

Social Support: *The Tie That Binds*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 1:27, John 1:1–3, Rom. 14:7, 1 Cor. 12:14–26, 1 Corinthians 13, Gal. 6:2, Eph. 4:1–16.*

Memory Text: “ ‘A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.’ ” (*John 13:34, 35, NIV*).

It is very clear that being unloved, lonely, and isolated increases the likelihood of various risky behaviors. Disease and premature death from all causes rises by 200 to 500 percent or more in such individuals. Saddest of all, isolation deprives us of the joy of everyday life, the joy that comes from satisfying and fulfilling relationships. One study was conducted on 170 military wives receiving prenatal care at a military hospital. The research showed that women without emotional and psychological support had three times as many complications as those with adequate support.

Anything that promotes a sense of isolation may lead to illness and suffering. That which promotes love and intimacy, connection, and community is healing and brings health. And no wonder, because, as humans, we were meant to live in community and fellowship with one another.

With these ideas in mind, we come to the final week in our study about health and temperance, and our topic deals with the important question of interpersonal relationships and how these can impact our physical well-being.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 26.*

To view and/or download a Hope Channel program on this week's lesson, visit www.lifesbeat.org.

The Original Image

As human beings, we are so immersed in sin that we often can forget just how bad it is, just how much it has affected us. It is not easy to realize how far we have fallen, because we have been down for so long.

Read Genesis 1:27. How does the fact that Jesus Himself is God help us understand better what it means to have been made in the image of God? How does knowing about Jesus help us understand the kind of characters our first parents had at the Creation?

The Bible is clear: we were made in the image of God. It is clear, too, that Jesus is God (*see John 1:1–3*). Thus, in the beginning, humans reflected somewhat the moral character of Jesus. The Jesus who loved us so much that He stooped down and took on our humanity in order to save us—that is what humans were originally like. The Jesus who was willing to minister to others by washing the feet of His betrayer—that is what humans were somewhat like. The Jesus who, even while dying on the cross, took time to comfort the dying thief—that is what humans were like. The Jesus who cried out, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (*Luke 23:34*)—that is what humans were to some degree like before sin entered.

The unselfish love and concern for others that marked Jesus’ life also must have been reflected to some degree in Adam and Eve before the Fall, who were from creation made “in the image of God.”

Hence, the idea of being like Jesus means being remade into the image in which we were originally created. And it is obvious from looking at Jesus, from seeing how He lived and how He treated people and how He loved even His enemies, that at the heart of Christ’s character was unselfish love for others. As humans, then, we originally were made to love and care unselfishly for those who were around us. That is certainly part of what it means to have been made in the image of God.

We were made, therefore, to love and to be loved, and this we cannot do in a vacuum. We need people to love, just as people need to be loved. This is what community and family are all about.

Dwell more on this idea about what it means to have been made in the image of God and that Jesus is God. How does this fact help us understand just how fallen we are and how much we need a Savior? More so, how should this help us understand why we need to treat people better than we often do?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *1 Corinthians 12:25, 26*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Recognize the importance of social relationships and their impact on physical, mental, and spiritual health.

Feel: Foster the development of a variety of connections among relatives, friends, church family, and community members.

Do: Offer support to one another with kindness, forgiveness, generosity, patience, and encouragement in the oneness and fullness of Christ.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Social Ties Bind Our Hearts Together

A God created us to be part of a family and a community, and He gave us gifts to build up the body of Christ. What gifts do you have that others need, and what gifts do others have that you need?

B How can we support each other and come closer together with our God-given gifts?

II. Feel: Connected

A How is your social health? Do you have a variety of social connections? What relationships do you need to work on?

B What joy and comfort do you receive from your social connections? How can you increase the emotional support that you offer others?

III. Do: One in Christ

A Christ designed for us to love and care for one another in a manner similar to the way in which He loves and cares for us. How can we reflect God's care for us in the way that we love and support others?

► **Summary:** Created as we are in the image of Christ, we receive our greatest fulfillment in connecting to others in the same ways that He relates to us.

People: Social Beings

People are social beings. Not long after Adam was created, God provided a companion for him. He said, “ ‘It is not good for the man to be alone’ ” (*Genesis 2:18, NIV*). We need one another.

Hence, a crucial point regarding this reality must be understood.

Read Romans 14:7. What important principle is found in this text? How have you experienced the powerful reality of this truth?

In life or death, we impact others, especially those in our family. The responsible caring for our own health brings blessings not only to ourselves but to those with whom we share our lives.

