

God Loves Freely



SABBATH—DECEMBER 28

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Exodus 33:15–22; Hosea 14:1–4; Revelation 4:11; Psalm 33:6; Matthew 22:1–14; John 10:17, 18.

MEMORY VERSE: “The Lord says, ‘I will forgive them for leaving me. I will love them freely [with no limits]. I am not angry with them anymore’ ” (Hosea 14:4, ICB).



After Jesus woke up from the dead, He “said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these other men love me?’ ”

THREE TIMES PETER said that he didn’t know Jesus. Before Jesus died, He warned Peter that he would say he didn’t know Him (Matthew 26:34). After Jesus woke up from the dead, He “said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these other men love me?’ Peter answered, ‘Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Take care of my lambs.’ Again Jesus said to him, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ Peter answered, ‘Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.’ Then Jesus said, ‘Take care of my sheep.’ A third time Jesus said, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was sad because Jesus asked him three times, ‘Do you love me?’ He said, ‘Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Take care of my sheep’ ” (John 21:15–17, ERV). Jesus asked Peter to serve Him three times. Three was the number of times that Peter said he didn’t know Jesus. So, Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him three times because Jesus wanted to show His other followers that He accepted Peter again.

The question that Jesus asked Peter is the same question that God asks each of us: “Do you love Me?”

Everything depends on our answer to that question.

**GOD LOVES US MORE THAN WE CAN HOPE FOR
(Exodus 33:15–22)**

God asks us, “Do you love Me?” He also freely loves each person. God freely loves you, me, and every other person more than we could imagine in our minds. We can read Bible history to understand that God loves us very much.

Read Exodus 33:15–22 and think about the story that these verses talk about. What do these verses show us about God’s plan for our lives and His love for us? How does verse 19 help us answer these questions in a special way?

Not long after God saved His people from slavery in Egypt, the Israelites worshiped a gold cow. When Moses came down the mountain after talking with God, Moses saw the people worshiping the gold cow. So, Moses threw down the pieces of stone that God wrote the Ten Commandments on. The stone broke in pieces. The people lost the special blessings that God gave them. But God chose to continue to be in a special relationship with Israel anyway.

Many people don’t understand what Exodus 33:19 means: “Then the Lord answered, ‘I will show my love and mercy to anyone I want to. So I will cause my perfect goodness [love and mercy] to pass by in front of you, and I will speak my name, YAHWEH, so that you can hear it’ ” (Exodus 33:19, ERV). Often people think this verse means that God chooses to show mercy to some people, but not other people. Many popular preachers teach this false idea. They say that God chooses some people to be saved and some to be lost. But God doesn’t work that way.

So, then, what is God really saying in Exodus 33:19? God announces that He can give mercy and love freely to people who didn’t do anything to earn those gifts. God will give His love and mercy to Israel even after they worship the gold cow.

This story is one of many stories that shows us that God does more for us than we could hope for or expect. God’s mercy is good news for us all, right?

In what ways has God continued to show His love to you far more than you expected or hoped for?



Moses threw down the pieces of stone that God wrote the Ten Commandments on.

LOVING SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T LOVE YOU BACK (Hosea 14:1–4)



The Bible tells us many times that God is the same as a husband who is married to a cheating wife.

The story about Hosea shows us God's love for sinners. Hosea was God's special messenger. God commanded Hosea to " 'marry a woman who has sex with anyone she wants. Have children with her. Do this [have children] because the people of the land are like [the same as] that kind [type] of wife. They have not been faithful [loyal] to me' " (Hosea 1:2, NlrV). Hosea and his cheating wife were living object lessons. They showed God's love for His people when God's people cheated on Him with other gods. The story about Hosea and his wife shows how God gives His love to people who are not worthy of that love.

The Israelites sin against God again and again. The Bible tells us many times that God is the same as a husband who is married to a cheating wife. God loved His people with perfect love. God was loyal to His people. But Israel did not love God back. Israel served and worshiped other gods. God's people broke their relationship with Him and hurt God very much. At times, their relationship with God looked as if it couldn't be repaired.

Read Hosea 14:1–4. What do these verses show us about God's love for His people?

After God's people sin against Him again, God announces: " 'I will forgive them for leaving me. I will love them freely [with no limits]' " (Hosea 14:4, ICB). The word "freely" comes from the word "nedabah" in the Hebrew language. "Nedabah" means something that a person offers or gives because he wants to. Bible writers use this same word to talk about the offerings that people chose to give freely to God in worship.

In the book of Hosea, God shows His love and loyalty to His people. Israel "cheated" on God with other "lovers." Again and again, Israel broke their relationship with God. But God freely chose to love His people. The people weren't worthy of God's love. The people rejected God's love again and again. But God continued to give His love to His people. No one forced God to love them.

