
Weekly Update

Week 1 for Sabbath January 4 2003

Welcome to God's Time Weekly Update. Here, we hope to share many practical ideas for Sabbath School, the weekly lesson study, as well as some devotional thoughts and important events. I pray that it will be of benefit to you as you endeavour to lead worship in its many varied forms.

Devotional Activity

What has 2002 been like for you? Was it a good year, a challenging year or one that you would rather forget? There were many highlights, both internationally and domestically, as well as individually. In a journal book (it is worth investing in one, as many of the activities can be recorded on its pages) list as many as you can that were of significance to you. Next to each one, indicate whether it was positive or negative, how it impacted you and how it has changed you as a person. Be honest – no one else has to see this. When you've finished write a short summary of how 2002 impacted on your life.

Sabbath School

Time Capsule

On a piece of paper write down the following things:

What is my life like today?

What is happening in the world today?

What would I like to do this year?

What would I like to happen this year?

After completing this fold it up, and seal it in an envelope. Put on the front of the envelope the time you are going to open it up (3, 6 or 12 months – up to you), and put in a safe place. When you go over it again, try and recall what has happened since writing it, and do it again.

Lesson

This quarter we begin looking at God's covenant with humanity by looking at why we need this covenant. One of the themes they raised was equality – what kind of equality does humanity have with: a) each other and b) with God? What kind of equality can we achieve in our sinful nature?

Calendar of Events

Historical Events

Born

Died

Dec 29

St Thomas a Beckett murdered 1170 at Canterbury Cathedral

Dec 30

USSR formed, 1922

Rudyard Kipling, 1865

Tiger Woods, 1975

Dec 31

Elizabeth Arden, 1884 Cosmetics executive

Sarah Knauss 1999, the oldest living woman at age 119

Jan 1 New Year's Day

Commonwealth of Australia Inaugurated 1901

Anniversary of Cuban Revolution 1959

Independence Day Haiti 1804

Independence Day Sudan 1956

J Edgar Hoover 1895 FBI director

Jan 2

Dr Christian Barnard performed the first successful heart transplant

Jan 3

Martin Luther excommunicated by Pope Leo X 1521

Howard Carter discovers Tutankhamen's sarcophagus 1924

Cicero 106 BC

Father Joseph Damien, 1840 Christian missionary to lepers

Clement Attlee 1883, British PM 1945-1951

J R R Tolkien, 1892, Author of 'The Lord of the Rings' trilogy

Jan 4

Burma (Myanmar) becomes a republic 1948

Jakob Grimm 1785, German fairy tale collector

Louis Braille 1809, inventor of blind alphabet

T S Eliot 1965, poet aged 76

Weekly Update

Week 2 for Sabbath January 11 2003

Devotional

Last week we wrote down our thoughts on the year 2002. When I did the exercise I find myself even finding the negative things didn't look so bad with hindsight (I still don't see them as wonderful, but they are not so doom and gloom anymore). I hope the exercise helped you find similar things. It got me thinking. We often find many things to criticise and complain about, but we aren't so reticent to give thanks. In your journal, list 5 things that you are thankful for. Go and personally thank at least one person related to what you wrote down. Because this is such an important activity, this one needs to be done every week.

Sabbath School

You'll need to have access to PowerPoint for this activity. Find a selection of pictures from nature. On different slides write a Bible verse relating to rest and casting cares away. Also include other things that you want to happen that morning, including the offering etc. While it is running, have some background, soothing music playing, and don't stand up the front. Be prepared for some commotion from people wondering what is going on, but the aim is to get people to slow down, rest, meditate and forget the worries of the week.

Lesson

If God were to make a specific covenant with you, what would it be? What are the benefits to you? What have you done so far to keep this covenant?

Calendar of Events

Historical Events

Born

Died

Jan 5

x-rays discovered by German physicist Wilhelm Roentgen

Kiowa Indians report stars falling, 1834

William Wills, Australian explorer, 1834

Swiss Anabaptist reformer Felix Manz drowned 1527

King Edward the Confessor of England, 1066

Catherine de'Medici, queen mother of France, 1589

Sir Earnest Shackleton, Antarctic explorer, 1922

George Washington Carver, 1943

Jan 6

Charles Spurgeon converted to the Baptist faith at age 16, 1850

Joan of Arc, 1412

Fictional character Sherlock Holmes, 1854

Japan's Emperor Hirohito dies after 62 year reign, 1989

Jan 7

University of Glasgow founded, 1450

Galileo discovers 4 satellites of Jupiter, 1610

Jan 8

Marco Polo, 1324

Galileo, 1642

Jan 9

Jan 10

League of Nations established 1920

UN first General Assembly meets, 1946

Jan 11

East-Pakistan becomes independent state of Bangladesh, 1972

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Weekly Update

Week 3 for Sabbath January 18 2003

Devotional

What does God look like? Be creative – draw what God looks like. Having some difficulty, see Psalm 18; Daniel 7 and many passages of Revelation.