What do the following texts tell us about how social relationships were meant as a blessing for us? *Gen. 2:18, Eccles. 4:9–12, 1 Cor. 12:14–26, Gal. 6:2.*

Because good relationships positively influence both our own and others’ lives, we should learn to give and receive graciously. It is incorrect to say, “It’s my body, and it’s nobody’s business but mine.” Society pays, directly or indirectly, for every person’s poor health choices. Human life, a precious creation of God, is of utmost worth and is deserving of preservation. In many places the value of life is not appreciated; for the Christian, every person is valuable. It is important to invest not only in your own health but also in the health of others.

A doctor studied the importance of social ties and social support in relationship to disease and mortality rates. The close social, cultural, and traditional ties of the Japanese culture made for exemplary health outcomes. The better the social ties, the better the health. He further indicated that social isolation results in poorer health and higher mortality rates. Meaningful social relationships positively influence physical, mental, and emotional behaviors.

In what ways have you benefited from a social network? How can you help others in the same way you have benefited? Do you tend to take more from the network, or give more? What does your answer say about you?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Love enhances the quality of life and improves the quality of our physical well-being.

The medieval metaphysical poet John Donne wrote, “No man is an *Island*, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the *Continent*, a part of the *main*.” —*The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, third edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 190. God created us as social creatures, with the privilege of associating with Him and His creation. We are not meant to live in isolation.

Paul Tournier quoted a patient in his book *Escape From Loneliness*: “There are two things you cannot do alone: marry, and be a Christian.”—John S. Gilmour (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 25. How true! Jesus said that love is the identifying mark of Christians: “ ‘Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples’ ” (*John 13:35, NLT*).

Long before sin entered the world, God recognized the human need for love and companionship. While Adam enjoyed the company of myriads of animals, he had no female counterpart as did they. So, God created Eve as Adam’s partner. Modern studies suggest that there are measurable health benefits for those who enjoy the company of others. Conversely, those who do not enjoy a social support network tend to face more disease. Our study underscores the impact that relationships have on our well-being. Health is more than diet and exercise.

Activity for Discussion: List a variety of ways to express love. Talk about things that people do for you that make you feel loved.

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: Our focus centers on the positive nature of God-established relationships and the health benefits associated with them. These ties are rooted not only in Creation but in redemption, as well. While there may be health benefits from associating with all types of people, there is no closer bond than the spiritual tie that unites believers.

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Unity in Redemption

All humanity is related through our common ancestry (*Acts 17:26*). We're related, too, through the love that God has for all of us. Everyone may be redeemed by Christ's precious blood, because God wants no one to be lost (*2 Pet. 3:9*).

The Bible is clear that through redemption in Jesus, all barriers between us should be brought down, because we are the same before the Lord: sinners in need of God's grace.

How does Paul describe the people who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus? *Eph. 4:1–16*. What does this mean in terms of how we should relate to one another?

No one hates his or her own body (*Eph. 5:29, 30*). All parts of the body interact to function effectively. If one part of the body suffers, all functions are affected. The closer we are to others, the more readily and powerfully we feel the impact of their problems.

When we interact socially and helpfully with others, it improves health. Two hundred seventy-six healthy volunteers were exposed to the common cold virus. The effect of a variety of interpersonal relationships was explored. Those reporting the fewest types of relationships had more than four times the risk of developing a cold than those reporting greater numbers of relationships. These differences were not explicable by factors such as immunity, smoking, exercise, amount of sleep, alcohol intake, and so forth. It was shown that the *diversity* of relationships was more important than the total number of people with whom the individuals interacted. Mutually supportive, diverse relationships increased resistance to infection, at least according to this study.

All this points to what we have been talking about all this quarter: our emotional, mental, and spiritual health can have a powerful impact on our physical health. Central to our emotional and spiritual health are the kinds of interpersonal relationships we share with others.

Sure, there are times when most everyone wants to be alone, but that is not the same as being part of a larger community that can act as a support group, especially in times of need.

How can you better involve yourself in the life of your church community? How much death to self will it take to be more involved? What gifts do you have that can benefit others?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Bible Commentary

I. Social Beings United in Redemption *(Review Galatians 6:2 with the class.)*


In the beginning God created relationships. Together with God, the union of male and female formed the first society. In the Bible, sex is not primarily a physical act but a spiritual and emotional union that has a physical counterpart in the intimacy shared by husband and wife. Adam and Eve were blessed with an expanded society at the births of their children. This unit was the first family, created for the purpose of nurture, mutual support, and, above all, love.

