

February 25, 2023



GRATEFUL FOR FREEDOM

A number of years ago religious freedom was severely restricted in some countries that today enjoy freedom. Students who worshiped on the seventh-day Sabbath often faced serious challenges in their academic journey. Sometimes they were threatened with being expelled from school. Many families knelt in prayer asking for God's intervention and direction.

Christina's parents decided to enroll their daughter in a music school. Several days before the scheduled entrance exam, a public announcement went out. The principal of that school announced the decision that Seventh-day Adventist students would not be admitted to the music school. It was known that Adventist students were determined to keep the seventh-day Sabbath holy according to the Bible.

Christina's parents received the news with considerable disappointment. Yet they did not lose heart. They prayed and entrusted the matter in God's hands. With renewed interest they anticipated the day of the entrance exam.

On the appointed day, a member of the examination committee was charged with the specific responsibility of asking each student about the religious beliefs they held. Notwithstanding their aptitude in music, the students who would not attend school on Sabbath would not be granted admission.

Christina waited prayerfully outside the examination room. Right before it was her turn to enter, a teacher from the examination committee was asked to leave and assist with an urgent matter. Christina entered and took her turn. One by one the teachers on the committee tested her musical skills. After the exam was over, Christina left the room. No one had asked her about her religious convictions.

Christina's family praised God for the answered prayers! Now they prayed for guidance in the next step. There remained one more challenge—talking to the homeroom teacher.

To the family's surprise, the teacher accepted Christina in her class and offered not to mark Christina's absences on Saturday. Her desire was to help her students succeed. Each Friday, at the end of the school day, the teacher gave Christina the homework that she would need to do for Monday. Christina had a successful academic year.

It was a time of great joy for many Christians when religious freedom was finally granted and there was no longer instruction in schools on Saturday. God answered in marvelous ways the prayers of His faithful children!

Sabbath FOR STUDY

- » **Memory Text:** "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'" (John 14:6).
- » **Our Beliefs, no. 22, Christian Behavior:** "We are called to be a godly people who think, feel, and act in harmony with biblical principles in all aspects of personal and social life."
- » Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 134-137.

Sunday RESPONDING

- » Read Ephesians 5:1-17.
- » Discrimination against people because of their religious beliefs can be minor, serious, or even life-threatening. It can happen across the world or here at home. It can happen to Christians as well as to people who hold different beliefs. We need to show our gratitude to God for the freedoms we enjoy, and pray for those who do not enjoy these freedoms. We also need to utilize these privileges to share the hope we found in Jesus.
 - When religious freedoms are restricted, what should be the Christian's response? Read Acts 5:29. How can we be Christ's witnesses when political or religious authorities restrict religious freedom? How can we hold firm to God's great commission to share Jesus with everyone?

Monday BIBLE ANSWERS ON CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOR

- » Read Psalm 106:3; Acts 5:12-42; 2 Corinthians 10:5.
- » Part of being a follower of Jesus is showing His love to everyone—especially the person who does not know Him. Jesus has called us to share the "good news" with everyone—those close to home and those far away. We are to love our neighbor. There are no conditions to us loving others. We are to stand for what is right and love others—regardless of how they respond. God's message is a message of love.
 - » What are some ways we can show God's love to unbelievers?
 - » How can you show respect to others who believe differently and also share Jesus?
 - » "It is no part of Christ's mission to compel men to receive Him. . . . But Christ is ever showing mercy, ever seeking to win by the revealing of His love" (Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 541).
 - » Religious Persecution in the Bible?

Stop and think about the Bible stories in the Old and New Testament. The Bible contains stories about religious persecution and intolerance. Look up the references below and match them with the person, persons, or group of people that are mentioned in the stories. All verses are taken from the NKJV.

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|---------------|-------|----------------------------------|---|
| Daniel 6:4-24 | _____ | Stephen | A |
| Acts 8:1-4 | _____ | Gentiles | B |
| Daniel 3:1-30 | _____ | Church (Christians) | C |
| Acts 6:8-7:60 | _____ | Jesus | D |
| Acts 10:40-48 | _____ | Samaritans | E |
| John 11:30-49 | _____ | Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego | F |
| Luke 10:29-36 | _____ | Daniel | G |

Tuesday
REFLECTING

- » Read Romans 12:18.
- » How should a Christian young person respond to the different religious beliefs in the world around us? Do we simply “agree to disagree”? How can we show tolerance and respect for people who hold different beliefs and at the same time share Jesus with them?
- » As the citizens of God’s kingdom in this world, how do we live in society without offending people, turning them off, or being disrespectful? We have a fine line to walk. Jesus calls us to be fearless and bold in standing for Him, yet to always treat others the way we would want to be treated. That means respecting other people’s right to their beliefs just as we want our own rights to be respected.
- » “What we do or say may seem to us of little moment, when, could our eyes be opened, we should see that upon it depended the most important results for good or for evil” (Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 102).

Wednesday
BIBLE INSIGHTS

- » Match the verse with the text. All Bible passages are taken from the New King James Version.
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|----------------------|-------|---|---|
| 1. Acts 4:12 | _____ | “... one God and Father of all ...” | A |
| 2. Romans 12:18 | _____ | “... do not be conformed to this world ...” | B |
| 3. 1 John 2:6 | _____ | “... teaching them to observe all things ...” | C |
| 4. Philippians 2:4 | _____ | “... there is no other name under heaven ...” | D |
| 5. Ephesians 4:4-6 | _____ | “... walk just as He walked.” | E |
| 6. Matthew 28:19, 20 | _____ | “... also for the interests of others.” | F |
| 7. Romans 12:1, 2 | _____ | “... live peaceably with all men.” | G |

Friday
APPLYING

- » Read 1 John 3:23.
- » Interview three to five friends whom you know have a different religious background or outlook than you do. Read the questions below and be prepared to know how to answer them yourself based on what you believe. Here are some Bible answers to these questions:
 1. Hebrews 11:6. 2. John 3:16. 3. John 11:11, 14, 25, 26; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. 4. Micah 6:8; Deuteronomy 30:14-16, 19, 20. 5. John 17:3.

Here are the interview questions:

 1. Do you believe in a God?

 2. If so, what do you think God is like?

 3. What do you think happens to people after they die?

 4. How should people decide what’s right or wrong to do?

 5. What’s the ultimate point of life?

- » Make notes of their answers. Then look back over their answers and think about how their views differ from yours. What could you say about your belief in Jesus and the teachings of His Word that would be meaningful to each of these people?
- » Pray for your friends and ask God to impress their hearts with His truth. Ask Jesus for wisdom to know how you can share Him with your friends.

- » “Doing, not saying merely, is expected of the followers of Christ” (Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 149).

Thursday
CONNECTING

- » Read Matthew 22:37-39.
- » Review the memory text.
- » In world that says that “there are many different truths for different people,” can you believe in “the truth” anymore? Seventh-day Adventist Christians say yes! But in a world with more diversity, more different views and opinions than ever before, we have to think carefully about how to share that truth.
- » While we have to stand firm on what we believe, we also have to respect and love others whose beliefs are different. In fact, love is the key here. Bible doctrines have their place, but the best way to share Jesus with our world is to live His love in everything we do. When people see our love in action, they’ll be ready to hear our message of God’s love.
- » “When those who profess the name of Christ shall practice the principles of the golden rule, the same power will attend the gospel as in apostolic times” (Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 137).
- » What are possible ways you can speak about God’s truth?

