


RADIANT LIFE

ADULT  **VOLUME**


TEACHER


Curriculum for
Spirit-filled Living
Radiant Life
Adult Teacher
Volume 4
September 2023–
August 2024

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Accompanying videos and PowerPoint® files are also available at [RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult](https://www.RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult). At this website, scroll down to find the appropriate free video when you see this symbol in the lesson: .

Use the free PowerPoint® files at the appropriate time in the lesson when you see this symbol: .

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How to Use the *Adult Teacher*

The *Adult Teacher* is a Bible-centered curriculum, written by Spirit-filled authors with a goal to clearly communicate the teachings of Scripture. From Genesis to Revelation, the entire Bible is covered in a period of seven years. This cycle presents all major Church doctrines, as well as important topics to help us live as Christians in our world.

Some people misunderstand the role of the Holy Spirit in teaching and using curriculum in study preparation. They ask, “How can you follow the Holy Spirit if you are using a curriculum?”

The Holy Spirit's Role in Teaching

God has given teachers to the Church in order to instruct believers and equip them for life and service. The role of the Spirit is to quicken or illuminate what teachers teach and students receive. Without this teaching of the Spirit, all learning is merely head knowledge (see 1 Corinthians 2:10–16, especially verse 14). Teachers cannot give what they have not received. And students cannot learn what they have not studied (2 Timothy 2:15).

Why Use Curriculum?

Using the *Adult* curriculum in your Sunday School class does not circumvent what the Holy Spirit wants to do. Rather, by using *Radiant Life Adult* curriculum, you benefit from the work of Spirit-filled writers who have taken the time and effort to study and write a commentary about the passages under examination. You also are able to complete an overview of the entire Bible in seven years!

A good curriculum should:

1. Ensure important information will not be omitted or overemphasized.
2. Weed out false teaching and doctrinal errors.
3. Provide a variety of resources. Remember that the Bible is the teacher's textbook! The curriculum serves the teacher by offering biblical insights and instructional ideas.
4. Help teachers ask the right questions.

Curriculum and Questions

A study discovered that teachers ask their classes an average of forty-five questions weekly. Of these, one-third are rhetorically directed to students or are “class functionality” questions (i.e., asking students to distribute materials or discussing class issues). Curriculum materials provided teachers with one-third of the discussion questions asked in class, of which most were asked word-for-word from the curriculum. The other one-third of questions asked weekly were teacher-generated.

Teachers who did not utilize discussion questions from curriculum were five times more likely to be asking lower-level questions (questions asking for simple recall or understanding—no application questions). The study verified that these lower-level questions resulted in much less discussion than those asked at higher levels. Those who utilized curriculum were more likely to ask higher-level questions that required students to think through issues and apply the lesson material to their lives.

How Long Should You Prepare?

When preparing a lesson, use the “3 to 1” rule: three minutes of study for each minute of class time. A forty-five-minute class session, then, would call for two hours and fifteen minutes minimum in lesson preparation. Using that amount of time, the following steps offer teachers a timed budget for lesson preparation:

1. Skim the lesson (10 minutes).

Become familiar with the contents and direction of the lesson.

2. Pray for guidance (20 minutes).

This is a great time to pray for class members. The Holy Spirit can steer a teacher’s thoughts toward specific students’ needs.

3. Study the commentary (30 minutes).

- Pay close attention to the relationship between the Scriptures and their interpretation in the Bible commentary section.
- Avoid the temptation to recite or read the commentary text in class.
- List the issues raised in the Bible commentary that might meet needs of students.
- Consider the application questions as well as items from the *Adult Resource Packet* to provide potential activities.
- Examine how each question relates to the Bible commentary section.
- Focus on elements that seem to leap off the page.

4. Write the lesson objective (15 minutes).

Customize each lesson objective to fit your class. The objective begins by saying: “Students will . . .” paired with a verb: *believe, discuss, accept*, etc. Each activity should be geared to accomplish the objective.

5. Plan for student response (10 minutes).

Use “What Is God Saying to Us?” and “Ministry in Action” sections to close the class session in prayer or in a time of personal dedication. (You may need to customize these sections for your students.)

6. Prepare Introducing the Study (10 minutes).

Begin the study with a story or the suggested “Opening Activity” that will capture students’ attention.

- Avoid starting with definitions.
- Use case studies, agree-disagree statements, and news items to spark interest.

7. Organize the Bible commentary (10 minutes).

- Use the outline in the *Adult Teacher* to guide you.
- Allow personal insight to flow from the Bible and lesson materials.
- Decide on two or three main ideas to focus on, then highlight the other topics.

8. List discussion questions (10 minutes).

Carefully select or write two to five questions that will stimulate discussion.

9. Select the pre-session activity (5 minutes).

Before class session begins, involve students in conversation, and serve snacks or coffee.

10. Pray for anointing (10 minutes).

Ask God for the anointing of the Holy Spirit to teach the lesson and for students to receive the teaching.

11. Gather needed materials (5 minutes).

Organize and collect all materials you will need to teach this lesson.

