

Beating Evil With Love



SABBATH—MARCH 6

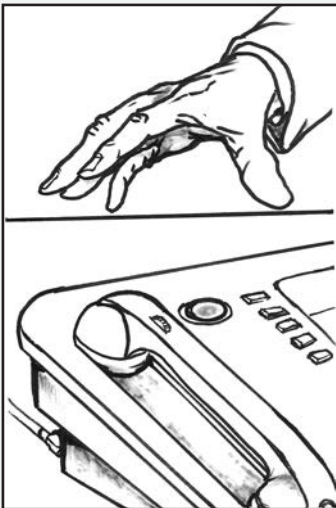
READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Isaiah 55:1–7; Isaiah 55:6–13; Isaiah 58:1–12; Isaiah 58:13, 14.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘Work hard to feed hungry people. Satisfy [take care of] the needs of those [people] who are crushed [in trouble]. Then my blessing will light up your darkness. And the night of your suffering will become as bright as the noonday sun’ ” (Isaiah 58:10, NlrV).

A JEWISH WORSHIP LEADER AND HIS WIFE get mean and nasty phone calls. The man and his wife live in Nebraska. They learn that the calls come from a leader of an American hate group named the Ku Klux Klan. The man and his wife can call the police to arrest this man. But they decide to do something different. They learn that the leader of the Ku Klux Klan is crippled. So, they show up at his door with dinner! The man is surprised. The love of this couple melts the hate in his heart. The couple continue to visit the man. He even thinks about becoming Jewish!

“ ‘Is not the time without eating which I chose, a time to take off the chains of sin, and to take the heavy load of sin off the neck [of people]? Is it not a time to let those [people] who suffer under a sinful [evil] power go free, and to break every load from their neck? Is it not a time to share your food with the hungry?’ ” (Isaiah 58:6, 7, NLV).

This week, let us learn more about the important spiritual rule that Isaiah shows us in these verses.



A Jewish worship leader and his wife get mean and nasty phone calls. The calls are from the leader of an American hate group. The love of this couple melts the hate in his heart.

BUY SOMETHING THAT IS FREE? (Isaiah 55:1–7)

Read this verse: “ ‘Listen! Every one who is thirsty, come to the waters. And you who have no money, come, buy and eat’ ” (Isaiah 55:1 NLV). How can you buy something if it is free?

Let us say you took some food and stood on a street in a big city. Then you announced to the hungry and homeless people: “Hey, do you have no money? That is OK! Come, buy and eat anyway!” But how can they buy if they have no money?

But what if you added these words as Isaiah does: “ ‘You will not have [need] to pay anything for it’ ” (Isaiah 55:1, NIV). Then the verse makes more sense, right? Isaiah asks the people to accept forgiveness from God (Isaiah 55:7). God freely gives this forgiveness to them. So, then, why does Isaiah write the word “buy”? The word “buy” shows us what God offers people. God offers to meet our needs. The word “buy” also shows that what God offers is worth a lot. So, if we want to get these gifts, we must ask for them. God freely offers forgiveness to us. The gift of forgiveness is part of God’s special agreement that He makes with His people. God offers forgiveness for free. But it is not because forgiveness was free for Him. God “bought” forgiveness for us at an awful price. His Servant died to buy it for us. So, it is free for us. But forgiveness came with a big price tag for God. That is what the word “buy” shows us.

What price did God pay to save us? For the answer, read 1 Peter 1:18, 19.

Read Ephesians 2:8, 9. What do these verses teach us about our being saved? Compare this teaching to the teaching of Isaiah. How are they the same?

Isaiah teaches us about the Good News. The teaching about the Good News in the Old Testament is the same as the Good News in the New Testament. The Old Testament did not teach that we are saved by our good behavior. There is only one way that we can be saved. God saves us by our faith in His mercy (Ephesians 2:8). He gives us “the free gift of life forever in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23, ICB).



