LESSON 11 *June 6–12

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Setbacks



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 4:35–41; Mark 5:21–34; Rom. 5:3–5; Job 19:23–27; Job 23:8–12; Luke 24:13–27; Rom. 8:18, 28.*

Memory Text: **"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us"** *(Romans 5:3–5, NKJV)***.**

One evening, as the sun dipped over the horizon, a girl was walking home when a dark storm blew in. She quickened her pace, knowing there was still a way to go. A lone raindrop fell on her cheek, then another, and, before she knew it, she was drenched. She started to run toward the front door of her home, where her father rushed to meet her. He had been watching her from the front window. As he wrapped a blanket around her shoulders, he asked her, "I saw you just now, in the rain. Why, with every bolt of lightning, did you stop running to look up and smile?"

"Oh, I stopped to look up," she said, "because God was taking my picture!"

What is our response when the storms of life come or when we have certain setbacks in our relationship with God? Do we put our head down as the rain pelts upon our backs or do we look up, knowing and trusting that God is there as we turn our face toward Him?

This week, we'll explore some responses we often have when life is challenging. We'll consider how we might use life's setbacks to strengthen, not weaken, our most important relationship.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 13.*

Life's Storms

Jesus had spent the day speaking to large crowds of people on the shores of Galilee. Jesus' words would echo in the people's minds for a long time and down throughout eternity.

As evening fell, Jesus spoke to His disciples, inviting them on a journey with Him. " 'Let us cross over to the other side' " *(Mark 4:35, NKJV)*. Jesus knew a storm would come but suggested they go anyway. He had an important life lesson to teach His closest followers.

You likely know what happened next.

Read about this storm again in Mark 4:35–41. What lessons on faith can you take from these verses?

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Consider these points:

1. Jesus falls asleep on what was likely the only pillow in the boat. The fishing boats usually had one pillow, which the driver of the boat, at the stern, sat on. The person at the stern guided the boat to the destination. So here, Jesus is in the position of the boat's "driver," but He falls asleep at the wheel.
2. Not all the disciples were new to sailing. Peter, James, and John were experienced fishermen. They knew the Sea of Galilee, and they would have known how to navigate a storm.
3. This is the only recorded Gospel account of Jesus sleeping. During one of the worst storms in their lives, when the disciples are terrified and think they're going to die, Jesus is asleep at the stern.
4. The disciples' response in their time of crisis is "Do You not care?" They questioned Jesus' character and His love for them. Too often, this is also our response when we face hard times.

It's in the midst of hopelessness that we might try to save ourselves (like the disciples), or sometimes it's when we feel pain or loss that we start to question or doubt God's love and care for us. We presume that He should act in a certain way based on what we think and see from our human perspective. But, as with the disciples, it's in life's storms that God can work the greatest miracles. God is *always* faithful, even when His apparent lack of involvement doesn't make sense to us. He's in our storms with us and can calm the storm when we cannot.

What is your usual response when you face a storm in your life? How do such moments impact your relationship with God? When have you lived out 2 Corinthians 5:7?

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Be Made Well

Imagine the throng of people on the shore of Galilee. They've been waiting for Jesus' return since early morning, and as He steps from the boat, they press close around Him, following Him into the village of Capernaum. Suddenly, Jairus, ruler of the synagogue, appears and begs Jesus to come to make his daughter well.

One of the people in the crowd is a woman who has been unwell for many years. She's spent all her money on doctors, but she "was no better, but rather grew worse" *(Mark 5:26, NKJV)*. She's heard about this great Man of Galilee and, with hope in her heart, gathers what little strength she had to leave her house that morning to join the crowd. The press of the people feels almost suffocating as she inches closer to Jesus. And then, through the pushing and shoving, she sees Him. She encourages herself: " 'If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well' " *(Mark 5:28, NKJV)*.

Read Mark 5:21–34. What happened, and what can we learn?