Sabbath School

I was sorting through some stuff the other day, and came across an old pamphlet on Sabbath School. On the back was the following poem by Gwendoline Smart, entitled *Our Sabbath School*. It first appeared in *S.S. Worker* in March 1950.

This is our Sabbath School – a dear, remembered place;
Not just these walls, e'en though these walls be dear.
It is the hearts that burn and glow within,
For just so many hearts make up a school.

This is the sweetest hour of sacred time
Wherein we gather round the feet of God,
And hear His words, so charged with life and hope,
So bountiful with love, fall from His page.
These pages we have pondered every day;
Like pearls the truth has shone beneath our eyes;
And now we share the treasure we have found;
This is the breath, the life, of Sabbath School.

'Tis here that we have learned to give to God
Our offerings of sacrifice and prayer,
That we may bridge the terror of the dark
From heathen lands, unto the gates of heaven.
We scan for miles His miracles of grace
Our where the seas of blue wash white the sands,
And offer Him our means, our prayers, our sons,
From this – our Sabbath school.

These things we do that our dear school may live –
Our daily study is her beating heart,
Which ceasing, makes her pulse grow tired and slow –
Not just for record but to fill men's hearts.
We will remember how our school was formed,
And we will hearken to Thy prophet's words-
That for the future we have nought to fear,
Remembering the leading in the past,

Take this our school within Thy keeping hands,
A sacred, chosen vessel unto Thee.
For those who pray and for the ones who teach,
For those who lead and those who lift their songs,
Grant wisdom and a special gift of grace,
Grant power and understanding of the heart.
May this be home – where we can find deep peace
And fellowship among the friends of God.
This is our Sabbath school, a dear, remembered place.
Dear Master, may it be the gate to heaven
To every weary soul who worships Thee.
Here may our children learn to love Thee well,
And here may our own souls find Thee most dear;
May it shine brightly as the days grow dark.
Our highest aim: to hear another say,
“ ‘Twas in this Sabbath school I found my Lord.”

Lesson

What do you say to Australians suffering from drought who don't even have the hope of a rainbow at present? Would you be able to do what Noah did if God asked you to do the same today?

Weekly Update

Week 4 for Sabbath January 25 2003

Devotional

At present there is a serious bushfire crises in my hometown of Canberra. This last Sabbath was extremely hot, low humidity (only 5%), and hot northerly winds. As the day progressed the smoke got heavier, first turning the sun into a florescent pink circle, and then enveloping it, leaving us in darkness equivalent to night time. Many have lost they houses, some have had a miracle, and many of us are preparing in case we come in the line of fire. And what would I take if a fire did occur? This question remained on my mind for a while. I certainly have clothes, a large library of books, useful information and work on my computer, as well as my music, keyboard and cd collection. In the madness of a rushed exit what would I take? What would you take? It is amazing how a crises forces us to think about what is most valuable to us. Put yourself in that scenario and work out what you would take. If everything else was destroyed how would you feel about it?

Sabbath School

One day, when I was a freshman in high school, I saw a kid from my class was walking home from school. His name was Kyle. It looked like he was carrying all of his books. I thought to myself, "Why would anyone bring home all his books on a Friday? He must really be a nerd." I had quite a weekend planned (parties and a football game with my friends tomorrow afternoon), so I shrugged my shoulders and went on.

As I was walking, I saw a bunch of kids running toward him. They ran at him, knocking all his books out of his arms and tripping him so he landed in the dirt. His glasses went flying, and I saw them land in the grass about ten feet from him. He looked up and I saw this terrible sadness in his eyes.

My heart went out to him. So, I jogged over to him and as he crawled around looking for his glasses, and I saw a tear in his eye. As I handed him his glasses, I said, "Those guys are jerks. They really should get lives."

He looked at me and said, "Hey thanks!" There was a big smile on his face. It was one of those smiles that showed real gratitude.

I helped him pick up his books, and asked him where he lived. As it turned out, he lived near me, so I asked him why I had never seen him before. He said he had gone to private school before now. I would have never hung out with a private school kid before. We talked all the way home, and I carried some of his books. He turned out to be a pretty cool kid. I asked him if he wanted to play a little football with my friends. He said yes. We hung out all weekend and the more I got to know Kyle, the more I liked him, and my friends thought the same of him.

Monday morning came, and there was Kyle with the huge stack of books again. I stopped him and said, "Boy, you are gonna really build some serious muscles with this pile of books everyday!" He just laughed and handed me half the books.

Over the next four years, Kyle and I became best friends. When we were seniors, we began to think about college. Kyle decided on Georgetown, and I was going to Duke. I knew that we would always be friends, that the miles would never be a problem. He was going to be a doctor, and I was going for business on a football scholarship.

Kyle was valedictorian of our class. I teased him all the time about being a nerd. He had to prepare a speech for graduation. I was so glad it wasn't me having to get up there and speak.

