Why are your children barefoot?" she asked.

The woman explained that her eight-year-old daughter's sandals had broken, so she had asked her four- and six-year-old daughters to remove their sandals so their older sister wouldn't feel ashamed.

"I'll get a pair of sandals and some food," Iolanda said.

She disappeared into the house and returned a moment later with sandals for the eight-year-old girl and a snack of plain crackers, plain cookies, and cold water.

The little girls beamed with joy. "Can we call you Grandma?" one asked.

The mother was surprised at Iolanda's kindness.

"Why are you doing this?" she asked.

"I'm a Christian from the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and we like to help people," Iolanda said. "I sew clothes for children, and church members bring me many donations. So, I have lots of sandals and clothes."

"I want to be part of this church," the mother said. "I want to study the Bible with you."

A year later, the mother was baptized and joined the Adventist Church.

Iolanda Xavier, an 86-year-old great-grandmother, believes that nothing is more important than obeying Jesus' command, " 'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you' " *(Matthew 28:19, 20; NKJV)*.



"Mission is really important," she said. "All of us were born of God to be missionaries."

Part of last quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, also known as the Quarterly Mission Project Offering, went to open a church at Pernambuco Adventist Academy in Brazil's state of Pernambuco, where Iolanda lives. Thank you for planning a generous offering for this quarter's projects. Watch a YouTube video of Iolanda at bit.ly /Iolanda-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: *Luke 14:11*

Study Focus: *Gen. 11:5, Isa. 14:12–14, Num. 12:3, Luke 18:9–14, Ps. 20:7.*

Last week, we were confronted with the Lord's diagnosis of Laodicea's spiritual malady: " 'You say, "I am rich . . . and have need of nothing"—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked' " *(Rev. 3:17, NKJV)*. John, the apocalyptic prophet, denounced the problem of spiritual pride, which is rooted in the focus on "I," with its emphasis on the ego. The sobering reality is that apart from God, we can do nothing to overcome self. We may be thankful, therefore, that the message of the Bible is all about solving this problem of self, a problem that concerns each and every one of us.

This week we will analyze the sin of pride in order to understand its mechanism and apprehend its danger. To that end, we will proceed in three steps.

1. First, we will trace the inception of pride in heaven during the time in which Lucifer planned to usurp God's place *(Isa. 14:13)*.
2. We will then proceed to earth to examine the enterprise of the builders of Babel at the time they planned to make a name for themselves by endeavoring to build a tower that would reach to heaven *(Gen. 11:4)*.
3. In the third step, we will study a number of examples of pride alongside contrasting models of humility: Pharaoh and Moses, Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel, and the Pharisee and the tax collector in Jesus' parable *(Luke 18:9–14)*. This third section will offer a comparative reflection on pride and humility based on the teaching of biblical wisdom *(Prov. 11:2; Prov. 27:1, 2)*.

Part II: Commentary

The Pride of Lucifer: The key text concerning the pride of Lucifer is found in Isaiah 14:12–15, framed within the context of Isaiah's oracle against Babylon *(Isa. 14:3–23)*. It is interesting to note that the language of the oracle against Babylon/Lucifer in this text is reminiscent of the language of the apocalyptic accusation against the church of Laodicea. Both charges concern claims of what "you [Lucifer/Laodicea] have said" *(Isa. 14:13, NKJV; compare with Rev. 3:17)*. As in the letter to the Laodicean

church, the oracle of Isaiah against Lucifer emphasizes the first-person perspective (in this case, Lucifer's), which is repeated five times: "I will ascend," "I will exalt," "I will sit," "I will ascend," and "I will be like the Most High." As in the letter to the Laodicean church, the oracle of Isaiah marks an unexpected turning point when it predicts: "Yet you shall be brought down" *(Isa. 14:15, NKJV)*. In both prophecies, the inspired authors describe a scenario of boasting (as indicated by the prideful "I"), which is unequivocally condemned.

