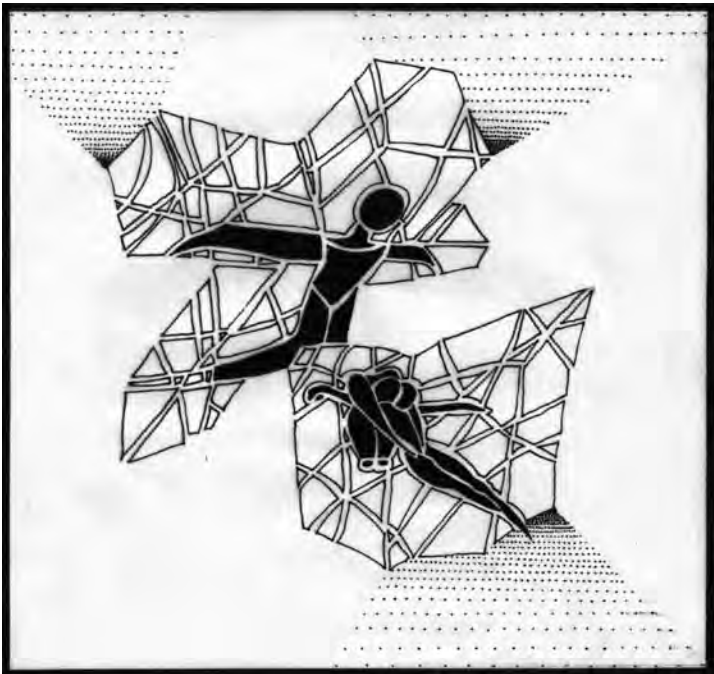


Preparing a
People

*“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in
health, just as your soul prospers”*

(3 John 2, NKJV).



Introduction
*Preparing for the
Ultimate Trip*

Numbers 5; 6

How often have your parents, professors, or church leaders urged you to prepare for a special event? We can all agree that for any major goal we have set, some level of preparation is required. We prepare to attend college, and we prepare for weddings and for various holiday celebrations. We work tirelessly when a major event is about to occur or even for regular day-to-day events. Shouldn't we also prepare to meet with God? We can enjoy the special moments of life when everything is in order. No more important are our special moments and events than having an audience with God and being a part of His kingdom.

Halt! Take that 180-degree turn toward God.

This week we will study some passages of Scripture that challenge us to prepare ourselves for the coming of God's kingdom. As people whose ultimate aim is to enter God's kingdom, we have been provided with a moral as well as a spiritual compass to guide us in our preparation. Numbers 5 and 6 contain some ethical and moral codes that we can learn from.

Major events demand preparation! Our first responsibility is to make sure we are spiritually right with God. Therefore, we must put away immorality, an unforgiving heart, infidelity, etc. As we prepare, we are called upon to halt! Take that 180-degree turn toward God. If we don't prepare our minds and body for action, we will not have the spiritual strength to control our bodies, to glorify God, and to weather the storms we may encounter on the journey.

This week, we must think about the physical and mental preparations that are required for entering God's kingdom. If we neglect the nourishment of our bodies and minds, we'll lose our battle with sin. Just like a soldier who doesn't prepare for the battlefield, we will lose the fight; we will miss the kingdom. It should be obvious that, as a people on the move, as a people seeking to reach the Promised Land, as a people called out by God, we could learn from the book of Numbers.

Just as many of the special moments we prepare for have special themes (parties, weddings, etc.) and attributes we want to include, so does preparing for God's kingdom. Read Galatians 5:22–24. Let's get ready for our special day with Jesus by filling our lives with these wonderful attributes.

Now that we are on the move toward the greatest preparation in life, ask this week what is in your life that is hindering your preparation for the kingdom. Ask God to show you more ways in which you can prepare.

Helyne Frederick, Lubbock, Texas, U.S.A.

Numbers 5; 6;
John 17:20–23

Evidence *Healthy Apples, Healthy Barrel*

After He led the Israelites out of Egypt, God began to transform His free but fragmented people into a single-hearted nation of witnesses (Exodus 13–17). As recorded in Exodus through Deuteronomy, He taught the Israelites exactly how to order their new society. Each ceremonial and social law reminded the Israelites of their responsibilities to God and cemented their connections to each other. By applying His principles to all aspects of their lives, the people learned how to honor God, make their community healthy, and keep their living witness pure.

