

Times of LOSS



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 5:22–24, 35–43; 1 Pet. 5:6, 7; Gen. 37:17–28; Luke 16:13; Rom. 6:16; 1 Cor. 15:26.*

Memory Text: “Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ” (*Philippians 3:8, NKJV*).

The moment Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they experienced their first loss, the loss of innocence. And this lost innocence was replaced with selfishness, conflict, blame, and a desire for control and supremacy over each other.

Shortly after the Fall, they witnessed the first loss of life when they were given animal skins to cover their nakedness. Banned from access to the tree of life lest they would eat and live forever, they also lost their perfect garden home, and years later they lost their son, Abel, at the hands of his brother, Cain. In the end, one of them lost their spouse, and finally the surviving partner lost his or her own life. So many losses came as a result of one decision.

Yes, we all know the reality, and pain, of loss, and most of us feel it the deepest when this loss strikes us in the family. And no wonder, for in the family we have our closest bonds; thus, loss there, in its many varied forms, hits us the hardest.

This week, as we continue to look at family life, we will look at it in the context of the various times of loss.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 1.

Loss of Health

We are thousands of years from the tree of life; and we all feel it, too, especially when it comes to our physical health. Sooner or later, unless we are killed when young by trauma, we all come to the harsh reality of the loss of health.

And, as difficult as the loss of health is, how much more painful when it strikes, not just ourselves, but someone in our own family? How many parents have, especially as they have dealt with an ill child, wished it had been them, the parent, who was sick instead of the child? Unfortunately, we are not given that choice.

What do all these accounts have in common? *Mark 5:22–24, 35–43; Matt. 15:22–28; Luke 4:38, 39; John 4:46–54.*

In each of these cases, and no doubt in so many more, it was a family member beseeching Jesus' help for another family member.

No question, we recognize that we suffer because we live in a fallen world. When sin entered the world, not only did death enter, but also chronic pain, illness, and disease. When faced with a chronic or terminal illness, we may experience shock, anger, despair, and may even feel like shouting, "My God, my God, why have you deserted me? Why are you so far away? Won't you listen to my groans and come to my rescue?" (*Ps. 22:1, CEV*). As David did, we'd do well taking our questions, anger, and pain to God.

In many ways, sickness and suffering will remain a mystery until death is finally defeated at Jesus' return. At the same time, we can glean important truths from God's Word. While Job endured unspeakable pain, he experienced a deeper intimacy with God. He explains, "I heard about you from others; now I have seen you with my own eyes" (*Job 42:5, CEV*). Paul had some sort of chronic illness, and how he dealt with it tells us that suffering can equip us to comfort others, it can give us compassion for others who are hurting, and it can enable us to minister more effectively (*2 Cor. 1:3–5*); that is, if we don't allow it to break us.

Whether we or family members are suffering with illness, what promises can we claim? Why, at times like this, is the reality of Jesus, our Lord, suffering on the cross so important to us? What does Jesus on the cross teach us about God's unfailing love, even amid illness in our family?

Loss of Trust

We are all sinful, dysfunctional people who at some time will prove ourselves to be untrustworthy to someone who trusted us. And who hasn't been the victim of someone else's betrayal of our trust? And, as hard as such a loss of trust can be, it's always so much worse when we betray, or are betrayed, by a family member.

Sometimes it may seem easier to cut our losses and run when we decide the relationship isn't worth the effort of rebuilding. Of course, it's not so easy when it's a family member, such as a spouse. You could even say that one of the purposes of marriage is to teach us the lesson of how to rebuild trust when it is broken.

When trust in a relationship has been compromised, how can both trust and the relationship be healed and saved? *1 Pet. 5:6, 7; 1 John 4:18; James 5:16; Matt. 6:14, 15.*

Rebuilding broken trust is like a journey; you must take it one step at a time. The journey begins with a sincere acknowledgment of the hurt and confession of the truth, whatever the offense and whoever the offender.

When adultery has been the cause of the breach, healing begins when the betrayer confesses. As part of the healing process, confession must accompany complete openness on the part of the betrayer. There can be nothing that remains hidden, or else, when it is found out (and it will be found out), it will destroy the trust that was reestablished. And the second time trust is breached, it becomes even harder to heal than the first breach was.

Rebuilding trust takes time and patience. The more serious the offense, the more time it will take for it to be repaired. Accept the fact that sometimes it's going to feel as if you are moving two steps forward and three steps backward. One day it seems like there's hope for tomorrow, and the next day, you feel like running away. Many have, however, been able to rebuild their broken relationship and developed a deeper, more intimate, more satisfying, and happier marriage.

