



POSITIVE READING CHOICES

Character Building or Addiction

April 3, 2021

1 PREPARING

A. THE SOURCE

Isaiah 43:10-12 (NIV) • “‘You are my witnesses,’ declares the LORD, ‘and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses,’ declares the LORD, ‘that I am God.’”

Philippians 4:8 (CEV) • “Finally, my friends, keep your minds on whatever is true, pure, right, holy, friendly, and proper. Don’t ever stop thinking about what is truly worthwhile and worthy of praise.”

2 Peter 1:16 (NIV) • “We did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our LORD Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.”

Luke 6:45 (NIV) • “A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.”

(See additional passages in student material.)

The Adventist Home, p. 412 • “What shall our children read? This is a serious question and one that demands a serious answer. It troubles me to see in Sabbathkeeping families periodicals and newspapers containing continued stories which leave no impressions for good on the minds of children and youth. I have watched those whose taste for fiction was thus cultivated. They have had the privilege of listening to the truth, of becoming acquainted with the reasons of our faith; but they have grown to maturer years destitute of true piety and practical godliness.”

B. WHAT’S TO BE SAID ABOUT “POSITIVE READING CHOICES”

Any earliten class will probably contain a range of readers—from those who read reluctantly if at all, to those who devour a book a day. This lesson is directed mainly at those who like to read, to guide them in making positive choices that will build them up as growing Christians. Discussion should center on how to discriminate between good readings and cheap/empty readings, why we read, what kind of reading strengthens our spiritual muscle, etc. The discussion shouldn’t exclude those who aren’t avid readers, though—they should be encouraged to read good books. Always underline the benefits and blessings of good reading even as you and your class tackle difficult topics.

C. WHERE WE'RE GOING WITH "POSITIVE READING CHOICES"

As a result of this lesson we would like the students to be able to:

1. Evaluate their own reading choices from a Christian perspective.
2. Recognize that what we read affects how we think and choose.
3. Choose to apply Christian standards to their reading material.

D. MATERIALS NEEDED

Beginning • (Activity A) three or four books for teen readers; (Activity B) paper, pencils, markers.

Connecting • Bibles, chalkboard or flipchart.

Applying • Chart handouts, pencils.

2 BRIDGING

A. WHERE WE'VE BEEN BEFORE

Allow 10 minutes as students are arriving to:

1. Share anything that was meaningful to them in this lesson.
2. Engage in a discussion about the topic of the lesson in connection to the belief highlighted this week.
3. Say the Bible memory text either individually or in a group.

B. OTHER SABBATH SCHOOL COMPONENTS

- >> Song service
- >> Under Resources you will find the mission emphasis link for Adventist *Mission* for youth and adults at www.realttimefaith.net
- >> Service project reports

3 BEGINNING

NOTE TO TEACHER: Put together your own program with options from the categories below—Beginning, Connecting, Applying, and Closing. Please keep in mind, however, that the students need to have an opportunity to be interactive (participate actively *and* with one another) and to study from the Word.

A. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • Choose three or four books at an earliten reading level representing different areas of interest. Bring the books to Sabbath School but don't show them to the group until you're ready to start this activity.

Get set • Read aloud the first paragraph of each book to the group.

Go • **Ask:** What criteria do you use to evaluate whether a book is worth reading?

Debriefing • **Ask:** When you pick up a book, what grabs your attention? Do you "judge a book by its cover"? Do you decide based on the text on the back cover? Do you read a few pages at random? Or do you rely on other people's recommendations to choose a good book? What's your number one consideration when choosing a book to read?

B. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • Hand out paper, pencils, and markers to each class member

Get set • **Say:** A publisher has decided they want to publish the story of your life—a book all about you! Design the front and back cover of the book. How will your story be illustrated and described to catch a reader's attention?

Go • Allow about 10 minutes for class members to design their book covers, then have them show and share what they've done.

Debriefing • Ask: What do writers and publishers do to try to grab your attention so you'll read a book? Is it wise to judge a book by its cover? Have you ever picked up a book expecting one thing and found something completely different inside?

C. BEGINNING ILLUSTRATION

In your own words, tell the following story:

Candy's parents and teachers have always been impressed with how much she loves to read. She sometimes goes through a book a day—or more. Her friends call her “the book-worm,” but Candy doesn't care. She loves escaping into a story that takes her away from the real world and all its problems. She reads anything she gets her hands on, and sometimes the world of books seems more real to her than school, her family, and her friends.

Jeff read a book once in sixth grade because he had to write a book report on it. Since then, he usually gets around that by reading the back covers when he has to do a book report for class. He likes some magazines, but usually just looks at the pictures. Jeff's very active and is involved in lots of sports and outdoor activities.

Debriefing • Ask: Is Candy missing out on anything? Is Jeff missing out? Are you a Candy or a Jeff? Do you think these are extremes, or do you know people like Candy, and people like Jeff? How can we get the most out of reading without losing touch with the real world? How do we choose what's good to read and what's not?

