Week of Prayer 2024: Sunday

**A Message of Joy and Hope**

**By Stanley Arco**

Christian was born into a Christian home but didn’t have access to the Bible. When he grew older, he became an alcoholic. He married Alcylene, an Adventist, and her Bible soon became the cause of quarreling in their marriage. Frustrated with the trouble the book was causing, Christian gave the Bible to a friend who used the pages to smoke tobacco.

Christian’s wife threatened to leave him. Desperate to save his marriage, he accepted an invitation to attend a prayer meeting at church. There the preacher embraced him and gave him a Bible.

Christian stubbornly challenged his wife, “If I find in the Bible that alcoholics won’t go to heaven, I will stop drinking.” Would reading the Scriptures change Christian’s life and attitude?

**The Scriptures Reveal God’s Plan**

In the Bible we find a message that shows the continued authority and relevance of Scripture for the Christian’s life; a testimony of God’s redemption plan throughout history; and encouragement with the lessons of perseverance, joy, and hope in God.

In its first and last chapters the Bible gives us a picture of what a perfect life was intended to be, without sin, and what it will be restored to when Jesus returns.Suffering, pain, sadness, and sin were not God’s plan. It was a choice that human beings made.

Adam and Eve enjoyed a daily encounter with the Lord. When they disobeyed God, they felt shame and fear (Gen. 3:8). Then it was necessary for God’s love and compassion to show up. He gave them the promise of a Savior, the Messiah (see Gen. 3:15). The Bible reveals that the plan of redemption was “from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2).

God was sad to be separated from His creation. “Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth” (Gen. 6:5, 6).

And while humanity knew the history of Creation and sin—they knew the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden; they knew the consequences of sin and the world-washing flood—they still trusted in their own ability to save themselves. “And they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves” (Gen. 11:4).

God did not grow tired of loving. He called a faithful man, Abraham, to be a blessing for all humanity. When Abraham’s descendants were enslaved in Egypt, God heard their cries and delivered them. As they wandered in the wilderness, God established a physical sign of His alliance of love and friendship. He said, “And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them” (Ex. 25:8). But they weren’t happy with a sanctuary, a living symbol of God’s presence.

What did they ask now? “Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations” (1 Sam. 8:5). God heard them and gave them the desire of their hearts. First Samuel 9:16 says, “For I have looked upon My people, because their cry has come to Me.”Was an earthly king part of God’s plan? No. He had a better plan: an eternal King, the Messiah! This King, the Messiah, loves and saves His people. Despite the many times the people grew apart from the Lord, He persisted in looking for them.

**The Bible Generates Joy and Hope**

In what ways does the Bible generate joy? It tells us about God and His loving character and the attributes of His work in history. When we learn about God, we understand more of His love, kindness, faithfulness, and other attributes that bring us joy.

The Bible provides wisdom and guidance for our lives. Through its encouragement we can face challenges with confidence. We receive comfort in the Bible biographies and Jesus’ lessons. Perseverance and joy begin to be part of our lives, even amid difficulties. The Scriptures give a purpose and mission for each challenge. They offer a divine plan for humanity’s future.

Communion with God brings joy of the certainty of His presence and a deep and intimate connection with Him. Finally, we have not just a theoretical knowledge of but a friendship relationship with the Creator. Hope generated from reading the Bible is much more than a positive attitude.

God has all power to fulfill His promise of eternal life. He says, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death” (Rev. 1:17, 18).

The Bible gives us the promise of a new heaven and earth. “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes;” “for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4). It also offers us the promise of reinstatement. John 14:1-3 says, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. . . . I go to prepare a place for you. . . . I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

As we study the Bible, we discover that God has a redemptive plan for humanity. We actually become new creatures. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17).

**The Result**

Remember Christian and his pledge? Christian and Alcylene began reading the Bible together. In 30 days they had read it completely. Christian found all the answers he had been looking for. Their family life was transformed, and Christian was baptized. He began to teach the Bible, giving Bible studies and holding evangelistic meetings.

Within 13 years of being baptized, their family had built six churches with their own resources and contributed to the construction of 22 more churches in the Autazes region of the Amazon jungle.

Does the Bible contain transformative power? Does it give life a purpose and a mission? By the grace of God and through a sincere study of the Word, Christian became a new creature. The many people touched by him and his family are a testimony to God’s amazing grace and His divine plan.

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Questions for Reflection:

What are your favorite verses that bring you hope and joy?

How have you seen the persistent love of God?