Graduation day, I saw Kyle. He looked great. He was one of those guys that really found himself during high school. He filled out and actually looked good in glasses. He had more dates than I had and all the girls loved him. Boy, sometimes I was jealous. Today was one of those days. I could see that he was nervous about his speech. So, I smacked him on the back and said, "Hey, big guy, you'll be great!" He looked at me with one of those looks (the really grateful one) and smiled. "Thanks," he said.

As he started his speech, he cleared his throat, and began. "Graduation is a time to thank those who helped you make it through those tough years. Your parents, your teachers, your siblings, maybe a coach... but mostly your friends. I am here to tell all of you that being a friend to someone is the best gift you can give them. I am going to tell you a story."

I just looked at my friend with disbelief as he told the story of the first day we met. He had planned to kill himself over the weekend. He talked of how he had cleaned out his locker so his Mom wouldn't have to do it later and was carrying his stuff home. He looked hard at me and gave me a little smile. "Thankfully, I was saved. My friend saved me from doing the unspeakable."

I heard the gasp go through the crowd as this handsome, popular boy told us all about his weakest moment. I saw his Mom and dad looking at me and smiling that same grateful smile. Not until that moment did I realize its depth.

Never underestimate the power of your actions. With one small gesture you can change a person's life. For better or for worse. God puts us all in each other's lives to impact one another in some way.

Lesson

What's in a name? Find out what your name means. How accurate of you is that definition? Is there another name that is closer to who you are? If God would change your name what would He change it to?

Weekly Update

Week 5 for Sabbath February 1 2003

Devotional

Friends are very important people in our lives. List your 3 most important friends at the present moment. Do you remember when you first became friends? What made it possible for your friendship to develop? Have they done anything specifically special for you? Have you done anything specifically special for them? Think of something you can do (eg. a card, a letter, an e-mail, going out for a meal) to say thank you to these people for being your special friends. How have these people helped you understand God?

Sabbath School

A farmer had some puppies he needed to sell. He painted a sign advertising the pups and set about nailing it to a post on the edge of his yard. As he was driving the last nail into the post, he felt a tug on his overalls. He looked down into the eyes of a little boy. "Mister," he said, "I want to buy one of your puppies."

"Well," said the farmer, as he rubbed the sweat off the back of his neck, "these puppies come from fine parents and cost a good deal of money." The boy dropped his head for a moment.

Then reaching deep into his pocket, he pulled out a handful of change and held it up to the farmer. "I've got thirty-nine cents. Is that enough to take a look?"

"Sure," said the farmer. And with that he let out a whistle, "Here, Dolly!" he called. Out from the doghouse and down the ramp ran Dolly followed by four little balls of fur. The little boy pressed his face against the chain link fence. His eyes danced with delight. AS the dogs made their way to the fence, the little boy noticed something else stirring inside the doghouse. Slowly another little ball appeared; this one noticeably smaller. Down the ramp it slid. Then in a somewhat awkward manner the little pup began hobbling toward the others, doing its best to catch up "I want that one," the little boy said, pointing to the runt. The farmer knelt down at the boy's side and said, "Son, you don't want that puppy. He will never be able to run and play with you like these other dogs would." With that the little boy stepped back from the fence, reached down, and began rolling up one leg of his trousers. In doing so he revealed a steel brace running down both sides of his leg attaching itself to a specially made shoe. Looking back up at the farmer, he said, "You see sir I don't run too well myself, and he will need someone who understands."

Lesson

It is time for an election. Each individual needs to make promises about what they would do if they were elected. Give individuals a few minutes each to make their case for election for Prime Minister of Sabbath School. Once all have made their case its time to vote. Each individual has 3 votes. If there is a tie, have only those people go back into the draw, where everyone has another vote. You can do the

voting one of two ways: simply by raising hands and counting them at the time, or by having people write their 3 choices on a piece of paper, with someone else counting while you continue with the lesson. Discuss which promises were believable, and which were hopeful dreams. How were people convinced of different promises?

Weekly Update

Week 6 for Sabbath February 8 2003

Devotional

Having the opportunity to move has given me a chance to look at property, houses and flats lately. Jesus said that He has gone to prepare a place for us, and He now wants to know what you would like at your place. Would you like to be on a mountain, or next to the beach? Would you prefer a cooler climate or a more humid one? Do you want a large garden, or acreage for animals? Would you like a study, or a gazebo? Spend time contemplating things you would like in your house when you get to heaven. Remember, you have eternity to enjoy it.

Sabbath School

If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof over your head and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75% of this world.

If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish someplace, you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy.

If you woke up this morning with more health than illness, you are more blessed than the millions who will not survive this week.

If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation, you are ahead of 500 million people in the world.

If you can attend a church meeting without fear of harassment, arrest, torture, or death, you are more blessed than 3 billion people in the world.

If you can read this message, you just received a double blessing in that someone was thinking of you, and furthermore, you are more blessed than over two billion people in the world who cannot read at all!!!