With this background in mind, let us now turn our attention to the story of the fall of Lucifer. This story is full of spiritual lessons. We shall assess them point by point:

The name of Lucifer: The problem of Lucifer is implicit in his name. Lucifer, which is derived from the Latin *lux ferre*, "bearer of light," is the translation of the Hebrew name *heylal*, "light," which echoes the exclamation of divine adoration, *halleluiah*. Thus, as the semantics of his name suggest, Lucifer's profound intention (that is, what he sought in his heart *[Isa. 14:13]*) was to be worshiped.

His ascension: In order to be worshiped, Lucifer sought to go up from where he was to the place of God, which was above. The upward movement is repeated several times for emphasis. First, the key verb, which describes his move, *'alah*, "ascend," is used twice, as the first and last verb of the series of actions in the phrases "I will ascend into heaven" *(Isa. 14:13)* and "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds" *(Isa. 14:14)*. This upward movement resonates again in the verb *'arim*, "I will exalt," which means literally to "carry upward," referring to Lucifer's throne. Thus, Lucifer audaciously intends to raise his throne "above the stars of God," meaning the highest stars.

The intended place of destination: Lucifer aimed at reaching "the mount of congregation." The parallel passage, in Ezekiel 28, refers to the holy "mountain of God" *(Ezek. 28:16)*, which designates the place of God's temple, where God's people are gathered to worship God. Isaiah 14:13 specifies, indeed, that this place is located "on the farthest sides of the north" *(NKJV),* a superlative for the highest place, the place of God Himself, where God is worshiped in heaven. The same phrase is used in Psalm 48 to designate the place of the temple *(Ps. 48:2)*.

The profound intention: The passage concludes with a disclosure of Lucifer's true intention: " 'I will be like the Most High' " *(Isa. 14:14, NKJV)*. These are Lucifer's last recorded words in the passage *(Isa. 14:14)*. This story reveals the daring blasphemy of pride in all its hubris: to become like God. The conclusion warns us of the result. Pride that aims at usurping the highest place in heaven, the place of God Himself, will cause its possessor to end up "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" *(Rev. 3:17)*, in "the lowest depths of the Pit" *(Isa. 14:15, NKJV)*.

The pride of Babel. The language that is used to describe the work of the builders of Babel echoes that of the Creation account, clearly indicating the builders' intention to supplant and identify themselves as the Creator. Already this intention was anticipated in the preceding chapter in the table of nations, in which Nimrod's foundation of the kingdom of Babel is introduced with the technical word *re'shit*, "principal" *(Gen. 10:12)* or "beginning." This is the same word that introduces God's work of Creation *(Gen. 1:1)*.

Likewise, the builders of the Tower of Babel display the same desire as Nimrod to take God's place. The word of God, *wayyomer 'Elohim*, rendered as "God said," which marks the rhythm of God's work of Creation, is also used here with the builders as its subject: *wayy'omeru*, "they said" *(Gen. 11:3, 4)*. The divine fulfillment of Creation *wayehi*, "and there was" *(Gen. 1:3)*, now describes Babel's achievement *wattehi*, "and they had" *(Gen. 11:3)*. The same language referring to God's self-deliberation when He proposes to create humankind—*na'aseh*, "let us make" *(Gen. 1:26)*—reappears four times in reference to the builders' self-deliberation: " 'let us make bricks' " *(Gen. 11:3, NKJV)*, " 'let us . . . bake them' " *(Gen. 11:3, NKJV)*, "let us build" *(Gen. 11:4)*, and "let us make" *(Gen. 11:4)*. Even their intention to " 'make a name for ourselves' " *(Gen. 11:4, NKJV)* is a usurpation of God's prerogatives, for God is the only One who makes a "name great" *(Gen. 12:2)* and the only One who can make a name for Himself *(Isa. 63:12, 14; Jer. 32:20)*.

Thus, the builders of Babel possess the same ambition as Lucifer. As Lucifer before them, the builders wanted to go up to God's place, to the "door of God" (Bab-El). The story ends with an ironic play on the name of the tower: Bab-El ("the door of God"), the name of the presumptuous building endeavor, leads to *balal*, "confusion" *(see Gen. 11:9, NKJV)*.