What principles in healing a marriage can be used in the cases of other kinds of broken trust? At the same time, what might be a situation in which, though there is forgiveness, there is no more trust, nor should there be?

Loss of Trust, Continued

Another way that trust is lost is through family violence. Unthinkable as it is, research reveals that the home is the single most violent place in society. Family violence touches all kinds of families, including Christian homes. Violence is an assault of any kind—verbal, physical, emotional, sexual, or active or passive neglect—that is committed by one or more persons against another in the family.

The Bible includes accounts of family violence, even among God’s people. What are your thoughts and feelings as you read these verses? Why do you think these stories were preserved in Scripture?

Gen. 37:17–28 _____

2 Sam. 13:1–22 _____

2 Kings 16:3, 17:17, 21:6 _____

Abusive behavior is the conscious choice of a person to exercise power and control over another. It cannot be explained or excused by alcoholism, stress, the need to fulfill sexual desires, the need for better control of anger, or any behavior of the victim. Victims are not responsible for causing the abuser to abuse. Abusers distort and pervert love, for “love does no harm” (*Rom. 13:10, NIV*). Professional treatment can facilitate change in an abuser’s behavior but only if the person takes responsibility for the behavior and seeks such help. To those who will open themselves to His presence, *God is able to do exceedingly abundantly* to help abusers stop abusing, to repent of their attitudes and behavior, to make restitution in every way possible, and to embrace the qualities of agape love to heal their own hearts and to love others (*compare Eph. 3:20*).

Try to put yourself in the place of someone traumatized by violence. What words of acceptance, comfort, and hope would you like to hear? Why is it important to provide safety and caring acceptance rather than offering advice about how to live better with the abuser?

Loss of Freedom

God alone knows how many millions, even billions, of people struggle with some form of addiction. To this day, scientists still don't understand exactly what causes it, even though in some cases they actually can see the part of our brain in which the cravings and desires are located.

Unfortunately, however, finding the locations of those addictions is not the same thing as freeing us from the addictions.

Addiction is hard on everyone, not just the addict. Family members—parents, spouses, children—all suffer greatly when any member of the family is under the grip of a power that they just can't seem to get free of.

Drugs, alcohol, tobacco, gambling, pornography, sex, even food—what makes these things into addictions is the habitual and progressive nature of their use or abuse. You are unable to stop even when you know that it is harming you. While enjoying your freedom of choice, you become a slave to whatever you are addicted to, and so you actually lose your freedom. Peter has a simple explanation of what an addiction is and its results: “They promise freedom to everyone. But they are merely slaves of filthy living, because people are slaves of whatever controls them” (2 *Pet.* 2:19, *CEV*).

What are the things that can lead people into addiction? *Luke 16:13, Rom. 6:16, James 1:13–15, 1 John 2:16.*

Sin and addiction are not, necessarily, the same thing. You can commit a sin that you are not addicted to, though so often it can turn into an addiction. How much better, through the power of God, to stop the sin before it turns into an addiction. And, of course, the only lasting solution to the sin and addiction problem is by receiving a new heart. “Because we belong to Christ Jesus, we have killed our selfish feelings and desires” (*Gal.* 5:24, *CEV*). Paul also explains to the Romans what it means to die to that sinful, addictive nature so we can live for Christ (*Rom.* 6:8–13), and then adds, “Let the Lord Jesus Christ be as near to you as the clothes you wear. Then you won't try to satisfy your selfish desires” (*Rom.* 13:14, *CEV*).

Who has not personally known the struggle of addiction, either ourselves or in that of others, maybe even family members? How can you help people realize that it's not an admission of spiritual failure if, even as Christians, they might still need professional help?

Loss of Life

As human beings, we know the reality of death. We read about it, we see it, and we maybe have even come close to facing it ourselves.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:26. How is death described, and why is it described this way?

Who, having lost a loved one, doesn't experience for themselves just how great an enemy death is? On the other hand, the dead have it "good." If, in the Lord, they close their eyes and in what seems like an instant to them, they are raised to immortality. "To the believer, death is but a small matter. . . . To the Christian, death is but a sleep, a moment of silence and darkness. The life is hid with Christ in God, and " 'when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.' "—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 787.

No, it's the living, especially the remaining friends or family members, who know the real pain and grief following a death. The fact is that grief is a natural, normal response to loss. It is the emotional suffering we experience when something or someone we love is taken away.