How blessed are you?

Lesson

How does a marriage work? Get people into pairs, forming 'married' couples. Ask them how they think their marriage would go (some might be total failures to the perfect couple). In answering this question, get them to find out their common interests, what things they disagree on, as well as what chemistry they think they have between them. After discussing everyone's responses, ask each person to then ask the same question about them and God. What needs to change if each individual's relationship with God is going to improve?

Weekly Update

Week 7 for Sabbath February 15 2003

Devotional

This week we celebrate Valentine's Day. The true romantics will have planned for this day for a while, and the rest of us are only starting to think about what we going to do on this (if we are going to do anything at all). All of us have at least one special person, even if we aren't romantically linked, that is very close to us. If you are feeling poetic, write a poem of how you feel about them, and of how much they mean to you. Like Valentine's cards, you don't need to put your name to it, but leave it with them, so that they have a special valentine this year. Next, write a valentine's card to God, again sharing how you regard Him. Finally, imagine what God would put in a valentine's card for you.

Thank God for the very special people in your life, and then ask God to help you find people that aren't as fortunate. They are all around, and are waiting for someone like you to be their friend.

Sabbath School

Last week we saw the death of 7 astronauts only minutes away from returning home. They had dedicated their own lives, spending years in training, assessing the risks, and made the sacrifices necessary to spend time in space. What risks do we take to be Christians? What training do we go through to be Christians?

Recognise the many careers individuals in your congregation hold. Ask them to share what some of the occupational risks are in their job, and why they continue to work in that area with those risks.

Lesson

Your group has been asked to write a set of laws for an area known as Arbitrary land. Consider both how the laws are going to be enforced, and what purpose they serve. How easy was it to get agreement on the laws? What intentions did each participant have for their desired laws? Are they enforceable?

Weekly Update

Week 8 for Sabbath February 22 2003

Devotional

It is 61 years this week since Singapore fell, and the bombing of Darwin began. There seems to be nothing that stirs fear more than the threat, and its reality, of war. It seems that we desire to have peace. How do you define peace? How does the world seem to understand peace at the moment? What can you do to bring peace to a) your neighbours b) your church and c) to your family?

Thank God for the peace that you have in your life at the moment. Contemplate all the different things that He does that make sure that your life isn't full of chaos.

Sabbath School

A smile costs nothing, but gives much.

It enriches those who receive, without making poorer those who give.

It takes but a moment, but the memory of it sometimes lasts forever.

None is so rich or mighty that he can get along without it and none is so poor but that he can be made rich by it.

A smile creates happiness in the home, fosters goodwill in business and is the countersign of friendship.

It brings rest to the weary, cheer to the discouraged, sunshine to the sad and it is nature's best antidote for trouble.

Yet it cannot be bought, begged, borrowed, or stolen, for it is something that is of no value to anyone until it is given away.

Some people are too tired to give you a smile.

Give them one of yours, as none needs a smile as much as he who has no more to give.

Author Unknown

Lesson

Get everyone to write some rules for what should happen in your Sabbath School room. Consider talking, appropriate clothing, and what activities can occur there. Then get each person to select one of their rules, and put it up on a board. Once you have got one from everyone, tell them that those rules are enforceable from this moment. So, if one of the rules was bare feet only, all people should then take off

their shoes! Carry on your lesson as you normally would, then discuss how easy it was to follow those rules. Were there some that conflicted with each other? Did it create harmony for people? Did it give them 'freedom', or did they feel constrained?

Weekly Update

Week 9 for Sabbath February 28 2003

Devotional

One of the most recognised Christian books, apart from the Bible, is John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. I'm sure that all of you have read it, and perhaps have a copy in your own library (<http://bible.christiansunite.com/bun/pilgrim01.shtml> is one of a number of sites to refresh your memory of the story). In it, Pilgrim goes on a journey, going through good times, as well as some extremely tough times. One of the criticisms of the book, and of Bunyan, was that he gave no specific reason as to why Christian began his journey. As you contemplate your journey with God, what made you decide to begin that journey? Was it an easy decision? Was it something that just happened over time, or did you have a 'Damascus experience' like Paul?

Thank God for initiating your journey.

Sabbath School

THE POEM

I knelt to pray but not for long,
I had too much to do.
I had to hurry and get to work
For bills would soon be due.

So I knelt and said a hurried prayer,
And jumped up off my knees.
My Christian duty was now done
My soul could rest at ease.

All day long I had no time
To spread a word of cheer.
No time to speak of Christ to friends,
They'd laugh at me I'd fear.

No time, no time, too much to do,
That was my constant cry,
No time to give to souls in need
But at last the time, the time to die.

I went before the Lord,
I came, I stood with downcast eyes.
For in his hands God held a book;
It was the book of life.

God looked into his book and said
"Your name I cannot find.
I once was going to write it down...
But never found the time"

Now do you have the time to pass it on?