How does the word picture of God as a husband who is cheated on help you see God in a different way? How does this word picture change the way you understand your relationship with God?

LOVE FREELY GIVEN (Revelation 4:11)

God continued to love Israel after Israel sinned against Him again and again. In the same way, God continues to love us after we sin. We aren't worthy of God's love. We also can't earn God's love. God doesn't **need** us. The God of the Bible doesn't need anything (Acts 17:25). God loves you, me, and everyone else because He wants to love us.

Compare Revelation 4:11 and Psalm 33:6. What do these verses tell us about God's freedom?

God made the skies and this earth. So, God is worthy of getting all glory, honor, and praise. God didn't **need** to make this earth or any other planet. Before God made this earth, He already enjoyed a love relationship with His Son, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

Read John 17:24. What does this verse tell us about God's love before He made the earth?

God didn't need to make people so that He could have something to love. God chose to make our planet because He wanted to be close to us and share His love with us.

God also continues to love us after we sin against Him. After Adam and Eve sinned, they were not good enough for God's love anymore. Adam and Eve earned death, not life. But God didn't punish them with death right away. God made a special plan to help save sinners and bring them back to Himself with love. God's saving plan includes us, too.

God continues to love sinners. What does this choice tell us about God's mercy and love? How should this important Bible truth cause us to love God more?



God chose to make our planet because He wanted to be close to us and share His love with us.

GOD INVITES MANY PEOPLE, BUT FEW PEOPLE ACCEPT HIS INVITATION (Matthew 22:1–14)

As we saw, God loves people because He wants to love them. God invites people to love Him back, too. God gives us freedom to choose to accept or reject His love. We see this idea in Jesus' picture story about the wedding feast.



God invites everyone to the wedding feast.

Read the picture story in Matthew 22:1–14. What is the meaning of this picture story?

Jesus tells a picture story about a wedding feast. In the story, a king's son is about to get married. The king sends out his servants to go get the guests who were invited to the wedding. But the guests do not want to come to the wedding (Matthew 22:2, 3). The king sends more servants to the guests to invite them to the feast. But the guests pay no attention to the invitation. Worse, the guests grab the king's servants and kill them (Matthew 22:4–6).

Later, the king punishes the guests who kill some of his servants. Then the king tells the rest of his servants, “ ‘The wedding feast is ready. I invited those people, but they were not good enough [worthy] to come to my feast. So go to the street corners and invite everyone you see. Tell them to come to my feast’ ” (Matthew 22:8, 9, ERV). Jesus then talks about a man who comes to the feast without wearing the proper wedding clothes. The king orders some of his servants to throw the man out into the dark. This part of the picture story shows us that the guests must get wedding clothes from the king before they may come to the wedding feast. Jesus ends the picture story with these strange but powerful words, “ ‘Yes, many people are invited. But only a few [people] are chosen’ ” (Matthew 22:14, ERV).

What do these words mean? The “chosen” are the people who accept God's invitation.

God invites **everyone** to the wedding feast. Any one of us can refuse God's love. We must be free to love. God will never force His love on anyone. Sad to say, we can reject having a loving relationship with God.

God is getting wonderful things ready for the ones who love Him. These things are more wonderful than anything we can imagine in our minds.

Have you accepted God's wedding invitation? How does your life show you are wearing the wedding clothes?

JESUS WAS NAILED TO THE CROSS FOR US (John 10:17, 18)

God invites everyone to enter into a love relationship with Him. First, we must freely accept His invitation if we want to enjoy everything He plans for us in heaven. As we saw yesterday, the king invited many guests to the wedding feast. But not everyone was willing to come (Matthew 22:3).

Shortly before Jesus went to the cross, He said with a sad heart: “ ‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the men who speak for God and throw stones at those [messengers from God] who were sent to you. How many times I wanted to gather [bring together] your children around Me, as a chicken gathers her young ones under her wings. But you would not let Me’ ” (Matthew 23:37, NLT). Jesus wanted to save His people. But the people didn’t want to be saved.

Jesus went to the cross for His people anyway. Jesus died for them and for us. We should die because of our sin. But God Himself (in Jesus) died for our sin so that we may live. God made a way to repair the broken relationship between Himself and sinners. In the meantime, God continues to give us His love. But God doesn’t need to love us. He loves us because He wants to.

Read John 10:17, 18. Compare these verses with Galatians 2:20. What’s the message to us in these verses?

God showed His love for us on the cross. Jesus chose to die for us because He wanted to. No one forced Jesus to give up His life for us. Jesus gave His life to help us without asking us to do something first. His choice was part of God’s saving plan. God the Father and Jesus the Son agreed to this plan before they made the skies and the earth.