The proud and the humble. The Bible does not contain an abstract essay on pride and humility. Virtues and flaws are best apprehended in the action of individuals, in the course of events. Thus, in the Bible, the teaching of pride versus humility is exemplified by the contrast between humble and proud persons: Cain versus Abel, Jacob versus Esau, Joseph versus his brothers, Pharaoh versus Moses, and Daniel versus Nebuchadnezzar. In this lesson, only the contrast between Pharaoh and Moses will be presented.

Pharaoh versus Moses. In the beginning of the book of Exodus, both men are confronted with the strangeness of God. Yet, they react differently to God's presence. Moses reacts to God by responding to Him with two questions. The first question focuses on himself: "Who am I?" *(Exod. 3:11)*. Moses feels insignificant before God and inadequate to the task of accomplishing the mission he is called to fulfill. Moses' second question concerns God Himself. Moses wants to know Him *(Exod. 3:13)* so that he may enter into relationship with Him.

On the other hand, when Pharaoh hears about God, he reacts by denying His existence. Unlike Moses, Pharaoh refuses to know Him *(Exod. 5:2)*. Pharaoh cannot acknowledge the existence of God simply because he thinks of himself as God. Consequently, Pharaoh refuses to hear about another deity. Pharaoh reverses the divine injunction to let the Israelites go so that they may keep the Sabbath *(Exod. 5:6–9)* and, instead, commands Israel to do more work. Moreover, the Lord knew Moses face-to-face *(Deut. 34:10)*, whereas Pharaoh kept rejecting God and refused to humble himself before Him *(Exod. 10:3)*. While Moses was remembered as the humblest person on earth *(Num. 12:3)*, Pharaoh was remembered as the proudest *(Exodus 7–10; compare with Neh. 9:10)*.

Part III: Life Application

Teacher's Tip 1: How do we die to self? Equally as important, how do we keep a humble spirit in service to our Maker? To further explore the answers to this topic, read the reflection below and discuss with your class the questions that follow.

For Reflection: The Lord endows each of us with gifts, both spiritual and natural, to bless His church. These gifts can include singing, preaching, teaching, helping, hospitality, evangelizing, storytelling, and so on. Unfortunately, it is all too easy for us to lose sight of the Giver of the gifts and to exalt the human vessel.

1. What are some things you can do to help yourself stay humble when serving the Lord with the gifts He has given you to glorify Him?
2. What are the dangers of pride and self-exaltation?
3. Why is humility so important when serving the Lord?
4. Talk about your answers to the questions above in light of Paul's admission: "I die daily" *(1 Cor. 15:31)*. How does Paul propose that we accomplish this "death"? Why is this "death" so critical to humility and successful service for the Lord?

Teacher's Tip 2: Divide your class into small groups and assign each group one of the following contrasts in pride and humility: Cain versus Abel, Abraham versus Lot, Jacob versus Esau, Joseph versus his brothers, and Daniel versus Nebuchadnezzar. Give each group time to explore the contrasts and prepare a short presentation on the results of their study. Invite them to share their ideas with the class.

Cain versus Abel *(Genesis 4)*: Contrast the meaning of the names of Cain and Abel, their choice of offering, and the dialogue between them.

Abraham versus Lot *(Genesis 13)*: Consider the attitudes of each man in his choice of land.

Isaac versus Ishmael *(Genesis 18)*: Compare the instances of laughter in the narrative. Later, consider Isaac's submission to being sacrificed *(Genesis 22)*.

Jacob versus Esau *(Genesis 27)*: Compare the attitudes of the brothers toward the birthright and their subsequent encounter in Genesis 33.

Joseph versus his brothers *(Genesis 37)*: Contrast the response of Joseph's brothers to his dreams with their fear of retaliation later on *(Genesis 50)*.

Nebuchadnezzar versus Daniel *(Daniel 1, Daniel 3, Daniel 4)*: Consider the gracious humility of Daniel in the face of the king's mandate. Also contrast Nebuchadnezzar's attempt to usurp the supremacy of God in Daniel 3 with his experience of abject humility in Daniel 4.

Notes