Lesson

What is the perfect Sabbath? Give each individual a piece of paper, and ask them to create an order from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday, of what they would do on their perfect Sabbath. Get each individual to share the main highlight of the day for him or her. PLEASE be honest. If people say sleeping in, ask them reasons why. Discuss why the Sabbath doesn't seem to be a joy for many people.

Weekly Update

Week 11 for Sabbath March 15 2003

Devotional

With the threat of war very imminent, the question that has been asked of many people of all generations has been whether you would go to war, as a soldier, either voluntarily or conscripted. If that question was asked of you today would you go? State your reasons. If you didn't go, would you be involved in any other aspect of war (humanitarian or home front)? What about if the circumstances were different (eg. Your country was invaded)? If you did, what would you be leaving behind? Was it an easy decision? What would your family think if you didn't come back?

Sabbath School

If you don't have one, get a hold of a promise box, or even make one yourself. On pieces of paper have Bible verses that contain promises. As everyone enters, give them one. Give them some time to meditate and reflect on that promise. Ask if anyone would like to share their promise and any significance it may have for that individual. Spend some time on particular promises, ending the session with thanks to God for His promises.

If no one is prepared to share, ask whether anyone believes or trusts in God's promises. We've all had doubts at some stage in our journey, not believing in the promises. If that is the case, spend some time in prayer asking that we may see some evidence of God's promises during the week.

Lesson

This week the lesson highlighted the relationship with God as key to understanding the covenant. Discuss the pros and cons of each human relationship (parent-child, friends, lovers) as an analogy of the relationship between God and us. Use this to help answer the question why we need a mediator?

Weekly Update

Week 12 for Sabbath March 22 2003

Devotional

Deadlines. Our lives revolve around deadlines. We need to get that assignment in on time for school. Your boss wants that proposal on his desk by 5pm today. You need to prepare food for tonight, hopefully before everyone starts complaining that they are hungry. We need to wake up with the alarm to make it to work on time.

Deadlines are things that often define our time, and thus what we can choose to do, and achieve. This week write down what you do every hour of every day. What deadlines had to be met? What deadlines were important? Which were important, but not essential? What time did you spend with God? Has God set a deadline on you?

Sabbath School

Recently a Catholic committee investigated a 'crying' Mary in Western Australia. (See <http://www.abc.net.au/pm/s793404.htm> for more details on the story). They concluded that it wasn't a miracle, due to the fact that other factors couldn't be discounted. They were at pains to explain that this doesn't deny the possibility that it could be a miracle, but that because they couldn't discount other 'natural' phenomena, it couldn't be declared a miracle.

How do we define what a miracle is? Discuss this, coming up with a list of criteria to for something to be a miracle. Choose some miracles of the Bible – do they fit the criteria? Why, why not? Have you had any miracles in the last week?

Lesson

Take the time to reflect on your life. Have there been times where you have tried to 'earn' your own salvation? Are you still carrying burdens that weren't supposed to be carried by you? Make a large cross for your group to look at. Let each individual write on a piece of paper their faults burdens, before coming before the cross to pray for forgiveness, and accept the merits of Christ's blood. Each person should then put this paper on the cross, and with a dark marker (red if possible), have it crossed out so that no one can read that paper again.

Weekly Update

Week 13 for Sabbath March 29 2003

Devotional

What makes you happy? List all the things that make you happy. After that work out whether it is something that always makes you happy, usually makes you happy, sometimes makes you happy, or only occasionally makes you happy. This week spend some time enjoying the things that make you happy, and plan a certain time every week when you can call your happy time.

Thank God for the many happy things in your life, and thank the many people that also make your life happy.

Sabbath School

IS IT WORTH IT ALL? By Janet Marie Moreland

Some folks say, "Why seek ye souls in another land? Can't you see the ones at hand? What challenge do you see there that with any here won't compare?"

But to them I say, "I seek souls in another land, bound with darkness and fear, for few there are who say, "Use me to help them hear."

In a land with a culture oh so sweet, born to an arrangement all so neat, it's hard to leave and turn our feet in a direction our Lord to meet.

But in the end, when our task is done, and our Saviour calls us home, we see souls for Jesus won, and our hearts burst with joy to hear our Saviour say, "welcome home, Children dear."

Copyright 1971 accessed from <http://www.sacm.net/opinion/janet/worth.html>

Lesson

This quarter we have looked at the Covenant, and it's meaning for us in the twenty-first century. This final lesson takes us to the benefits for humanity now and in the future. Get your class into equal sized groups, each to look at the benefits suggested in the lesson, to answer the following questions: why is it a benefit? How does one experience that benefit? Why do we not experience those benefits more often?

Weekly Update

Week 14 for Sabbath April 5 2003

Devotional

There are a plethora of surveys and questionnaires that are out there, designed to help you understand yourself and where you fit into the world. (See www.emode.com to find these sorts of 'tests' that range from useful to the humorous). If you were asked to write one of these 'tests' to rate how 'Christian' someone was, what questions would you include. After writing all the questions, answer it yourself. Where did you rate? Use Bible characters and see how they rank.