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This incident shows Jesus' care and compassion for the sick and lonely, and those usually lost in the crowd. Many that day were pressing close to Jesus' side as they drifted along with the crowd, but only one intentionally reached out to touch Jesus to receive the blessing she so desperately needed. However, it wasn't her touch that healed her; it was her faith that made her well *(Mark 5:34)*. "The Saviour could distinguish the touch of faith from the casual contact of the careless throng."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 344. Jesus' garment held no special power; rather, it was the woman's faith and her choice to reach out to touch Him that healed her.

That frail woman, in her suffering and distress, could have stayed in bed at home on that morning, but instead, she deliberately sought Jesus out in the hope of healing. Seeing Him at a distance wasn't enough; she drew close to Him.

Jesus beckons us to do the same today. He says, " 'Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls' " *(Matt. 11:28, 29, NLT)*.

How did this woman in such great need demonstrate the ideas in Romans 5:3–5? What might this look like in your life?

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Job

When we think of setbacks in the Bible, Job is perhaps the person who first comes to mind. Not only did he lose all his wealth *(Job 1:14–17)*, but he also lost his children *(Job 1:18, 19)* and his health *(Job 2:7)*. His wife then tried to convince him to curse God and die *(Job 2:9)*.

After some time, three friends came to sit with Job. They were so shocked at his appearance that they sat with him, speechless, for seven days *(Job 2:13)*. Eventually, when they spoke, they tried to offer human reasons for why such misfortune had come to Job, but in doing so, they unintentionally increased his suffering. Three friends blamed him, saying he must have some hidden sin in his life to repent of *(Job 8, 11, 15)*, even saying, " 'Surely such are the dwellings of the wicked, and this is the place of him who does not know God' " *(Job 18:21, NKJV)*.

How did Job respond? Read Job 19:23–27 and Job 23:8–12.

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No matter the tragic events that surrounded him, and the fact that he didn't understand them, Job remained faithful. He held fast. He didn't blame God or curse Him. Instead, when tempted to blame God, he declared: " 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD' " *(Job 1:21, NKJV)*.

We, too, live in the middle of this same battle. Satan afflicts us with pain, suffering, loss, and hardship as part of his plan to distort our picture of a loving God. In such times, we can respond in one of two ways: blame and reject God, or cling to Him with all our might. Although the battle rages around us, we must remember that, in light of eternity, our momentary troubles are but temporary trials *(2 Cor. 4:16–18)*. There is so much more to the picture than what we see here and now, and one of the great challenges for a believer is to trust God even in the darkest times. God has, in many ways, revealed to us the reality of His love. We must cling to this crucial truth—that of God's love—even when we might not sense it at the moment.

If you are in the middle of a difficult time right now, run to God. Take your Bible and a notebook, and go outside to be with God in nature. Copy down Romans 5:3–5, and reflect on the different messages in this passage, believing that God's love and care for you is the surest and most stable factor in your life.

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The Road to Emmaus

It had been an intense few weeks for the two disciples as they replayed in their minds some of the events and conversations they had experienced. The triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the clearing of the temple. The Passover in the upper room. Jesus' prayers in Gethsemane. Judas's ugly betrayal. The trial, the mocking, the beating. Jesus' bruised body hanging on a cross and His final words before He breathed His last as the afternoon sky turned black. The loud rip of the temple curtain. The open graves of the righteous. Gently taking Jesus' body off the cross and laying Him in the tomb before Sabbath. And then the confusion, discouragement, and questions in the disciples' minds. How had they gotten it so wrong?

Jesus' followers were disappointed, discouraged, and confused. This was the greatest setback of their lives. What they didn't see was that this was merely a moment in the greatest story of all time. As two of them walked on the road to Emmaus, Jesus appeared and walked with them.

Read the conversation in Luke 24:13–27 and think about the two different perspectives: the two followers, and Jesus.

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Once their eyes were opened, the two followers rushed to Jerusalem to share the things that had happened to them on the road *(Luke 24:33–35)*. As Jesus came and stood in their midst, they were terrified. Notice His questions to them: " 'Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts?' " *(Luke 24:38, NKJV)*.