The church is an extended family that exists for that same purpose. Perhaps that fact is why it is not uncommon to hear believers refer to their fellow Christians as brothers and sisters. The church is the gathering of those who have been redeemed from sin by the blood of Christ. The extension of this divinely created social unit is called evangelism. Evangelism is rooted in the concept of good news. The good news is that there is a place where anyone may belong, be accepted, and be loved. An American television situation comedy featured a theme song line that referred to a “place where everybody knows your name.” The place, however, was a bar, not the church. Truly, if we neglect our youth, the gangs will find them; neglect our adults, the bars will find them; neglect our seniors, *bingo!*

Consider This: If companionship was needed before sin invaded and initiated generation upon generation of broken relationships, how important is it today? How can we become more sensitive to the aches and pains (emotional/physical/spiritual) of our families, neighbors, and communities? How does cultivating this sensitivity contribute to a healthier society? What talents has God given me and my fellow Christians that can be used to reach empty, lonely, hurting souls?

II. Support and Serve One Another *(Review Galatians 5:13 with the class.)*

Jesus told us that the distinguishing mark of His followers is love. Paul’s “love chapter,” 1 Corinthians 13, describes what love is like. Love is comforting the bereaved, encouraging the belittled, embracing the berated. Kind actions, a forgiving spirit, a friendly smile, and joyful hospitality are all faces of love at different times. In a sinful world,

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Support One Another

Recognizing the outstanding benefits of service one to another, we can understand why Mrs. White made this statement in *Medical Ministry*: “Christian kindness and earnest consecration are constantly to be manifest in the life.”—Page 204. A person can have all the theological knowledge in the world, but if the person is not kind, loving, and caring about others, what good does this knowledge do? This seems to be very much the theme of Paul in 1 Corinthians 13. It would do us all some good to read that chapter over often, even daily and then ask ourselves how well we are following what Paul says there.

What do the following verses teach us about how we are to relate to one another?

John 13:35

Rom. 15:7

Eph. 4:32

Col. 3:13

1 Thess. 4:18

James 5:16

1 Pet. 3:8

1 Pet. 4:9

1 John 1:7

An outstanding virtue of the Christian is to follow the example of Jesus in loving people despite their weaknesses. Jesus loved His disciples regardless of their many shortcomings and failures. He was caring and inclusive, even when He was rejected and betrayed. We are called to do the same. This can happen only as Christ works in our lives, and He can do that only to the extent that we surrender and allow Him to. As we grasp just how much grace and mercy have been extended to us by God, we can start doing the same to others. Loving the loving and the kind is relatively easy; most anyone can do that. It is when we are called to love the unloving, the ones who are hard to get along with, the ones who treat us nastily and unfairly—then it takes the grace of God working in us.

How well do you love those who are not so easy to love? How can you learn to do better in that area? How would Jesus treat that person? Go and do likewise.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

in which suffering is an ever-present reality, love embraces even more. In this context, support and service take on redemptive qualities; and as we share Christ's love in a self-sacrificing manner, we share in His sufferings. Those who share His suffering also share His reward!

Consider This: Who benefits more when we serve others—the person helped or ourselves? What positive health benefits may we derive as we work for the benefit of others? How is service related to the Christian call to evangelize? How can we be the face of love that invites others into a mutually supportive relationship?

► STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Read the following description of a lonely woman, excerpted from Paul Tournier's book *Escape From Loneliness*. Think of ways to be more sensitive to others' needs—ways to include them in our society.

"She used to turn on the radio in the evening, just as the program ended, . . . in order to hear a human voice wish her good night. Yet, she worked as a secretary. . . . Many visitors from every country came to see [her boss], but in the office they spoke only business. Never was there a word addressed to her as a person. Who she was, how she, a foreigner, had come to Geneva after many ups and downs, the sorrows that still deeply troubled her—nobody cared about these things. Her work was appreciated, and she received every courtesy, but to all intents and purposes she remained alone.

"She lived in one of those great modern buildings, with countless one-room flats, where the neighbors' noises come from every floor. She knew none of those neighbors with whom she rubbed shoulders in the elevator daily, and they did not know her. She had no intimate friends. Her room was even in the same building where she worked. She rarely went out for any reason except for the odd hurried shopping trip. Before falling asleep, she would switch on the radio, '. . . and so, we bid you a very pleasant good night!' It was a human voice, speaking to her."—Page 13.

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Serve One Another

The life of Jesus on earth was a life of service. From the earliest days of His ministry right up until the end, He was serving humanity. In fact, according to the Bible, He still is serving us today (*Heb. 2:17, 18*).

We each have been created with specific spiritual gifts for service. What are the various spiritual gifts and services found in the following verses?

Rom. 12:4–8

1 Cor. 12:1–5

Eph. 4:8–11

As we have seen, as human beings, we were made to love others, as Jesus loved. And when we do this, we do not simply benefit others. We benefit ourselves, as well.