Thank God that He doesn't rely on a standard test for us to qualify for His kingdom.

Sabbath School

You probably very familiar with Max Ehrmann's poem *Desiderata* (see www.desiderata.com), but few of us know who Ehrmann is. In fact, most people are forgotten soon after they die, except for those close to them. Take the time to think about how you want to be remembered when you die. If you were to die tonight, how do you think people would remember you now. If there is a difference between those two answers, ask yourself why, and what would change that. See <http://www.wvu.edu/~lawfac/jelkins/lp-2001/ehrmann.html> for more information about Ehrmann.

Lesson

With this year's theme being *United in the Wonder of God's Grace* we begin a quarter of lessons that goes to the heart of the gospel – forgiveness. Ask the question are you forgiven. How do you know? When did you know? Describe the process of coming to that point.

Weekly Update

For Sabbath May 3

Devotion

It is often at this time of year that we either love the weather or hate it. The cold, the wet, the windy. List all the types of weather that occur in your town, and next to it rate it out of ten (10) for how much you love it. Then spend some time meditating how God is like that type of weather.

Sabbath School

May 1, known as May Day, has in recent times been associated with the working class. This week celebrate the 'workers' of the church. Recognise the many efforts of members of the local congregation, including the pastor. Also take the time to thank our union, division and world-church leaders by listing the qualities that we like in our leaders (perhaps you have someone specific in mind), and then choose one of these leaders to send an e-mail with these qualities that we admire in this person.

Lesson

We've all struggled with guilt at some point or another. Though the biggest question we face is how to deal with guilt as Christians, I want to ask whether there are any positive uses for guilt in our lives. How do we distinguish between the positive and the negative?

Weekly Update

For May 10

Devotion

It's time to get those colouring pencils out again. What does your mother look like? Try to capture the essence of your mother, and what she has done for you. Send this to her to express how grateful you are to her. (if your mother has died, put it into a place where you can see it regularly to remind you of her).

Sabbath School

Mother's Day – there are flowers, cards, talks, and many things that one could do this Sabbath to celebrate our mothers. But I'm going to suggest something more challenging – seeing God as our mother. We pray 'our Father. . .' in the light of what our fathers are like, but nearly all of us have had an even more special bond with our mothers. What are the qualities of mothers that we find in God? Did they agree with ones found in the Bible? Is (or has it been) difficult to see God as your mother? Why/why not?

Lesson

With the issues raised in the lesson, discuss the contemporary furore over our Governor-General, Dr Peter Hollingworth, by viewing it from his position, the victim's position, and the church's position. Try to keep the discussion from getting side-tracked into a debate about whether he should stay or go. Conclude by asking can we forgive Dr Hollingworth, and if so, how do we forgive him.

Weekly Update

For Sabbath May 17

Devotional

It's that time of year again – financial analysts, political experts and television news shows mull over the details of government budgets, and what they mean for the average person. This week we're going to spend time working out our spiritual budget. How much income have you had this week? List all of the blessings you have received, and the time you spent in personal devotions. Then list all the expenses: all the work you have done, the commitments you have made. If you're like me the picture is probably not looking so great on the balance, but that shouldn't surprise us. If blessings did not outweigh the expenses ask yourself why that is? Take the time to thank God for the many blessings He has given you in this week alone.

Sabbath School

In Ephesians 6 Paul uses the analogy of a soldier to represent the Christian life. If you were to write the same letter to someone today, what illustration would you use? How would the individual be 'dressed'?

Lesson

Define love. Where does forgiveness fit into this definition? Can we forgive without loving a person? Can we love a person without forgiving them?

Weekly Update

For May 24

Devotion

Just lately, they have been improving the electricity supply to my local area. To ensure worker safety they have cut the power. Without any power there wasn't a lot that I could do, as many objects in the house require electricity, either as a primary source (computer) or secondary source (cooking food). If you had your spiritual power cut, what couldn't you do while it was 'out'? Do we rely enough on God that we would have little else to do?

Sabbath School

This week we've been asked as a community to recognise the importance of charities and the work they do. What happens in your local community? What projects is your church involved in? What are some of the international activities going on at the moment? Take the time to thank the people who give of themselves to helping the needs of others.

Lesson

Many countries have an oath of allegiance, which demonstrate their loyalty to the country and all it stands for. Write an oath for your allegiance to God. Why did you include what you did? Do you meet those requirements? Why/why not?

Weekly Update

For May 31

Devotion

Recently I saw a competition where the dogs had to look like their owners (or is it the other way round?). Choose a dog that you think reflects who you are, listing the qualities that you have in common. Then think about what sort of dog God would have. Again list the qualities that both would have, and then ask what the difference between the two dogs is and whether those differences reflect the difference between us and God.