4 CONNECTING

A. CONNECTING TO THE KINGDOM

Present the following ideas in your own words:

God has a mission for each one of us—to be

agents for His kingdom in this world. Every choice we make—our entertainment, how we spend our leisure time, even our reading material—affects that mission. We can't be at our best for God unless we're filling our minds with things that will help us grow stronger spiritually.

For those who love to read, their choice of what to read is critical. Lots of teens—and lots of adults—read almost indiscriminately, reading everything they come across as long as it's entertaining. But there's so much out there that's not going to build us up spiritually with junk.

The Bible speaks about having our minds “transformed” rather than conformed to the culture around us (Romans 12:2). If we fill our minds with everything the culture has to offer, we're going to be squeezed into that mold whether we like it or not. Five minutes a day of Bible reading isn't going to counteract hours of romance novels or cop-and-robber thrillers. Our minds are changed under the influence of what we read.

B. CONNECTING TO THE LESSON ILLUSTRATION

Ask someone beforehand to read or tell the story from the lesson.

Ask: Why do you think Alison and Nelson developed such a strong urge to read fiction books and lost taste for any other type of books? (Point out that a fiction addiction may be like any: It's hard to tell in advance who's going to be addicted—other circumstances in a person's life may make them more likely to become an addict. With drugs and alcohol, it's safer and easier to avoid them altogether. But reading has many benefits, so it wouldn't make sense to avoid reading altogether. That's why we need sensible Christian guidelines for what and how to read.) **Ask:** Are romance novels the only thing that could affect a person this way? What about someone who constantly reads celebrity magazines and bios, or crime stories, or science fiction and horror stories? What kinds of

dangers might these types of reading pose?

C. CONNECTING TO LIFE

Pose the following scenario:

Your English teacher tells you to choose any three books you want to read and report on to the class (and no cheating by just reading the back covers—you have to read the whole book). You'd like your report to reflect what you believe as a Christian, so you want to choose books that fit a Christian lifestyle.

Which books are good for a young Christian?

Have class members check out the following Bible texts and discuss how they can apply to our reading choices: **Philippians 4:8; Galatians 5:19-23; Luke 6:45; Colossians 3:1, 2**. As each verse is read and discussed, sum up a one-sentence principle from it that we can apply to reading choices, and write each sentence summary on a chalkboard or flipchart at the front of the room.

Ask: What are the benefits and the drawbacks of each type of story? How is each story a powerful tool for God's kingdom?

5 APPLYING

A. APPLICATION ACTIVITY

Try to get one book suggestion from each person, focusing if possible on books that class members felt were good reading for Christians. Suggest that each person take the list home and choose one of the positive, uplifting books suggested by someone else to add to their own reading list.

Debriefing • Ask: Did you have a difficult time thinking of a favorite book that was a positive choice for a young Christian to

read? If so, could you use some of the books on this list to improve your spiritual library?

B. APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Read the Ellen White quote in the student lesson. How do you respond to that?
2. What's the best book you've ever read, and why?
3. How do you make your own reading choices?
4. Can you think of a situation in which a book you've read (other than the Bible) has affected the way you think about something important in your life, or even affected a choice you had to make? Was it a positive or a negative influence?
5. Have you ever felt that you were addicted to reading a certain kind of book that wasn't good for you? How can you break this kind of reading habit?

6 CLOSING

SUMMARY

In your own words, conclude with the following ideas:

Reading is powerful. It opens new doors to us and changes the way we see our world. With all its exciting possibilities, reading holds dangers, too—if we settle for books that focus our eyes on the worst of this world rather than on the best of heaven. Let's all resolve to take the power of books more seriously—to choose our reading wisely. We are God's kingdom agents, and we can't fill our minds with just any old thing. We need to be in training for our mission, filling our minds with things that will lift our eyes and our thoughts up to Jesus.



STUDENT LESSON

POSITIVE READING CHOICES

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Sabbath FOR STUDY

- » **Memory Text:** “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8, NKJV).
- » **Our Beliefs, no. 11, Growing in Christ:** “By His death on the cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. . . . Jesus’ victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love.”
- » Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 60-63

CHARACTER BUILDING OR ADDICTION

It started out so innocent. Alison and her brother Nelson were out of school for the summer, and once a week they went to the library to read and bring home books to read for the rest of the week. At first they selected reading material that was inspirational and educational. They were learning about history, health, and nature.

Then one day Nelson picked up a science-fiction book about space, aliens, and heroes,

and Alison picked up a fiction book about fairies, castles, and white knights.

Soon all they were reading were fictional books. When they would pick up a book on history or nature, they found it was no longer fun or interesting to read. They also found that they were no longer eager to read their Bibles, Sabbath School lessons, or their inspirational character-building books. They even lost interest in attending church. They weren’t sure why, but they knew something was wrong.

Alison and Nelson decided to speak to their youth pastor and asked if he knew what was wrong with their spiritual life. After much discussion Pastor Mike recommended they do an experiment. He suggested they stop going to the library and reading the types of books they were reading. He suggested they give their minds a chance to recover from the overstimulating and sensational books they had been reading. After the pastor prayed with them, Alison and Nelson agreed to take on the challenge.