God offers forgiveness for free.

DEEP THOUGHTS AND WAYS (Isaiah 55:6–13)

The Lord says, “ ‘My thoughts are not like your thoughts. And your ways are not like my ways. . . . The heavens are higher than the earth. And my ways are higher than your ways’ ” (Isaiah 55:8, 9, NIV). Why does the Lord say this?

We cannot fully understand God or things that He made. He is stronger and more powerful than we are. That should make it easier for us to accept His help (read Isaiah 57:15).

Read Isaiah 55:6–9. What is the Lord saying in these verses? And why? What does the Lord do that is so hard for us to understand?



“The angels wish to look into the plan of God to save sinners.”—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, page 360.

Life is full of mystery. Maybe the hardest one for the human mind to understand is the plan of God to save humans from sin (read Ephesians 6:19). The same God who made the stars and planets became a human. He lived a hard life. He suffered. Then He offered Himself for our sins. He died on the cross. He did these things to forgive us and to show us mercy. How can we ever fully understand this wonderful truth?

“The angels wish to look into the plan of God to save sinners. The people that God saves will study this Bible truth forever. They will sing about it too. So, why not study about it carefully now?”

“We cannot ever learn or know everything there is to know about this topic. It includes how Jesus became a human and how He gave Himself for our sins. It also includes His work in heaven for us now. We will study these topics forever.”
—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, page 360, adapted.

Have you hurt anyone? What mean words have you said to someone? How many promises have you made and then not kept? Jesus forgives you for all these things. He helps you to stand, right now, perfect and holy in the eyes of God. He gives you the power over sin and evil in your life. Wow! It is hard to understand this beautiful Bible truth. It is a mystery. Why not thank God right now for this wonderful gift?

NOT EATING FOOD FOR A SHORT TIME (Isaiah 58:1–8)

A fast is a time when someone chooses not to eat any food for religious reasons for a little while. What “fast” is God talking about in Isaiah 58:3?

For sure, this must be the fast that happens on the Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement was the time each year when the temple on earth was made clean from sin. On this day, the people of God did not eat any food. This is the only time that God commands His people to fast—or not eat for a short time (Leviticus 16:29, 31; Leviticus 23:27–32). Isaiah talks about what we should do when we fast (Isaiah 58:3). He writes the same words that we see in Leviticus about fasting. When we fast, God wants us to say no to pride. Both Leviticus and Isaiah talk about our need to empty our hearts of pride. Another name for doing this is humbling our hearts. Humbling our hearts is a part of a spiritual fast (compare Psalm 35:13; Daniel 10:2, 3, 12).

The Day of Atonement helps us understand the command from the Lord: “‘Shout like [the same as] a trumpet!’” (Isaiah 58:1, ERV). On the Day of Atonement, the holy leaders blew a special trumpet named a “shofar.” The “shofar” was made from the horn of a male sheep. The holy leaders blew the shofar ten days before the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:24). This helped the people remember the Day of Atonement and to get ready for it. Also, every 50 years, on the Day of Atonement, the holy leaders blew the shofar to announce the start of the Jubilee (Leviticus 25:9, 10; compare Isaiah 27:13). That is the time when slaves were made free. Land that had been sold in the past was given back to its first owners.

Read Isaiah 58:3–7. What is the Lord complaining about in these verses? What is wrong with the “fast” that His people are doing?

On the Day of Atonement, the chief religious leader went into the Most Holy Room of the temple to make it clean from sin. God already forgave His people for these sins. That is why the people did not eat any food. Their fasting showed God their thankfulness for His gift of forgiveness. But the people in the time of Isaiah are filled with pride. They fast to show they are very holy. They do not see that their sins made the temple dirty.



On the Day of Atonement, the holy leaders blew a special trumpet named a “shofar.”