The grieving process is not the same for everyone, but in general most people go through several stages. The first and most common reaction to the death of a loved one is shock and denial, even when the death is expected. Shock is your emotional protection from being too suddenly overwhelmed by the loss, and it may last from two to three months. You also may go through a time when you are constantly absorbed by thoughts of your loved one, even during common, daily tasks. Often conversations turn to your loss or loved one. This period may last from six months to a year.

The stage of despair and depression is a long period of grief, probably the most painful and protracted stage for the griever, during which you gradually come to terms with the reality of your loss. During this stage, you may experience a range of emotions, such as anger, guilt, regret, sadness, and anxiety. The goal of grieving is not to eliminate all your pain or the memories of your loss. In the final stage of recovery, you begin to have a renewed interest in daily activities and to function normally from day to day.

What comforting thoughts can you find in the following passages? *Rom. 8:31–39, Rev. 21:4, 1 Cor. 15:52–57.*

Further Thought: Many have suffered as a result of their addictions. They have become slaves to their desires and have lost their money, their jobs, their health, and their freedom. But Jesus came to give us freedom from our sin and from all our addictions, and “ ‘if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed’ ” (*John 8:36, NKJV*). Jesus also promised that He would always be with us (*Matt. 28:20, Isa. 43:2*); so, we do not have to wage this war alone. In fact, we must remember that the battle is the Lord’s (*1 Sam. 17:47*), and He promises victory (*1 Pet. 1:3–9*). Today you can begin on the road to victory over any addiction and receive the freedom you desire and what God wants for you. This doesn’t mean you won’t struggle, and it doesn’t mean that, at times, you won’t fail. But the good news is that as long as you don’t give up on the Lord, He won’t give up on you. And yes, there’s nothing wrong with seeking professional help, too. Just as the Lord can use a medical professional to help you with health problems, He can use a professional counselor to help with addiction, as well.

“When difficulties and trials surround us, we should flee to God, and confidently expect help from Him who is mighty to save and strong to deliver. We must ask for God’s blessing if we would receive it. Prayer is a duty and a necessity; but do we not neglect praise? Should we not oftener render thanksgiving to the Giver of all our blessings? We need to cultivate gratitude. We should frequently contemplate and recount the mercies of God, and laud and glorify His holy name, even when we are passing through sorrow and affliction.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 268.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What part does forgiveness play in loss of trust and in the healing of a broken relationship? *Matt. 6:12–15; 18:21, 22*. “Love . . . doesn’t keep a record of wrongs that others do” (*1 Cor. 13:5, CEV*).
- 2 What is the benefit of contemplating and recounting the mercies of God while we’re passing through sorrow and affliction?
- 3 What are practical ways your church family, as a whole, can help those who are struggling with any kind of loss?

God Had Other Plans

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

As she finished high school, Jo-Anna Clayton devised a plan for college. For the first year, she would enroll in a community college near home in the U.S. state of West Virginia. This way she could take basic classes at reduced tuition costs and stay with her parents and three younger sisters. After that, she would transfer to a Seventh-day Adventist school to study nursing.

But the plan collapsed during the summer. She just couldn't find a way to get to the community college from her parents' rural home. Jo-Anna couldn't obtain a driver's license because her parents, natives of Jamaica, were sorting out the family's U.S. residency papers. Her parents couldn't drive her back and forth, and no public buses stopped near her home.

Soon, only a month remained before the start of the school year, and she had nowhere to study.

Then her mother, Suzanne, remembered that family friends worked at Weimar Institute in California. Jo-Anna immediately went online and did some research.

"I don't want to go to California!" she told her mother. "That's too far away."

"You should at least think about it and pray about it," her mother replied.

Later that day, she did pray. "Please don't make me go to California," she said. "If I have to go to California, let one of my friends come with me."

A week later, Jo-Anna spoke with a Weimar recruiter and began to think that maybe God wanted her to study there. But a major barrier stood ahead: her parents could cover only the down payment and the first three months of classes.

Then a series of unexpected events rapidly unfolded.

Jo-Anna applied for and received a scholarship. While assisting people affected by local flooding, she connected with several Adventist physicians who pledged \$500 a month toward her tuition. She raised \$1,800 by writing financial assistance letters to family friends. Soon she had enough money to enroll, and she started classes in the fall.

"I didn't have any doubt that I was where God wanted me to be," she said.