This is also Jesus' message for us today. Too often, we forget that He walks beside us in our valleys. Too often we don't recognize Him. Too often we forget that there's much more to the story. Too often we feel troubled and allow doubts to arise in our hearts, forgetting that Jesus holds our lives securely in His hands. And too often we think we know better than Jesus does about what's really happening in our lives *(Luke 24:18)*.

The Bible gives such good counsel about how we as Christians can respond to challenges and setbacks. Take some time to study these short passages: *Rom. 8:28; Phil. 4:4–13; James 1:2–4, 12; and 2 Cor. 12:9, 10.* **As part of your study, write down three key messages you can share with someone who is facing setbacks right now. Keep 2 Corinthians 1:4 in mind.**

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See Jesus

Have you ever wished you could see Jesus when you feel discouraged? Picture yourself in this dream.

"I seemed to be sitting in abject despair, with my face in my hands, reflecting like this: If Jesus were upon earth, I would go to Him, throw myself at His feet, and tell Him all my sufferings. He would not turn away from me, He would have mercy upon me, and I should love and serve Him always. Just then the door opened, and a person of beautiful form and countenance entered. He looked upon me pityingly and said: 'Do you wish to see Jesus? He is here and you can see Him if you desire to do so. Take everything you possess and follow me.'

"I heard this with unspeakable joy, and gladly gathered up all my little possessions, every treasured trinket, and followed my guide. He led me to a steep and apparently frail stairway. As I commenced to ascend the steps, he cautioned me to keep my eyes fixed upward, lest I should grow dizzy and fall. Many others who were climbing up the steep ascent fell before gaining the top.

"Finally we reached the last step and stood before the door. Here my guide directed me to leave all the things that I had brought with me. I cheerfully laid them down; he then opened the door and bade me enter. In a moment I stood before Jesus. There was no mistaking that beautiful countenance. Such a radiant expression of benevolence and majesty could belong to no other. As His gaze rested upon me, I knew at once that He was acquainted with every circumstance of my life and all my inner thoughts and feelings.

"I tried to shield myself from His gaze, feeling unable to endure His searching eyes, but He drew near with a smile, and, laying His hand upon my head, said: 'Fear not.' The sound of His sweet voice thrilled my heart with a happiness it had never before experienced. I was too joyful to utter a word, but, overcome with ineffable happiness, sank prostrate at His feet. While I was lying helpless there, scenes of beauty and glory passed before me, and I seemed to have reached the safety and peace of heaven. At length my strength returned, and I arose. The loving eyes of Jesus were still upon me, and His smile filled my soul with gladness. His presence filled me with holy reverence and an inexpressible love. . . .

"This dream gave me hope . . . [and] faith. . . . And the beauty and simplicity of trusting in God began to dawn upon my benighted soul."—Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, pp. 79–81.

Amid life's setbacks, we need to focus on Jesus and what He reveals about God's love for us.

What hope can you take for yourself, right now, from what is written in Romans 8:18, 28?

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Further Thought: It's when we face life's challenges that we most need to cling to God. The topics we've explored throughout this quarter all contribute to keeping or refreshing a strong walk with God. When you face a setback such as a health challenge, financial difficulties, a marriage breakdown, the death of someone close to you, or another burden that robs you of joy, consider the following questions and reflect on the lessons studied thus far.

Discussion Questions:

❶ How has whatever setback you are facing, or have faced, impacted your picture of God? How can you more clearly see God's true character?

❷ When did you last pray for God's voice in your life to be stronger than the enemy's? Remember that the thief (Satan) comes to steal, kill, and destroy, but God gives abundant life *(John 10:10)***.**

❸ Is your heart humble? Do you trust that God is still sovereign and leading in your life, despite hardship? If not, how can you learn this humble trust in the goodness and love of God for you personally?

❹ Are you keeping yourself grounded in God's Word daily? Ask God to reignite your first love for Him as you pass through challenging times.