NOT EATING FOOD FOR THE WRONG REASONS (Isaiah 58:1–12)

The holy leaders blow the shofar ten days before the Day of Atonement. The shofar is a special horn made from the horn of a male ram. The holy leaders blow it to help the people remember to get ready for the Day of Atonement ten days later. The Day of Atonement is the time when the chief religious leader will go into the Most Holy Room of the temple. Then he will make it clean from all the sins of the people. God has already forgiven these sins. The shofar also helps the people of God remember that He is their King. Ten days after the shofar is blown, Isaiah announces a message in a loud voice the same as a trumpet. His message announces to the people that they are turning against God (Isaiah 58:1).



How does helping other people show what Bible religion really is all about?

Read Isaiah 58:6–12. What actions does God consider to be part of a fast that He will accept? Remember, a fast is a time when people choose to not eat any food for a short while. What is harder to do? Is it harder to skip a few meals? Or is it harder to use your own time and money to feed the homeless in your town? What is the Bible rule that helps us answer these questions? How does helping other people show what Bible religion really is all about?

Anyone can be religious. But that is not the only thing the Lord wants from us. Look at the life of Jesus. Yes, He was loyal to His religion. He did everything that He needed to do. At the same time, do you see how much the Bible writers showed us about His acts of mercy, healing, feeding the hungry, and His forgiveness? The New Testament writers showed us much more about these things than they did about the religious things Jesus needed to do to be a good Jew.

What does the Lord want from us today? He wants a church and a people who will preach Bible truth to everyone on the earth. What will lead people to accept the truth about Jesus? Will it be our strict obedience to the laws of health? Or will it be our feeding the hungry? Will it be our strict way of keeping the Sabbath? Or our spending time in helping people in need?

Read Matthew 25:40 and James 1:27. What do these verses tell us in answer to the questions in the paragraph above?

A TIME FOR US (Isaiah 58:13, 14)

Why does Isaiah talk about the Sabbath in Isaiah 58:13, 14? What connection does the Sabbath have with the Day of Atonement? As we saw, the Day of Atonement was the time each year when the temple on earth was made clean from sin.

The Day of Atonement happened one time each year. No one was allowed to do any work on this day (Leviticus 23:27–32), the same as on the weekly Sabbath day. So, what is true about working on the Sabbath day each week also is true about the Day of Atonement.

Read Isaiah 58:13. As this verse shows, how does God want us to keep the Sabbath? How can we make our Sabbath experience the same as the one in this verse? Why should it be that way for us?

Isaiah 58 talks about three main ideas: (1) saying no to sin and giving up things we love to help other people; (2) being kind to other people; and (3) the Sabbath.

How are these three ideas connected?

First, all three ideas show that we should put God first. We need to understand that we fully depend on Him. Second, when we live these three ideas in our lives, we live a holy life by doing what God asks us to do (read Leviticus 19:2). God showed Himself to us in the Person of Jesus. Jesus left His glory in heaven and became a human servant (Philippians 2:8). Jesus showed us how to be kind and how to give up things to help save other people (John 3:16). After He made the earth, Jesus rested from His work (Genesis 2:2, 3; Exodus 20:11).

Look some more at these three ideas in Isaiah 58. We see that the Sabbath gives us freedom from our work each week. This freedom is kind to people. Why? Because it lets people rest (Exodus 23:12; Mark 2:27). Jesus shows that kind acts are good and right to do on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1–5; John 5:1–17). Sabbath keeping makes us happy (Isaiah 58:14). So does helping other people (Isaiah 58:10, 11). What must change in your own life so that this experience can be yours?



No one is allowed to do any work on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:27–32).