“God didn’t make the plan to save us after Adam sinned. God’s saving plan was ‘the mystery hidden for a very long time.’ Romans 16:25 [NLT]. God’s saving plan showed the important rules that were part of God’s government forever. From the beginning, God and Jesus knew that Satan would sin and cause humans to sin, too. Sin was not part of God’s plan for us. But God saw that sin would happen. So, God decided to solve the sin problem. God loved us so much that He made an agreement with His only Son to save us. God made this plan ‘so that everyone who believes in him would not be lost but have eternal [everlasting] life.’ John 3:16 [ERV].”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 22, adapted.



“How many times I wanted to gather [bring together] your children around Me, as a chicken gathers her young ones under her wings.’ ”

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “ ‘To Meet the Bridegroom,’ ” pages 405–421, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*.

“People misunderstand God. This misunderstanding is the same as a dark cloud covering the earth. Men are losing their knowledge about God’s love. People misunderstand God’s love. At this time, we must announce a message from God. This powerful message will save lives. We must help people understand God’s love, mercy, glory, and truth.

“Isaiah talked about this work when he announced, ‘Jerusalem, you have good news to tell. Go up on a high mountain. Jerusalem, you have good news to tell. Shout out loud the good news. Shout it out and don’t be afraid. Say to the towns of Judah, “Here is your God.” Look, the Lord God is coming with power. He will use his power to rule [govern] all the people. Look, he will bring reward for his people. He will have their payment [reward] with him.’ Isaiah 40:9, 10 [ICB].

“The people who wait for Jesus to come must tell people, ‘Look at your God.’ We must announce God’s final message to all the people on the earth. This message will show everyone God’s love and mercy. At the same time, God’s followers must show His glory in their lives. They must show everyone else that God’s mercy changed their lives.

“The Bible truth about Jesus must cause us to do good things for other people. We must share Bible truth, and we must do holy works.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pages 415, 416, adapted.



“The people who wait for Jesus to come must tell people, ‘Look at your God.’ ”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Worse than the thought that there is no God is the thought that God hates us. What if God hated us? How would we behave?
- 2 Why do you think so many people don’t know who God is or understand about His love? How can you help people to better understand God’s love and mercy?
- 3 What message do we need to share today about God’s love? How can you explain this message to someone who doesn’t know God or His love? What proof can you show them to convince them about His wonderful love?
- 4 What things can we do to show God’s love to the people around us?

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS WITH NORTH KOREANS

Seventh-day Adventists from South Korea care about their brothers and sisters in the North. They want them to accept Jesus and be saved. Jesus said, “ ‘This good news about the kingdom will be told in all the world [everywhere on earth]. The people in all countries must know about it. And then the end will come’ ” (Matthew 24:14, WE). Today, many Adventists in South Korea are praying that God will help them to share the Good News about Jesus in North Korea.

The Adventist Church’s work started in the North, in 1904, and then moved to the South. Today, the church has 235,000 members living among 52 million people in South Korea. But no one knows for sure if any Adventists live in the North. 26 million people live in North Korea. Beom Seok Oh is a leader for the Adventist Church. His job includes sharing the Good News about Jesus with people in North Korea. Beom says that God has a people in North Korea. He knows about a North Korean woman who drank a tea made from a special Chinese sauce. The tea made her very sick with a fever. The woman drank the tea every Sabbath morning, so that her boss would let her stay home instead of going to work on the Sabbath. The woman was thrown into jail. She sneaked a Bible into the prison and hid it in a hole in the ground. Then the woman dug up the Bible later so she could read it when no one watched her. Later, the woman escaped to South Korea so that she could worship God freely. Church leaders in South Korea are getting ready for the time when God will let them work in North Korea. Then the church leaders in South Korea will send Bible workers to the North.

Until then, South Korean Adventists take care of people who escape from North Korea. One church leader and his wife from South Korea often visited a man who escaped from North Korea. The man and his wife helped the North Korean man. They cleaned his apartment, cooked his meals, and helped him to become a citizen. After six months, the North Korean man accepted Jesus. Chang-Seop Lee is the pastor of the Adventist church where the church leader and his wife worship.

Another man who escaped from North Korea was worried about his wife and children in the North. The man was so upset, he couldn’t sleep at night. Pastor Lee prayed with him. The man accepted Jesus. This story caused Pastor Lee to help as many people from the North as he can.

Pastor Lee says, “Maybe we can’t go to North Korea to share the Good News now. But we can share the Good News with everyone from North Korea whom we meet today.”

Pray for North Korea. Your 13th Sabbath Offering on March 29. Your gift will help us share the Good News in Korea.

INSIDE
Story
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



The woman sneaked a Bible into the prison and hid it in a hole in the ground.



Chang-Seop Lee