❺ When did you last turn to God as your Comforter and Counselor in prayer, trusting that He has kept His promise never to leave you nor forsake you *(Heb. 13:5)***?**

❻ If your faith is weak, pray, " 'Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!' " *(Mark 9:24, NKJV)***. Surround yourself with people who can encourage rather than discourage you.**

❼ The world doesn't always care for the weak, ignorant, wounded, and broken. God's message of "When you are weak, my power is strong" *(2 Cor. 12:9, WE)* **is a message that can radically transform people's lives. Think of someone you might encourage with this message today.**

Summary: We still live in a sinful world full of pain and suffering, and each of us faces hardships at some point in our lives, things that can cause us to question God's love. As we look back on how various individuals in the Bible responded to life's setbacks, we can take courage that our response in such times can strengthen our walk with God, who does not change *(Mal. 3:6)* and whose love remains constant.

INSIDE *Story*

Life's Most Important Work

Zeth Louis Lekatompessy put together a plan to bring his seven siblings and their families to Christ the same year that he was baptized in Indonesia.

The plan went like this: Zeth asked his wife, whom he married shortly before his baptism, to join him in praying daily for his relatives. He and his wife also visited the relatives and studied the Bible with them. Then he invited them to evangelistic meetings at a Seventh-day Adventist church on Ambon Island, where they lived. At the end of the meetings, 13 people were baptized, including his older sister and two other relatives. Later, five more brothers and sisters were baptized. Zeth was overjoyed! He decided that leading people to Christ was life's most important work.

For the next two years, he worked as a literature evangelist, sailing between islands to sell books. The COVID-19 pandemic ended his work.

As he contemplated the future, he felt impressed to volunteer as a Bible worker. His wife agreed, and he returned to the plan that he had made for the salvation of his siblings. He and his wife made a list of every person whom they knew and prayed over it daily. With their two small children, they used their motorcycle to visit people on the list.

On arriving at a new house, Zeth introduced himself and his family and said, "We are Seventh-day Adventists."

Houseowners asked curiously, "What's an Adventist?"

"An Adventist is someone who worships on the Sabbath," Zeth replied.

The next question inevitably was: "What is the Sabbath?"

Zeth suggested that the houseowners look up the answer online.

When houseowners saw that the Sabbath was Saturday, they were surprised and asked, "Is it true that Saturday is the true day of worship?"

Then Zeth opened his Bible and offered Bible studies.

The prayer list grew to 50 names over three years. Zeth and his family usually visited three families a day. Four people on the list had been baptized by the time Zeth left to study theology at Klabat University. Three more were baptized as he studied at Klabat, and others continued Bible studies in his absence.

"Fourteen percent of my list has been baptized," he said.



Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, also known as the Quarterly Mission Project Offering, that is helping people like Zeth prepare for gospel ministry. Klabat University, located near Manado, Indonesia, is a previous offering recipient. This quarter's offering will help similar schools in the East-Central Africa Division. Watch a YouTube video of Zeth at bit.ly/Zeth-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: *Job 42:5, 6*

Study Focus: *Gen. 50:20, Rom. 8:28, Job 10:9, Job 13:15, Job 19:23–27, Luke 24:13–35.*

As faithful Christians, we may confidently expect God to protect us from evil and harm, and we certainly have good reason to think He will. After all, God has promised to keep us and bless us *(Num. 6:24)*. And we strive to honor Him in all that we do, so that we do not forfeit this blessing or lay claim to it presumptuously. Yet, we may still get sick and suffer injustice and oppression in this life. At such times, we cry out to God for help.

We are not unique in our supplications to God during the dark times of life. The Bible is full of men and women of God who suffered and cried out for help. The book of Psalms is suffused with the entreaties of pious people who call on God to deliver them from evil *(Ps. 71:4, Ps. 97:10)*. The book of Job, in particular, illustrates this phenomenon. Job is a pious man; and yet, in spite of all his faithfulness, he suffers much tribulation and sorrow. Job does not understand the reason for his suffering. In anguish, he cries out to God in the face of what appears to be great injustice. The case of Job merits our attention for this very reason. Job experiences God's grace through opposite extremes of happiness and pain. Within the bounds of these two extremes that delineate his challenging conflict, Job learns to hope.