The rules supported the community's collective health.

The laws God gave Moses showed His deep concern for the Israelites, their physical health, social relationships, marriage fidelity, and personal vows to Him. In Numbers 5, God taught Moses to stop dangerous diseases from spreading by quarantining infected people. God then established an even stricter social rule for resolving conflicts.

The Israelites' quarantine rules stopped physical diseases from overrunning them, but their restitution rules were designed to kill off even deadlier parasites. Jealousy, anger, malice, and grudges would completely corrupt the people if left to fester. That is why every member of the community had to cooperate with the rules God set. The rules supported the community's collective health. If each apple in a barrel stays healthy, all the apples stay healthy.* But if the Israelites disregarded God's principles, the spoilage would spread from person to person, and the nation's testimony about God would suffer.

Unlike apple bruises, however, our spiritual and social bruises can be healed. Having joyfully received Jesus, Zachaeus began attending to his neighbors, the poor, and those he had wronged (Luke 19:1–10). In the same way, when God heals us, we become inspired to heal our communities, confess our wrongs, make restitution for them, and help rebuild whatever is broken. The Israelites could not faithfully testify of God while they were not in loving communion with each other, and the same is true of us today. Jesus' prayer for us was that we would be one, and that our communion would testify that God had sent Him (John 17). If we really are His witnesses, then our spiritual and social communities will show it.

REACT

We can stop a bruised apple from spoiling other apples by discarding it. In dealing with each other, what alternatives to discarding do we have?

*A rotten apple emits a great deal of ethylene gas. This causes other apples to emit the gas so that soon all the apples become spoiled.

Logos *Company, Halt: Are You Ready?*

Numbers 5; 6;
Ezek. 33:15, 16;
Luke 19:8, 9;
Acts 17:28;
1 Cor. 6:19, 20

Clean Up Your Act (Numbers 5; 6)

The Israelites were moving to the land God promised them through their father Abraham. But before they could continue their journey, they needed to examine themselves and obey His commands. In Numbers 5, we read that the unclean were removed from the camp and that confession of sins was highly encouraged. Additionally, God reminded the people about the firstfruits and other oblations belonging to the priests, and that restitution must be made for trespasses. He commanded that if a person sinned against another, “The person shall make full restitution for the wrong, adding one fifth to it, and giving it to the one who was wronged” (Num. 5:7, NRSV). The book of Numbers lists guidelines under which Israel was to live. In fact, the Lord commanded that all ceremonially unclean persons must be removed from the vicinity of the camp.

We are on our way to the Promised Land.

Definite procedures were to be followed in dealing with marital infidelity. However, the children of Israel were not consistent with what the Lord wanted them to do, and they were thus tried by the laws given to them. They were not to do as they pleased. God is particular about His laws and commands.

The Nazirite Vow (Numbers 6; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20)

The word *Nazirite* means “separated.” Some Nazirites, such as John the Baptist, were appointed by God even before their birth and were to serve for life. However, other men and women voluntarily became Nazirites and served for a specified period of time.¹

As we prepare for the kingdom, we also need to follow certain rules. For example, read 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20. The admonition given in this text complements the principles in Numbers 6. For example, the Nazirites “were to eat nothing that came of the vine, to teach us with the utmost care and caution to avoid sin and every thing that borders upon it and leads to it, or may be a temptation to us.”² Just as the Nazirites did, we must deny our selfish desires and set ourselves apart as we prepare for the Second Coming.

Restoration (Luke 19:8, 9)

Zacchaeus had a bad reputation. As a tax collector, he gathered higher

amounts than he was supposed to and kept the profits for himself. In this way, he became wealthy at the expense of his countrymen, and people hated him for it.

Read Ezekiel 33:15, 16. Perhaps Zacchaeus was acquainted with these verses, for when he met Jesus, he said, “I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have overcharged people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!” (Luke 19:8, NLT).