A few weeks later Pastor Mike spoke to Alison and Nelson again and gave them each an autobiography about a leading neurosurgeon and suggested they read it and then let him know how it went.

Alison and Nelson were surprised that they enjoyed the book. They asked Pastor Mike why it was that they once again seemed to enjoy true stories. Pastor Mike explained that when we overstimulate the brain with fiction we lose the desire to read wholesome literature that has moral and spiritual value. He shared Matthew 6:24 with them: “No one can serve two mas-

ters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (NKJV). In other words, we cannot expect to love God if we fill our minds and thoughts with literature from books that do not draw us closer to Him. How important it is that we prayerfully evaluate each decision and carefully choose to store in the mind only worthwhile information that will help us grow closer to Jesus!

—Kathleen D. Sowards

Sunday RESPONDING

- » Read Romans 12:1, 2.
- » You see your friend reading and ask, "What are you reading?"
- » Your friend begins to tell you about the book and concludes his description with "It's the most exciting book I've ever read—wanna borrow it when I'm finished?"
- » What do you think? Sound like something you'd like to read?
- » You find out that the story your friend is reading has no character-building or educational value lesson. What do you tell your friend? Do you really think it matters what you read?

Monday BIBLE ANSWERS ON GROWING IN CHRIST

- » Read 2 Peter 3:18; Psalm 1:1, 2; Ephesians 6:12, 13.
- » Keeping our eyes and thoughts on Jesus is our only safeguard against temptation and sin. We should not allow anything that is empty of true meaning and value to distract us from what really matters. Getting to know Jesus, building a relationship with Him, and

using our time to help others learn of His love are things that matter most in life.

- » How could certain types of reading materials hinder your relationship with God?
- » What types of books can build your character and help you toward a closer relationship with Jesus?

Fill in the blanks. The text is from the New King James Version.

"_____ therefore, having girded your waist with _____, having put on the breastplate of _____, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the _____; above all, taking the shield of _____ with which you will be able to _____ the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of _____, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the _____; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being _____ to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:14-18).

Tuesday REFLECTING

- » Some read only when they are required to read a book for school. But good reading can change your life! How does a Christian young person who loves to read choose books that are good? Does it matter?
- » We're supposed to fill our minds with things that will bring us closer to Jesus. Some books cannot do that. In fact, many books would separate us from Jesus. Reading—just like watching TV or movies, or listening to music—affects us. What we take into our brain shapes our way of thinking. What information will you allow into your mind that will impact your future decisions?
- » "Those who would not fall a prey to Satan's

devices must guard well the avenues of the soul; they must avoid reading, seeing, or hearing that which will suggest impure thoughts” (Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 403).

Wednesday BIBLE INSIGHTS

Match the verse to the correct reference.

Galatians 5:19-23	2 Corinthians 3:18
Philippians 4:8	Colossians 1:9, 10
Colossians 3:1, 2	Romans 12:1, 2

“... if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate ...”	
“... be transformed by the renewing of your mind ...”	
“... increasing in the knowledge of God ...”	
“... the fruit of the Spirit is ...”	
“... being transformed into the same image ...”	
“... Set your mind on things above ...”	

Thursday CONNECTING

- » Read Philippians 4:8.
- » Review the memory text.
- » So how do you choose what to read? Is an entertaining story line the most important thing? That’s usually what draws us into a book, but it’s not really the best way to choose your reading material. As a Christian, you need to choose books that will build you up and help you develop a strong character. A good story strengthens your faith in God and helps you to grow in God’s image. Also, when we read only novels and stories for entertainment, we find it harder to focus on serious reading—such as the Bible, or your

textbooks at school. Find some quality non-fiction to exercise your brain. Try something different from what you usually read and stretch your mind in a new direction. Reading can introduce you to people who made a difference in the world and stood for the right, foreign countries, unknown scientific discoveries. There’s no limit to learning when you set your mind to it.

- » But try applying biblical standards, especially those found in Philippians 4:8. Ask yourself if the book you are planning to read will fill your mind with the kind of things you want. Does it match the standards of God’s Word? Will reading it make you a better Christian, a more loving friend and family member?
- » Don’t be afraid to read! But don’t be afraid to question your reading, either—and to close the book if you see that it’s leading you away from God rather than closer to Him.
- » “Receive into the soul by faith the incorruptible seed of the word, and it will bring forth a character and a life after the similitude of the character and the life of God” (Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 38).

Friday APPLYING

- » Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23.
- » In the table on the next page, try to list as many books you have read as you can remember reading in the past year. (Some of you may fill only a couple lines, while some may need extra pages. That’s OK!) Next to each one, check all the boxes that apply to it. Look over your list and think about what you can add to your reading menu to build spiritual muscle—and what you might need to take away.

TITLE	AUTHOR	MADE ME A STRONGER CHRISTIAN	DIDN'T HELP ME AS A CHRISTIAN