Part II: Commentary

The Experience of Grace. The book of Job begins with an emphatic note about Job's great virtues. According to the biblical author, Job is "blameless and upright" *(Job 1:1, NKJV)*. Job also was considered "the greatest of all the people of the East" *(Job 1:3, NKJV)*. Even God testifies to Job's singularity and uniqueness, saying, " 'There is none like him on the earth' " *(Job 1:8, NKJV)*. According to all the assessments of Job, he is a perfect man. And yet, at the end of the book, Job, responding to God, confesses that at the time when he was judged as "perfect," his relationship with God was only at a primitive stage: " 'I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear' " *(Job 42:5, NKJV)*. Job then adds that "now," after his experience of suffering, "my eye sees You" *(Job 42:5, NKJV)*. Thus, Job recognizes that there was something important that kept him from seeing God initially.

What was it?

An attentive reading of the biblical text, and particularly the use of the repeated *kḥinam*, meaning "for nothing" or "for free," will help us resolve this question. The word *khinam* appears for the first time in the book of Job in the form of a question when Satan responds to God, who has just praised Job for his piety: Does Job serve God "for nothing [*kḥinam*]?" *(Job 1:9, NKJV)*. Satan's argument is that God is overly protective of Job. To prove his point, Satan then proposes a challenge to God: let me touch Job's belongings; that is, strike "all that he has" *(Job 1:11, NKJV)*. Satan bets that Job will then sin. God permits all of Job's substance to be within the devastating reach of Satan's power. A raid by the Sabeans, a fire from heaven, and a great wind ravage his properties *(Job 1:13 19)*. In the aftermath of the destruction, Job loses all that he has. Although Job mourns, he does not sin *(Job 1:22)*.

In response to Satan's accusation, God uses the same word, *kḥinam*, that Satan used when he charged Him with putting a protective hedge around Job. The Lord says, " 'You incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause [*kḥinam*]' " *(Job 2:3, NKJV)*. Job confirms this notion when he uses the same word later in his outcry to God about his wounds, which are multiplied *kḥinam*, "without cause" *(Job 9:17)*.

The word *kḥinam*, which derives from the word *kḥen*, "grace," is, therefore, a significant keyword that marks Job's destiny. On one hand, Job suffers "without cause" (*kḥinam*). On the other hand, Job is accused of serving God from self-serving motives and out of a desire for prosperity. This accusation from Satan is also echoed in the suspicions of Job's friends *(Job 34:9, Job 35:3)*. In fact, Job himself seemingly espouses this idea when he enumerates his good deeds *(Job 29:12–17, Job 31:1)* and announces his expectation to be rewarded for them *(Job 29:18)*. What was missing in Job's relationship with God, however, was the experience of grace. Job had to pass through the experience of suffering "without cause," "for free"; that is, without hope of any benefit, in order to understand God's unmerited gift of grace.

The Problem of Suffering. The book of Job emphasizes that it is Satan who initiates suffering in the human race *(Job 1:12)*. God Himself affirms Satan's responsibility for Job's suffering *(Job 2:6)*. Ellen G. White is very clear about whom to blame for Job's suffering: "The history of Job had shown that suffering is inflicted by Satan."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 471. Jesus also attributes suffering to the enemy *(Matt. 13:28)*. Is Job, then, wrong when he suggests that God is responsible for his pain?

Throughout the book, Job attributes agency to God as the One who is responsible for his oppression *(Job 10:3)* and who shakes him to pieces *(Job 16:12)*. Job even argues, "If it is not He, who else could it be?" *(Job 9:24, NKJV)*. However, at the end of the book, God responds to Job's assertions by enumerating His works of Creation *(Job 38, 39)*. God's

defense against Job's assertion that He is the destroyer is that He is the Creator. So, when Job places God at the origin of suffering, he really is voicing the monotheistic affirmation that there is only one God, one power, who is ultimately responsible for what happens to humanity. The Lord, through Moses, expresses this idea in the following words: " 'I, even I, am He, and there is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal' " *(Deut. 32:39, NKJV)*. This paradox informs the very substance and quality of Job's faith.

