HE SAID WHAT HE SAID

“Ah, OK,” some might say, “so it’s important to rest and focus on our relationship with God! But what difference does it make whether I do so on Monday or on Thursday?”

We answer with a Bible story.

Although he was one of the most powerful men in the most powerful nation of his day, Naaman found himself at the mercy of an incurable disease. Life as he had known it was over until hope sprung fresh through the testimony of his wife’s slave maid. Young as she was, this little slave girl dared to suggest that the God of her enslaved people was greater than the gods of the Syrians, and if Naaman would go to the prophet of the Lord, he could find healing. Naaman was desperate. He went.

Aside from the fact that the prophet Elisha did not even bother to greet Naaman in person, Naaman was appalled by the means through which he was to receive healing. There were clean rivers in Syria, but the prophet told him to dip in the Jordan. Worse still, he had to repeat the procedure seven times!

After dipping into the waters of the Jordan four times, his leprosy fared no better. Five times . . . six times . . . no change. The lesson for Naaman was that when God says “seven,” six won’t do. There was a healing awaiting Naaman, but he could only receive it in full surrender to God’s clear word (2 Kings 5). Heeding exactly what God has said is important if we are to reap the benefits of aligning ourselves with Him.

Read This Week’s Passage:
Psalm 33:6–9
Write out Psalm 33:6-9 from the Bible translation of your choice. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
I PROMISE

The omnipotence of God is in full display in the creation account of Genesis 1. In an almost formulaic narration, each successive element is brought into existence with the phrase “And God said” (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24). No additional action is taken to produce the creation—His word alone brings forth that which it has called out. It needs no help.

In a limited way, our words have creative power too (for more on the power of the tongue, check out the inVerse study guide on the letter of James). We can create a happy atmosphere or a demoralizing one through our words: “The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit” (Prov. 15:4, NIV). To a qualified extent, then, our words can create reality. But as powerful as our words may be, they cannot create matter. By contrast, God’s word not only creates matter but defines reality.

When God said, “Let there be,” nature followed the sound of His voice and conformed to the reality His word described. Surely this explains why it is impossible for God to lie (Heb. 6:18), because the moment He says it, it becomes reality. So, when Jesus stood up in that storm-tossed boat and declared, “Peace, be still” (Mark 4:39), His word ordered the reality of the wind and the sea, and peace ensued. One may say that the wind obeyed Christ’s command, but it was not in the same volitional sense of obedience that humanity is called to.

While God’s word has the power in itself to create the reality it describes, He has infused humanity with the freedom of choice to decide whether we accept or reject His reality. What is translated as the “Ten Commandments” would more accurately be the “Ten Words” (eseret ha-devarim; Exod. 34:28). They are not stated in the imperative, but in the Hebrew they read more like promises, for example, “[I promise] you shall have no other gods before Me,” and so on. (The inVerse study guide on the book of Deuteronomy will be a helpful study tool here.) From that perspective, the Ten Commandments simply describe those whom God has redeemed (cf. Eph. 2:10). Accepting God’s redemption (Exod. 20:2) means allowing Him to create in you the person described in the rest of the Ten Words.

Of His word God says, “It shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isa. 55:11, KJV). Everything God says of us in Scripture can be our reality if we would accept it by faith. We need not doubt His forgiveness when we repent (1 John 1:9); we need not worry about our basic necessities (Matt. 6:25–34); and we can have confidence in His salvation (Phil. 1:6).

Each Sabbath we celebrate the creative power of God’s word. Every day we have the privilege to submit to that power in our lives through faith.
BE HOLY

On the third day of creation God commands the earth to “bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth” (Gen. 1:11). On the fifth day He commands the seas to “abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens” (Gen. 1:20). On the sixth day He turns once again to the earth to “bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind” (Gen. 1:24).

For all living things God turns to the earth and the waters to bring them forth. But when it comes to humanity, God turns and speaks to Himself: “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). In response to His own word, God then stoops to the earth and forms Adam and Eve. Though formed from the dust, humanity, in a unique way, bore the image of God. Just as God is holy (Isa 6:3; 43:15; Rev. 4:8), Adam and Eve bore His resemblance.

As the sixth day of creation drew to a close, God spoke yet again and infused the fabric of the seventh day with the quality that He possesses within Himself. “God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it” (Gen. 2:3). Without God’s sanctification, the seventh day would be like every other day of the week. In fact, if days could boast, the other days of the week could claim superiority over the seventh because God created something tangible that contributes to the functioning of the earth on those days. On the seventh day, they could argue, God made nothing. It would appear the most inferior of days.

From the least of the days of creation, the Sabbath rises to preeminence because of God’s word concerning it. What makes the Sabbath holy is that God declared it to be thus. It is holy because God’s word said so.

When humanity lost its standing after the fall and the image of God was marred, Christ took upon Himself the task of restoring God’s image in humanity. It is to this end that He came to present a clear picture of God, that as we behold Him in the beauty of holiness, we would be transformed into His likeness (2 Cor. 3:18). “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy (1 Pet. 1:15, 16, KJV). When we receive it in faith, God’s word that calls us to be holy is the very word that makes us holy. As it is with the Sabbath, so it is with us.
What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

1 Peter 1:15–17
Isaiah 55:10, 11
Hebrews 4:12
Genesis 1
Mark 4:36–41

What other verses come to mind in connection with Psalm 33:6–9?

