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The Whole Gospel

A pastor held up his Bible before his congregation. It was in tatters, full of holes. In seminary he and some classmates had gone through his Bible and underlined every passage that dealt with justice, poverty, wealth, and oppression. Then, with a pair of scissors, they cut out every verse dealing with those topics. When they had finished, his Bible was in shambles. Throughout Scripture these themes are so central that there is a lot missing from the Bible when they are removed. The tattered Bible speaks powerfully and loudly about the things that God cares about.

What should this story say to us as Seventh-day Adventists? It should say a lot. Research shows that approximately 30 percent of Seventh-day Adventists are involved in meeting the needs of the community outside the church. What about the remaining 70 percent? Jesus calls His entire end-time church to proclaim and live the whole “everlasting gospel” (Rev. 14:6).

What is the whole gospel? Jesus’ mission and ministry depicted in Luke 4:16–21 portray the whole gospel as more than preaching the truth of salvation by faith, however foundational that is to all that we do. Jesus shows us that preaching the gospel also means tangible expressions of love and compassion for the poor, hungry, sick, brokenhearted, oppressed, outcast, and imprisoned. It’s about biblical justice and undoing what the devil has done, at least to whatever degree we now can as we look forward to Jesus’ ultimate triumph over evil at the end of the age.

This quarter we will explore this wholistic version of the “everlasting gospel” and will examine the role of the church in impacting their communities with this gospel. We define the “church” as a community of people who, together, do not exist for themselves but who

are called out to live and to preach the everlasting gospel as expressed in the ministry of Jesus. This means not only preaching the gospel but living it in our lives through ministering to the needs of those in our local communities.

Organizationally, how does your local church serve those in need? All ministries of the church (for example, health, family, youth, Sabbath School, deacons/deaconesses, etc.) exist to work together for serving the community, as well as church members. Adventist Community Services (ACS) units or centers work from the church to demonstrate the gospel and prepare the way for hearing the Word of God. In some parts of the world ACS is called Dorcas, Adventist Men, or some other name. The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), the Seventh-day Adventist Church's humanitarian agency with a nongovernmental organization status, though it does not operate from the local church, is another important part of reaching those in need.

Jesus shows us that preaching the gospel also means tangible expressions of love and compassion.

How do you personally express your appreciation for what God has done for you in Christ? One church member put it this way:

“On the street I saw a small girl,
cold, shivering in a thin dress,
with little hope of a decent meal.

I became angry and said to God:

‘Why did You permit this?

Why don't You do something about it?’

For a while God said nothing.

Then that night He replied quite suddenly:

‘I certainly did something about it.

I made you.’”—In Dwight Nelson, *Pursuing the Passion of Jesus* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2005), p. 78.

At the time of writing this Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide, Gaspar Colón was chair of the Department of Religion at Washington Adventist University in Takoma Park, Maryland, USA. May-Ellen Colón is director of Adventist Community Services International, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The Colóns served as missionaries in Africa and the former Soviet Union for nine years. They have two grown children and two grandchildren.

How to Use This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Apply, and Create

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, apply, and create. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply); and
4. What can I do with what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Create).

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

Step 1—Motivate: Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

Step 2—Explore: Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Step 3—Apply: Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

Step 4—Create: Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (*James 1:22*). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.