As Job famously says of the Lord, " 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him' " *(Job 13:15, NKJV)*. The Hebrew person of faith has the conviction that the good, as well as the bad, comes from God's hand *(Prov. 16:4)* because the person knows the reality of God's goodness and grace, and trusts, regardless of life's evil circumstances and situations *(Gen. 50:20, Rom. 8:28)*.

The Vision of Resurrection. To Job's friend Bildad, who all but accuses him of being a wicked man *(Job 18)* who does not know God, and, as such, deserves to go down into the grave *(Job 18:21)*, Job responds: "I *know* that my Redeemer is alive" *(Job 19:25, CEB)*. "This I *know*, that in my flesh I shall see God" *(Job 19:26, NKJV)*. In these two verses, Job affirms his faith in his resurrection, which will take place at the end of time, when "my Redeemer" [who presently lives] "will stand at last on the earth" *(Job 19:25, MEV)*. Thus, from within his tormented flesh, Job draws the following paradox of hope: "After my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God" *(Job 19:26, NKJV)*.

In this verse, Job does not refer to an existential experience happening in his present life. Nor does he refer to his personal immortality after death. The event he speaks about belongs to a cosmic event that concerns "the earth," an eschatological event that is situated in the far future—*'akḥaron*, "last," or the last day. This event is none other than the resurrection of the dead, at which time he, in his "flesh" *(Job 19:26)*, will see God (his Redeemer) with his own eyes *(Job 19:27)*.

Echoing again Bildad's last words *(Job 18:21)*, Job ironically concludes his speech with this warning: "That you may know there is a judgment" *(Job 19:29, NKJV)*. Job's hope in his resurrection is thus connected with the day of judgment, just as in the book of Daniel *(Dan. 12:1–3)*. Jesus brings this hope to Martha's mind on the day of Lazarus's resurrection *(John 11:23)*. And Paul preaches about the blessed hope to those who denied it *(1 Cor. 15:12–19)*. This hope is the last message of the Bible: the only solution to the problem of the world is God's creation of "a new heaven and a new earth," wherein "there shall be no more death, nor sorrow" *(Rev. 21:1, 4, NKJV)*.

Part III: Life Application

Teacher's Tip: The following questions may be discussed by the class as a whole or in small groups. If you choose to divide the class into small groups, allow enough time to discuss the question, reserving enough time for a presentation of their ideas at the end of class.

Also, encourage class members in the coming week to engage in one or more of the exercises listed in the activities section that follows. Then invite class members to share their experience with the class the following Sabbath. How did the activity strengthen their faith? How did it draw them closer to Jesus?

Questions for Discussion:

1. How would you comfort people who suffer for no apparent reason, as did Job?
2. How would you respond to those who would question the piety and religious devotion of people who are sick or ill?
3. Ask class members to answer the following questions: Would your faith remain unshakable if God did not grant healing in answer to your prayer on behalf of your beloved?
4. Are you ready to thank God for your misery (illness, failure of an exam, etc.), although you did your best? Discuss.
5. Do you blame poor individuals for their condition? Explain.
6. What are your arguments against those who claim that you deserve your failures? What do you think of the idea that God will answer all your prayers according to your expectations and that success will always crown the lives of God's people?
7. Why is God's cosmic response of a new creation the only solution to our personal problems and to the problems of a hurting world?

Activities:

1. Write a sermon or eulogy to be delivered at the graveside of a departed loved one or friend. Send it to the family of the bereaved to comfort them.
2. Share stories from your own life in which you experienced God's grace during a painful time. Learn to thank God for the bad *and* the good things in life.
3. Visit a sick friend in the hospital or a person who is terminally ill. What words of comfort will you share with him or her?

Notes