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “No one can be kind and giving without first knowing how to say no to self. You must live a simple life. You must give up wanting things that you do not need. You must be very careful with money. Then it will be possible for you to do the work that Jesus asks us to do. We must empty our hearts of all pride and the wish to get ahead in this life. In all our work, we must show the Bible rule of an unselfish life. This is the life Jesus lived. The walls, pictures, and furniture in our homes should show the Bible rule in Isaiah 58:7. Our clothing closets and our dining room table should show this important rule too. ‘I want you to share your food with the hungry. I want you to find the poor who don’t have homes and bring them into your own homes. When you see people who have no clothes, give them your clothes!’ Isaiah 58:7 [ERV].”
—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, page 206, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:



“‘When you see people who have no clothes, give them your clothes!’ Isaiah 58:7 [ERV].”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, page 206.

① Isaiah asked the people of his time a question: “ ‘Why waste your money on something that is not real food? Why should you work for something that does not really satisfy you [make you happy]?’ ” (Isaiah 55:2, ERV). In what way are we doing the same thing as the people in the time of Isaiah? That is, how are we working for things that do not make us happy? Why is it so easy to work for the wrong things?

② Saying no to things you do not need was important in the time of Isaiah. So was being kind and keeping the Sabbath. How important are they to us in the end time? (For the answer, read 1 Corinthians 15:52; compare Leviticus 25:9, 10).

③ In class, talk about Sabbath keeping. What is Isaiah talking about when he says we should turn away from doing what pleases us on the Sabbath? At the same time, the Sabbath should be a joyful experience for us (Isaiah 58:13). How can we keep the Sabbath holy and have a happy experience at the same time?

Summary: In Isaiah 55 and 58, Isaiah asks his people to give up their way of doing things and their way of thinking. He asks them to come back to God. God shows mercy to His people. He pardons their sin. Then God asks His people to show other people the mercy He showed them. This mercy shows the real meaning of the Sabbath. If we accept the gift of forgiveness, then our hearts and lives will be changed.

MARRIED TO SOMEONE WHO WAS NOT ADVENTIST

I did not want to marry Ming-Huang. I was a Seventh-day Adventist. Ming-Huang belonged to another Christian church in the south of Taiwan. But our parents wanted us to marry. So, we had to obey them.

I told my future husband, Ming-Huang Wu, “We can get married. But I will not change my religion.” He said OK.

But then we started to talk about the wedding. I wanted the wedding to happen in an Adventist church. But Ming-Huang said, “No! I am the husband. So, we should get married in my church.”

We argued. At last, I said, “An Adventist pastor must marry us. Or I will not marry you!” Ming-Huang asked his mother for advice. She gave permission for an Adventist pastor to marry us. But the mother of my future husband had secret plans. She wanted me to join her church after the wedding. She also wanted me to change her son. Ming-Huang had a drinking problem.

A month before the wedding, Ming-Huang took Bible studies and was baptized. I will never forget that day. Ming-Huang cried as he rose from the water. He wanted to marry me. But he did not want to leave his old life of drinking behind him. That is why he cried.

Ming-Huang emptied his heart of a lot of pride when he married me. For the next seven months, I fed my husband good food. I also taught him how to live a healthy life. Our neighbors saw that Ming-Huang was not the same. “You are a new man,” they told my husband.

But Ming-Huang did not want to be a new man. After our daughter was born, Ming-Huang went back to drinking.

Ten years passed. We had a second daughter. My husband and I had many fights about faith. I wanted to leave my husband. The problems with my husband were too much for me. I took our two daughters and left our home. I went to the home of some friends. I wanted my husband to be alone in our house. Then he would know if he really wanted a divorce from me. Ming-Huang did not want a divorce. He looked for me for three days. When he found me, he changed. This time, he fully became a new man.

Today, Ming-Huang is a caring husband and father. He also is a leader in our church. I am happy now. But the Bible is right when it says, “You are not the same as those who don’t believe. So don’t join yourselves to them” (2 Corinthians 6:14, ERV). Trust me, it is better to marry someone who is part of your own faith. The wisest man on earth, Solomon, learned this lesson the hard way. Me too.

INSIDE *Story* by ZENG-MEI CHANG



Ming-Huang went back to drinking.