Sabbath School

Last week we were reminded of the dangers of missionary work, with the beheading of an Australian missionary in the Solomon Islands. We often hear of the success stories in mission segments, but take the time this week to highlight the challenges of going overseas (or even staying here), the cost (physically, emotionally, spiritually) and the 'ugly' side of the work. Spend time in prayer for all the missionaries around the world.

Lesson

We often use the term 'reverence', particularly when discussing worship, but what does it actually mean? This week the lesson also talked about 'fear'. Often when we ask for forgiveness we have the 'fear' that the other person is going to reject us. All the stories we usually get told tell us the good outcomes, where the person was forgiven and the damage minimised, but what about the occasions when that doesn't happen. What do you do?

Weekly Update

For June 7

Devotion

The majority of the New Testament are letters written to different churches, addressing their specific needs. If you were considered an apostle, what would you include in a letter to your church? What are the positives? What are the current issues that need to be addressed? What advice would you give? What can you do to personally to address these issues?

Sabbath School

Celebrate Winter, with a winter program. What is it about winter that we like? Ask members to share what they like about winter. If you didn't have those things, what would winter be like?

Lesson

Thursday's lesson asked us to consider from all angles a scenario of forgiveness and civil law. Open this up right for discussion, because there are many points to consider and discuss. We often talk about God being just, but how do we reconcile this with the idea of Him being a forgiving, graceful God?

Weekly Update

For June 14

Devotion

Last weekend was a long weekend in many parts of Australia. What did you do? If we decided to have a public holiday for God during the year, what would you do on that weekend?

Sabbath School

Like many people at this time of year I've succumbed to the flu. With the Sars outbreak still not completely eradicated, and many other illnesses that have no known cure, much less prevention, take the time to pray for those that are suffering with illness at this time. You know it is never pleasant, and it often takes a toll on our spiritual lives as well. Think of some ways that we can help those that are sick in practical ways at this time.

Lesson

Words and thoughts. If one sees the Old Testament as the law on our words, then the New Testament talks about the law on our thoughts. We may have some control over our words, but do we have any control over our thoughts? Discuss these observations in relation to why we forgive and how we should forgive.

Weekly Update

For June 21

Devotion

For every day this week list all your activities that you did. Then on each day ask yourself what would you have been able to do if you didn't have a) sight b) hearing c) smell d) touch e) speech. Take the time to thank God for the senses that you do have, and the opportunities to enjoy them.

Sabbath School

Celebrate the longest night of the year by thinking about the moon. See <http://www.seds.org/nineplanets/nineplanets/luna.html> for a lot of good information about the moon. The moon offers many analogies to the Christian life. Eg. the surface of the moon is quite rugged, and it is in its full phase we can see the 'flaws' in it, but it doesn't bother us as it provides the light. Think of some other analogies that remind us to be lights in the dark night.

Lesson

We've all heard this week's lesson said to us many times. We even know some of the things we should do. But all of us know at least one person (maybe even ourselves) that are so selfless that they don't give anything to themselves. And many of them die young because they don't take full care of themselves, they so busy doing other things. How do we balance this week's lesson, and not working ourselves into an early grave?

Weekly Update

For June 28

Devotion

In the latest Hollywood movie to hit our screens, *Bruce Almighty* asks the question we have all asked since we were kids – if we were God for a week what would we do? Plot out what you would do this week if you were God, and then ask the obvious question – why isn't God doing that at the moment? Does it matter? Consider it in conjunction with this week's lesson as well.

Sabbath School

This quarter our thirteenth Sabbath offering goes to the South Pacific Division. Because it is our backyard take the time to consider the work in your local community. What needs are there to meet? What programs are already running? What are you local members involved in? Celebrate this work and encourage them in the challenges ahead.

Lesson

We conclude this quarter by looking at faith. We often use the term 'faith', but what does it actually mean when we use that term. Use the Bible hall of faith (Hebrews 11) to help you come to this definition.

Weekly Update

For July 5

Devotion

We often joke about winning Lotto, thinking that those millions would certainly help our lives. What would you do if you did win all that money? How would you react if you won that money without even putting an entry in?

Sabbath School

In many churches there have been changes in personnel as the new church year begins. It is a chance for new ideas, new perspectives and new challenges. Have a special program introducing all the Sabbath School leaders, their goals and dreams, their personal interests and what they want to bring to Sabbath School. Have a special dedicatory prayer for all those leading out in Sabbath School this year.

Lesson

We begin a new quarter looking at the book of Hebrews. This book was written for early Christians with their Jewish origins in mind. Twenty centuries later we are rarely mistaken as offshoots from the Jewish religion. What is the relevance of such a book today? Discuss what distinctions need to be made between Jews and Christians, which ones have been made, and what similarities do we have.

Weekly Update

For July 12

Devotion

A few weeks back I asked what would you do if you were God for a day. I'm going to ask a question that very few ask. Imagine that you have been asked to be the Devil for a day. What would you do? What wouldn't you do?