“Where restoration was voluntary, the Law of Moses required simply the addition to the principal of one fifth of the amount taken. . . . A fourfold restoration was one of the extreme penalties for deliberate robbery followed by loss of the goods (see Exodus 22:1 . . .). Ordinarily the amount restored was to double that taken, if the original property or money was also recovered (Exod. 22:4, 7). The amount Zacchaeus promised to restore was the best of evidence that he had experienced a change of heart.”³ When Christ is in the heart, His presence will manifest itself in the Christian’s behavior. The Bible says, “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Cor. 5:17, NRSV).

Complete Makeover (Numbers 5; 6; Acts 17:28; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20)

I love looking at the homes featured in the television show *Extreme Makeover*. Sometimes the houses look as if they are abandoned and dilapidated; but what a transformation there is at the end of the program! As we prepare to serve God, we must undergo a transformation. When Christ changes the heart, it must be visible in our behavior. All our activities—whether they are mental, physical, or spiritual—will reflect Christ living in us. The Bible tells us that as we prepare for mission and for God’s kingdom, we need to prepare our hearts and obey laws that govern our bodies. There should be a point in our experience where we separate ourselves to the Lord (Num. 6:1–8).

We are on our way to the Promised Land. The big question is, Am I being transformed, or am I still caught up in my own ways? Whom do I need to forgive? What habits do I need to break? Let us learn from Zacchaeus’s example.

REACT

1. How can you apply the principles in the “vow of a Nazirite” to your life?
2. If you were asked to take a vow to signify your preparation for God’s kingdom, what principles would you include?

1. *SDA Bible Dictionary*, p. 781.

2. *Matthew Henry’s Commentary* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), p. 586.

3. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 853.

Testimony *Youth Preparing for a Mission*

Numbers 5; 6

“Christian life is more than many take it to be. It does not consist wholly in gentleness, patience, meekness, and kindness. These graces are essential; but there is need also of courage, force, energy, and perseverance. The path that Christ marks out is a narrow, self-denying path. To enter that path and press on through difficulties and discouragements, requires men who are more than weaklings.”¹

“Health is a blessing of which few appreciate the value; yet upon it the efficiency of our mental and physical powers largely depends. Our impulses and passions have their seat in the body, and it must be kept in the best condition physically and under

“Be not satisfied with reaching a low standard.”

the most spiritual influences in order that our talents may be put to the highest use. Anything that lessens physical strength enfeebles the mind, and makes it less capable of discriminating between right and wrong.”²

We also are called upon to have firmness of character. “Some have no firmness of character. Their plans and purposes have no definite form and consistency. They are of but little practical use in the world. This weakness, indecision, and inefficiency should be overcome. There is in true Christian character an indomitableness that cannot be molded or subdued by adverse circumstances. We must have moral backbone, an integrity that cannot be flattered, bribed, or terrified.

“God desires us to make use of every opportunity for securing a preparation for His work. He expects us to put all our energies into its performance, and to keep our hearts alive to its sacredness and its fearful responsibilities.”³

“Be not satisfied with reaching a low standard. We are not what we might be, or what it is God’s will that we should be. God has given us reasoning powers, not to remain inactive, or to be perverted to earthly and sordid pursuits, but that they may be developed to the utmost, refined, sanctified, ennobled, and used in advancing the interests of His kingdom.”⁴

REACT

How can you redirect your preparation for God’s kingdom to ensure that you maximize your potential for service?

1. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 497.
2. *Messages to Young People*, p. 235.
3. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 498.
4. *Ibid.*

Num. 6:22–27;
Ps. 107:1–3;
Isa. 25:4

How-to Weathering the Storm

“The weather today calls for clear blue skies and slight winds.” Ironically, that’s the day the heavens open up with rain; lightning and thunder crackle across the sky; and you are caught without an umbrella. If you’re anything like me, in your journey toward the kingdom, you’ve had your share of storms in your life. Some fell hard and fast and were totally unexpected, while others we’ve walked right into without any heed to the darkness ahead. God never promised a life free from storms. However, He has promised to be with us through the storms and to get us safely to the kingdom. How can we weather the storms when they arise and still stay on the move?

God created tears for two reasons.

Pray and study the Bible. Commit yourself to His care every day. Read 1 Peter 5:7. Because He cares, He has told us in the Bible how to prepare for His kingdom and how to work for Him.