While she missed her family dreadfully for the first few months, the realization that she was at the center of God's will energized her as she worked 25 hours a week to earn more tuition money.



Jo-Anna, now 19, completed her first year debt-free, and she said God still pays her bills.

"I work like crazy, and when I do what I can, I say again, 'Lord, this is what I can provide. Now show me what You can do,' " she said. "He works it out for me."

Part I: Overview

There are some phases of family life we wish we never had to go through. Some are inevitable, but still acutely painful, such as the eventual loss of health and life. Others we never imagined possible. Who would have dreamed that our wedding days, standing before friends and family, also could be the inaugurations of adultery, addiction, or domestic violence? But it happens all the time. This week's lesson ponders some of the more sobering realities of family life that we will be exposed to, and addresses them through biblical and Christian counsel.

There is no doubt that our physical health and well-being are a concern to our Lord. When we suffer, He suffers: "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows" (*Isa. 53:4*). We might have thought that when the Messiah came to the world, He would have had more pressing responsibilities than to spend time healing individuals, but we would be wrong. That is exactly where He spent most of His time. We can assume His heart has not changed in that respect. Therefore, His ever-present concern and care for the sick should forever stamp the ministries of those who take His name.

"I trusted you!" The tone in which one reads those words betrays the reality that they are often spoken following grievous acts of betrayal. Jesus Himself knows what it is like to be betrayed (*Luke 22:48*) and can empathize with all those who have had their trust dashed. Even His words concerning adultery (*Matt. 5:28*), though often read in light of personal holiness, can be seen as an attempt at preserving spousal commitment by wisely preventing in the heart that which the law condemns in the body.

Part II: Commentary

A Suffering God Worldview

At some level, we all must intellectually wrestle with the persistent pain and suffering in the world. Joseph's first serious wrestling was an informal memorial service in which he had to look into the eyes of a mother and tell her about a God who was present when her son (Joseph's best friend in elementary school) suffered brain damage in a car accident and then later ended his very difficult life through suicide. Joseph wasn't yet 20, and neither was his best friend. It is often hard to know what to say in such moments. No doubt it wasn't easy for Joseph. But it would have been

harder if the God whom Joseph was sharing with his best friend's mother hadn't watched His own Son hang and die on a cross. Our God has drunk the dregs of personal pain and suffering and therefore is experientially qualified to speak to our pain. He stands unique among all "gods" in this respect.

As this lesson moves through times of loss that bring us face to face with a range of suffering, it is crucial that the true God—not a god who has insulated himself from suffering—be present in the discussion. In *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006) the late churchman John R. W. Stott famously noted, "I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the cross. . . . In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it?" He continues to say that our sufferings become more manageable in light of His. How true.

Encouraging Examples

Annie Johnson Flint, and the beauty that poured from her arthritic fingers, ministers to us all when we see the loss of health in a loved one or feel it in ourselves. She was orphaned as a child and eventually acquired severe rheumatoid arthritis, which twisted and racked her body with pain. She developed cancer, became incontinent, and later struggled with blindness. Her pain and the sores on her body were so intense that her biographer said that the last time he had seen her, she had had seven or eight pillows cushioning her body. Yet, from this crippled daughter of God came this hymn of praise:

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,
 He sendeth more strength when the labors increase;
 To added affliction He addeth His mercy,
 To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.
 When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
 When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,
 When we reach the end of our hoarded resources
 Our Father's full giving is only begun.
 Fear not that thy need shall exceed His provision,
 Our God ever yearns His resources to share;
 Lean hard on the arm everlasting, availing;
 The Father both thee and thy load will upbear.
 His love has no limits, His grace has no measure,
 His power no boundary known unto men;
 For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
 He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.

When thinking of the loss of life, we should remember the passing of Henry White, Ellen White's oldest son. He had contracted a cold, developed pneumonia, and become deathly ill. Ellen White recounts a

touching moment with her son: “When Henry White, our eldest son, lay dying, he said, ‘A bed of pain is a precious place when we have the presence of Jesus.’ ”—*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 274. In December of 1863, James and Ellen White lost their “sweet singer.” He had requested to be buried next to his little brother, John Herbert, so that they could come up together in the resurrection. He was only 16 years old when he died, but he left an endowment born from experience: the presence of Jesus and the promise of the resurrection. These twin gifts make all things bearable.