Think for a moment how good you feel when you reach out and help others, when you selflessly give of yourself with no intention of getting anything back for yourself. Something inside us is touched. There is a sense of well-being; we get a satisfaction that, really, nothing else can match. And that is because, by giving of ourselves, we are living as we were meant to live. We are doing what we were originally created to do.

As we have seen, a positive mental outlook on life can have a positive impact on us physically, as well. Our body reacts better when we feel positive, happy, and fulfilled. No wonder, then, that scientific studies have shown positive medical benefits that arise from doing good for others. It makes perfect sense: by helping others, we feel better, and when we feel better, our physical being is improved. What a perfect combination!

“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love” (*Gal. 5:13, NIV*). What does it mean to serve one another in love? How can you take these words and apply them in a practical way in your own life right now? Think of someone whom you can “serve in love” and do it, even if it takes self-denial on your part. After all, there is no question—someone out there needs you.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**Thought Questions:**

1 Why does loneliness have a debilitating effect on our *physical* health? How do the actions of others make us feel isolated or make us feel included?

2 How can we discern who is lonely and in need of a friend? How can we become more sensitive to cries for help and the soul that needs companionship? How can we expand our circle of friends to include people who are new to our churches? What are we doing to reach out to those who are not yet believers?

Activity: There are a number of companies who specialize in producing lists of people who are new to a community. If the request is specific, the list can be limited to those who are moving into a new community from elsewhere and will not include those who simply are moving within the community. By subscribing to one of these services (there will be a fee that probably could be paid from the church's personal ministry fund), you can obtain the addresses. Form a church "welcome wagon" ministry to greet these people into the community. With a little creative effort you even may find vendors who might provide special offers and products to advertise their business that you can deliver along with your invitation to your local church. (Make sure that the vendors and all participants are aware that the scope of your program includes an invitation to your church.) Next, form teams to visit the newcomers.

► **STEP 4—Create**

Just for Teachers: Our final activity explores ways to love and support the dispossessed—gangs, seniors, chronically ill persons, prisoners, homeless people, unemployed individuals, single parents, unwed mothers, or latch-key kids. The only criterion is to focus on a real need in your community—not problems that have no face where you live. It is better to make small plans and do rather than to form grandiose plans and do nothing. The following sample may help you know what to look for.

Sample: Recently, the downtown-planning board member and the parks director of a community addressed youth leaders with this concern: high school/middle school girls are "hanging with" older guys in the parks, smoking, cursing loudly, and scribbling graffiti. Mothers are afraid to take their children to the park, and civic leaders are concerned about the absence of family structure and support for the unruly youth.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Creation,” pp. 44–51, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “Social Purity,” pp. 567–671, in *Counsels on Health*; “Saved to Serve,” pp. 95–107, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “Development and Service,” pp. 497–502, in *The Ministry of Healing*.

“Many feel that it would be a great privilege to visit the scenes of Christ’s life on earth, to walk where He trod, to look upon the lake beside which He loved to teach, and the hills and valleys on which His eyes so often rested. But we need not go to Nazareth, to Capernaum, or to Bethany, in order to walk in the steps of Jesus. We shall find His footprints beside the sickbed, in the hovels of poverty, in the crowded alleys of the great cities, and in every place where there are human hearts in need of consolation.

“We are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and comfort the suffering and afflicted. We are to minister to the despairing, and to inspire hope in the hopeless.

“The love of Christ, manifested in unselfish ministry, will be more effective in reforming the evildoer than will the sword or the court of justice. These are necessary to strike terror to the lawbreaker, but the loving missionary can do more than this. Often the heart that hardens under reproof will melt under the love of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 105, 106.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Dwell more on the idea that, as beings made in the image of God, our first parents were somewhat like Christ, even though they still had a lot to learn. How does this help us understand our need for a Savior? (After all, we can compare ourselves to Jesus and see just how far we have fallen.)
- ❷ Consider your church situation and discuss with your Sabbath School class whether the quality of fellowship could be improved. What can you do to improve the level of fellowship within your church? What could your class do to strengthen relationships within your church body? How well does your church deal with those who have special needs, such as shut-ins?
- ❸ In class talk about the benefits and happiness that come from serving others. Why do we get so much satisfaction from serving others? What things hold us back from doing this more often? How can we, through the power of Christ, fight against the inherent selfishness in us that keeps us focused on ourselves and our own needs rather than on the needs of others? What is your own experience with selfishness? That is, how have you seen in your own life just how ultimately unsatisfactory and empty existence can be when lived selfishly?