Review your memorized verse from Psalm 33:6–9.
RELIGHTING THE FLAME

During creation week, God made various life forms: vegetation on day three, marine and avian life on day five, and animal and human life on day six. As the source of life, God is represented wherever there is life. This makes the denial of God’s presence an enormously difficult task—an impossible task! Life is self-existent only in God, because “in Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). Ellen White writes, “The Lord has given His life to the trees and vines of His creation.” (Francis D. Nichol et al, eds., Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1953), 1081.) She also states, “Without the life of God, nature would die.” (Nichol et al, 1081.)

Remarkably, the Creator imparted life via the spoken word. Speaking of the angels and other beings that inhabit the heavens, the psalmist declares, “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. . . . For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:6, 9, KJV). In this connection, Ellen White explains that “Christ was the Son of God; He had been one with Him before the angels were called into existence.” (White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 38.) It was all done by the spoken word, by the spoken command!

The entrance of sin included the entrance of death because “as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men” (Rom. 5:12, KJV). And, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezek. 18:20, KJV). God had clearly warned Adam that “in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:17, KJV). As surely as the word guaranteed life for obedience, so surely it guaranteed death for disobedience. The doleful litany of Genesis 5, “and he died,” sustains the accuracy of God’s warning. Ellen White notes that “the law reveals to man his sins, but it provides no remedy. While it promises life to the obedient, it declares that death is the portion of the transgressor.” (Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1950), 467, 468.)

God’s original plan was life without end, but death threatened to put a permanent end to life. “God is the life-giver. From the beginning all His laws were ordained to life. But sin broke in upon the order that God had established, and discord followed. So long as sin exists, suffering and death are inevitable.” (White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 522.) Through the sacrifice of His Son, God provided a justification for the renewal of life. This will occur by the spoken word just as original life on earth came by the spoken word. “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thess. 4:16, KJV).

Sabbath-keeping should be a celebration of the life-giving Creator who commanded, and it stood fast. With that same command voice, He will once again command. This time, life will last forever.

Meditate on Psalm 33:6–9 again and look for where Jesus is.

How have you experienced Christ’s life-giving word today?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

What is He saying to you through these texts?

Prayer: How do you respond to seeing Jesus in this way?
WE HAVE THE GIFT

The Bible record is in harmony with itself and with the teaching of nature. Of the first day employed in the work of creation is given the record, “The evening and the morning were the first day.” Genesis 1:5. And the same in substance is said of each of the first six days of creation week. Each of these periods Inspiration declares to have been a day consisting of evening and morning, like every other day since that time. In regard to the work of creation itself the divine testimony is, “He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.” Psalm 33:9. With Him who could thus call into existence unnumbered worlds, how long a time would be required for the evolution of the earth from chaos? In order to account for His works, must we do violence to His word? (White, Education, 129.)

When Adam came from the Creator’s hand, he bore, in his physical, mental, and spiritual nature, a likeness to his Maker. “God created man in His own image” (Genesis 1:27), and it was His purpose that the longer man lived the more fully he should reveal this image—the more fully reflect the glory of the Creator. All his faculties were capable of development; their capacity and vigor were continually to increase. Vast was the scope offered for their exercise, glorious the field opened to their research. The mysteries of the visible universe—the “wondrous works of Him which is perfect in knowledge” (Job 37:16)—invited man’s study. Face-to-face, heart-to-heart communion with his Maker was his high privilege. Had he remained loyal to God, all this would have been his forever. Throughout eternal ages he would have continued to gain new treasures of knowledge, to discover fresh springs of happiness, and to obtain clearer and yet clearer conceptions of the wisdom, the power, and the love of God. More and more fully would he have fulfilled the object of his creation, more and more fully have reflected the Creator's glory. (White, 15.)

Every soul, however degraded by sin, is in God’s sight accounted precious. As the coin bears the image and superscription of the reigning power, so man at his creation bore the image and superscription of God; and though now marred and dim through the influence of sin, the traces of this inscription remain upon every soul. God desires to recover that soul and to retrace upon it His own image in righteousness and holiness. (White, Christ’s Object Lessons, 194.)

How to exercise faith should be made very plain. To every promise of God there are conditions. If we are willing to do His will, all His strength is ours. Whatever gift He promises, is in the promise itself. “The seed is the word of God.” Luke 8:11. As surely as the oak is in the acorn, so surely is the gift of God in His promise. If we receive the promise, we have the gift. (White, Education, 253.)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

Why do details matter when it comes to spiritual things?

Describe your experience with the Word of God resulting in change, power, and/or transformation.

How do you experience the creative power of God’s Word every Sabbath?

How can some go through the Sabbath without this experience?

Explain holiness in your words. Next, explain your own experience of holiness in your words.

How do we reconcile modern contemporary lifestyles with biblical holiness?

How does the Sabbath differentiate life from living?

How can you help others experience the power of God’s Word?