The Root of Violence and Adultery

Whether one is a Christian or not, Jesus of Nazareth should be commended by all for His penchant at exposing the roots of human evil. Most people can recognize social problems, such as domestic violence and adultery, but fail at proposing rigorous enough solutions that make a significant difference. Jesus, on the other hand, had no qualms in exposing, and then severing, the root of these vices. As the Bible study guide touches on the subject of family violence and infidelity, we would do well to heed Jesus’ penetrating insight on these subjects.

Jesus traces the seeds of marital infidelity and murder (the apex of violence) to activities that all of us have personally participated in (*Matt. 5:21, 22, 27, 28*). The sobering reality is that the lustful eye and the angry spirit, something we’ve all experienced, places each of us on a trajectory that, if allowed to continue unchecked, terminates in adultery and murder. If that sounds too extreme, consider Jesus’ appeal to the highest court in the land, the Sanhedrin, and eventually to “hell fire” for simply the angry utterances of contempt toward another (*Matt. 5:22*). This language is not hyperbole but the brute realism that murder and adultery are the oak trees within the acorns of lust and anger.

Jesus is both preventive and preemptive when dealing with sexual sin and murder (extreme violence). He brings the “battle to the enemy” at its incipient phase (i.e., the lustful look and the angry word). He is not so naive as to wait to deter the violence of a man half crazed with anger or to wait to expect sexual faithfulness from one completely given over to lustful gawking or imaginations. Imagine a society (family, church, and state) that took the words of Jesus seriously and inculcated from an early age a sense of dread or shame at ever entertaining unchecked anger, and that also disparaged any sensuality that fostered lustful thoughts or looks.

Tragic Testimony

One would hope that homes proclaiming to follow Jesus—Christian

homes—would be exempt from domestic violence. But on the contrary, Benjamin Keyes, with Regent University’s Center for Trauma Studies, deplors the fact that “in Christian marriages we have a much greater frequency of domestic violence than we do in non-Christian homes.”—In Charlene Aaron, “Domestic Abuse in the Church: ‘A Silent Epidemic,’ ” Feb. 5, 2006, retrieved from <http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2016/January/Combating-Domestic-Abuse-in-the-Church>. Surprised? Perhaps stories such as Marleen’s need to be made front and center: “A woman I’ll call ‘Marleen’ went to her pastor for help. ‘My husband is abusing me,’ she told him. ‘Last week he knocked me down and kicked me. He broke one of my ribs.’ Marleen’s pastor was sympathetic. He prayed with Marleen—and then he sent her home. ‘Try to be more submissive,’ he advised. ‘After all, your husband is your spiritual head.’ Two weeks later, Marleen was dead—killed by an abusive husband. Her church could not believe it. Marleen’s husband was a Sunday School teacher and a deacon. How could he have done such a thing?”—Chuck Colson, “Domestic Violence Within the Church: The Ugly Truth,” Oct. 20, 2009, retrieved from <http://www.christianheadlines.com/news/domestic-violence-within-the-church-the-ugly-truth-11602500.html>.

Remind your class that in this week’s lesson the authors who highlighted domestic violence are fully aware that their audience is composed of the Christians sitting in your Sabbath School. This lesson study provides an opportunity to take what has been considered a “silent epidemic” and to expose it, encouraging those under its abuse to seek help today.

Part III: Life Application

Even though this week’s lesson has been occupied with the more somber experiences of life, it touches on what is really happening in homes of church members. It is not always a “happy Sabbath” for some on Sabbath morning. Your Sabbath School class provides opportunity for those who are hurting to share and seek help. Watch for those moments. Discuss a few of the practical ways that churches can become havens for families in trouble. Here are some points to get the discussion started.

- 1. One way to create a healing community within a church is to connect those who have suffered in the past with those suffering in the present. Even those suffering in the present can minister to others suffering in the present. Ask the class to think of ways the local church could accomplish this goal, inspiring them with this quote: “Those who have borne the greatest sorrows are frequently the**

ones who carry the greatest comfort to others, bringing sunshine wherever they go. Such ones have been chastened and sweetened by their afflictions; they did not lose confidence in God when trouble assailed them, but clung closer to His protecting love.”
—*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 274.

2. Violence in families is a problem for so many reasons. But a particularly pernicious one is the fact it is often concealed in silence and denial. Just as the Bible is transparent about the abuses of its notable families (*Gen. 4:8, 37:17–36, 2 Sam. 11:4, 13:14*), violence of all stripes, within families, needs to be addressed for the sake of safety, accountability, and one’s Christian commitment. How can the local church create avenues for victims of abuse to find refuge within its walls?