Give thanks. Always be thankful (Eph. 5:20). Sometimes this is easier said than done; but I have found that you can always find a rainbow after every storm (1 Thess. 5:18). Thank God for helping you to overcome temptations and for restoring you to Him. Thank Him for pointing you back to the right path when you stray (Numbers 5). Thank Him for being your Guide and Compass as you prepare to meet Him.

Cry. Shout. “I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me” (Ps. 77:1, NIV). I believe that God created tears for two reasons: to relieve our frustrations and to cleanse our souls. When it seems as though preparation is slowing down or stalled, reach out to Him. Cry out to Him for help. When it seems as though you are on the right path, shout for joy. Don’t be afraid to get emotional on the journey.

Help others. Stretch out your hand to help someone else in need. I’ve found that while assisting others, we give God time to calm our raging winds and rains. We also can strengthen others on the journey if we encourage and lift each other up. We are social beings, and 1 Thessalonians 5:11 urges us to encourage one another and to build each other up!

REACT

1. How can you help others prepare to meet God?
2. What advice and encouragement would you give to someone who is trying to prepare for the kingdom but who is constantly discouraged by his or her personal storms?

180-Degree Turn for the Better

Opinion

Ezek. 33:15;
Matt. 16:24;
Luke 19:8, 9;
John 10:10;
Gal. 3:29

God was interested in the spiritual and physical health of the children of Israel (Numbers 5; 6). He is just as interested in our well-being today. The commands He gave Israel through Moses provided the means of ensuring a healthy nation that would live a holy life. It all comes down to our love for God and our fellow humans. Just like the ancient Israelites, we must make that 180-degree turn from our ways to God's ways and there remain in His path forever. Our motto should be that of Philippians 4:8, "Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (NRSV).

Do we love just the lovable?

When we love God, we will not defile our bodies with unclean food and abusive substances; we will conform to biblical health laws. "Those who perceive the evidences of God's love, who understand something of the wisdom and beneficence of His laws and the results of obedience, will come to regard their duties and obligations from an altogether different point of view. Instead of looking upon an observance of the laws of health as [a] matter of sacrifice or self-denial, they will regard it, as it really is, as an inestimable blessing."* As we prepare for the Second Coming, and while we preach the gospel, we must remember that spiritual and physical strength are essential to face the end times.

When we put Jesus first, our reward is eternal life. Like Zacchaeus, we should mend our former ways (Luke 19:8, 9). Read Matthew 16:24. If we choose to follow Christ, we "are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29, NIV). Humility should be the order of the day. The end result is partaking in only godly activities. This does not involve a list of things we must do; rather, it is surrendering our selfishness to God.

He commands us to love Him and others (Matt. 22:34–40). He is willing to forgive us if we give up our unrighteous ways and make right our wrongs (Ezek. 33:15). If God forgives, why can't we do the same? Do we love just the lovable?

God wants us be in line with Him spiritually and physically. It's necessary for us to keep the flame of Jesus burning within us.

* *Counsels on Health*, p. 40.

John 14:2-4

Exploration
*Our Final Trip***CONCLUDE**

Preparing for a trip, even a spur-of-the-moment one, requires preparation. Clothes must be packed, mail needs to be held, and pets require a sitter. How much more effort might be necessary for us to leave our galaxy on the last and biggest trip we'll ever take? And yet, God takes care of everything. He will provide us with all that we need when we get to heaven. We can take nothing from this earth with us. Still, we have much preparation to do. We are to prepare our minds and bodies to be ready to live with Jesus.

CONSIDER

- Creating a collage or a painting of what you think heaven might look like. Hang it somewhere to help you when you struggle with spiritual challenges.
- Comparing and contrasting the physical challenges that the Israelites faced in exile with those we face today.
- Reading Numbers 6:1-21 and then writing a summary about how a Nazirite might live today.
- Creating or finding music to accompany the words found in Numbers 6:24-26. Sing the song once you've found it or created it.
- Exercising regularly to help physically prepare for heaven. Set goals for yourself that will enable you to be ready for Christ's second coming.
- Volunteering in a soup kitchen or homeless shelter. As Wednesday's lesson states, helping others is a good way to let God help us weather storms.
- Journaling about what concrete actions you could take to change your life, like Zacchaeus did after meeting Jesus.

CONNECT

Matthew 16:24.

The Desire of Ages, chapter 61.