Sabbath School

One of the most popular Sabbath School activities is simply having a good sing-a-long. Ensure that there is a musician that is confident enough to take favourites. When someone chooses a song ask them to share what makes it so special to them.

Lesson

Over the last century the role of monarch has changed dramatically. How would you define the current role of the monarch? How does this correlate to God as King?

Weekly Update

For July 19

Devotion

Sadly, last week those conjoined twins lost their lives on the operating table. It started me thinking what it would be like to be a conjoined twin. I then thought perhaps I already have. It is something that can happen when we're Christians. Instead of letting God into our lives totally, we just attach Him to the side of us, hoping that having Him there will be all we need. Unfortunately, we all know the reality. It becomes an unnecessary difficulty. And, as Rev 3:16 says, it would be far better if we were not conjoined at any part of the body, both for our sakes and for God's. Ask God this week to not only be a part of your life, but to be the full part of your life.

Sabbath School

It seems that we are losing the ability to laugh. I don't mean the little giggles at life's adventures, but real hearty laughing that hurts your sides. This week have a laugh-a-thon in Sabbath School, finding a good array of jokes that force you to laugh out loud. <http://www.pastornet.net.au/jmm/ahmr/index.htm> has a good selection to choose from.

Lesson

We tend to think of Jesus as this wonderful being that everyone should have recognised as God, but what if He turned up to your church today in jeans and a t-shirt. Would we be like many of the first century Jews who only knew Him as an ordinary man (certainly nothing happened for the first 30 years to distinguish Him from anyone else)?

Weekly Update

For July 26

Devotion

The Coat of Arms is one of the numerous symbols of any nation. In Europe it is also the symbol of individual families. Design your own coat of arms, making it a representation of you and God. <http://www.coatofarms-shop.com/> has information on colours and shapes with their meaning.

Sabbath School

Like the Devotion this week except design a Coat of Arms that represents your spiritual family.

Lesson

This week's lesson discusses Jesus superiority (and inferiority). If we as Christians are called to be 'Christ-like', how do we show this superiority without becoming snobs and this inferiority without becoming pitiful?

Weekly Update

For August 2

Devotion

What are you afraid of? Check out <http://www.phobialist.com/> for an extensive list of phobias. How severe is your reaction to your fears? If you didn't have that fear, what would you do? This week chose one fear, and slowly confront it. For eg, if you are scared of heights, go up a few steps higher on a ladder than you would normally go, or go to the second or third floor of a building.

Sabbath School

Terrorism works on the principle of fear. FDR, US President (1933-1945), uttered the famous words "the only thing we have to fear, is fear itself." With this in mind, share some promises about how we need not fear. If we were the ones held hostage in the Philippines on the weekend, how would we have responded? What if we were in New York on September 11?

Lesson

This week we are looking at the unique ministry of Jesus. On a white board have three columns, one headed Aaron, one Melchizedek, and the other Jesus. List all the attributes of these people, good and bad, comparing them, particularly in their career. Henri Nouwen wrote the classic book *The Wounded Healer*, where he argues that those that have experienced hurt and pain can then heal others with the same affliction. Do you agree? What wounds do you have that you could use to help other people?

Weekly Update

For August 9

Devotion

During the week, Felix Baumgartner, was the first person to skydive across the English Channel. It seems that for all the fears we might have (remember last week's devotion), we also have this dream to do things that no-one else has done before. www.guinnessworldrecords.com lists some of these amazing feats. What is one thing that you want to do? What do you want to be remembered for?

Sabbath School

This week is healthy bones week (www.healthybones.com.au). You can test your knowledge of bones at <http://kidshub.org/kids/bones.cfm>. Imagine what humans would be like without bones. What would we look like? What would we do (and not be able to do)? Thank God for the bones He has given us, as well as the doctors and nurses who sometimes have to fix our bones.

Lesson

If God came to you, and asked you to design a sanctuary that represented Him most fully, what would you put in there? What materials would you use? What does each aspect of it mean?

Weekly Update

For August 16

Devotion

I know that spring is almost upon us. How do I know? Well, Australia's national flower, the Wattle, is all around. Its bright yellow flowers stand out amongst the generally drab winter scenery. In fact, as Christians, we are asked to be like the wattle. We rely entirely on the sun, the rain, and the soil for our existence. The tree itself is the main support network, like a church, but in the end we need to show the brightness of God's love to an otherwise dreary landscape. And the best news is that we don't need to demonstrate a lot. If you look closely at the wattle flowers, each one is only tiny, but when a lot of little flowers are bunched together they create a large mass of colour. Try being a wattle flower this week.

Sabbath School

<http://www.theinterviewwithgod.com/home.html> has a most powerful poem, with a PowerPoint presentation with inspiring pictures. Share it with others this week. What would you ask God if you had the opportunity? How would He answer?

Lesson

Using the six elements listed in Sunday's lesson, write a personal covenant between God and yourself, that deals with the particulars of your own situation and experience.