Lesson Planning Example

The lesson for September 24, 2023, “Joseph’s Story Begins,” is the basis for this lesson-planning example. Please take a few minutes to skim the lesson and the items available in the Adult Resource Packet. A completed sample of the “Planning the Session” form follows to illustrate study planning. Here is a sample entry from a teacher’s journal:

Sunday, September 17, 4:00 p.m.

I open the *Adult Teacher Guide* and skim through the table of contents to review the concepts we have already covered in this unit on “Early Israelite History.” I review the unit introduction to help me focus on the place of this lesson in relationship to the rest of the unit. Then I read through the entire lesson for next Sunday.

By beginning my preparations on Sunday evening, I can be sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s direction throughout the week to show me ways I can use daily experiences and conversations to help students connect God’s Word to everyday life.

Tuesday, September 19, 6:00 p.m.

I observe the helpful information at the beginning of the lesson: the **Study Text** and **Key Verse** are given to me for easy reference. I note the **Central Truth**, which is: God is present with us through the Holy Spirit in good and bad times.

I read through **Learning Objectives** to understand where students should be by the end of this lesson. I also visit RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Age-Levels/Adults for the free **PowerPoint® slides** to accompany this lesson.

I notice this sentence in the introductory paragraph (that starts with “Say”): “Maybe you’ve heard the saying, ‘The waiting is the hard part.’ Waiting for something good is hard enough, but it is far more difficult to remain patient in uncertainty—when we have to wait and see whether things will turn out right.” I highlight it to use in my opening comments. The “Say” statements help me know how to begin each section without reading the lesson aloud.

I plan to use the **Opening Activity**, which is a question for the students: “What are some of the most exciting times of waiting in a person’s life? What are some of the most challenging?” Using these questions will invite everyone to the discussion, even if they do not have a strong biblical background. It will also help students begin to identify with Joseph as he waited for God to fulfill the dreams He had given Joseph years earlier. I plan to share the paragraph at the bottom of page 29 which summarizes the events that have occurred since our last lesson and gives a foretaste of the lesson to come.

Now I move to **Part 1—Joseph’s Prophetic Dreams**. I summarize the first two paragraphs, highlighting these words, “God’s ways are different from human ways, and He chooses people who might otherwise have been overlooked.” I read through both subpoints, preparing to summarize them. Then I highlight the final sentence of the second subpoint, “While any messages we receive from God are good and we may feel compelled to share them, it is often wise to keep such

revelations to ourselves until God instructs us to share them.” This is a natural lead-in to the discussion questions for that subpoint.

Part 2—Plot to Harm Joseph focuses on the dysfunctional family dynamic that led to Joseph’s plight. Using the “Say” statement for the first subpoint will further help students identify with Joseph, while the “Say” statement for the second subpoint can lead to a deeper discussion of how God sometimes uses adversity to work out His plan for our lives.

Two **Resource Packet** items are mentioned under **Main Point 2**. Item 1 is a reflective self-evaluation designed to help students consider how they view their relationship with God during adversity. I decide to make copies of it and encourage students to use it to see ways they can rejoice in their relationship with God or ways they can trust Him more thoroughly. The second item is a case study, which I will copy for each student. Since my class is small, we will read the story and discuss the questions as a group. If my class were larger, I would have small groups work on it first, then discuss their responses in the larger group.

I look at the discussion questions to determine which ones will most likely relate to my students. I highlight the questions I plan to use during class.

I move on to look at **Main Point 3—Joseph Sold into Slavery**. At this point the hopelessness of Joseph’s situation seems to be increasing, and now Jacob (who knew God’s promise to the children of Abraham) was devastated by the loss of his son. As we look at it, we are understandably angry with the other brothers and can, no doubt, identify with Joseph, Jacob, or both! Helping your students understand God’s sovereignty and love in seemingly hopeless situations will bolster their faith.

Another **Resource Packet** item, “Enduring Promises” reminds students to examine the promises God gives us and helps them face adversity. I’ll make copies to give students to use during their own devotional time. This encourages them to apply concepts of the lesson throughout the week.

When I’m ready to close the session, I want to emphasize this statement from **What Is God Saying to Us?**: “In His perfect time, God will keep His promises and His plan will come to pass. As you move forward in your walk with the Lord today, have faith. He holds your future in His hands.” I will also challenge my students to use at least one point from **Ministry in Action** to apply this lesson to their own lives this week. And, I will close by praying for unity in relationships and for hope, even when circumstances seem hopeless.

Wednesday, September 20, 6:00 p.m.

When I go to church on Wednesday, I will take the Daily Bible Reading worksheet and the other worksheets with me to make copies to avoid the rush for the copier that often happens on Sunday morning.

Saturday, September 23, 8:00 p.m.

I read over the lesson and my notes again to plant the flow of the lesson firmly in my mind. Then I fill out the **Planning the Session** worksheet to use as a guide to manage the class time wisely. I pray for those in my class, myself, and all who will be ministering God’s Word on Sunday.

Sunday, September 24, 7:30 a.m.

I scan through the **Planning the Session** worksheet I filled out during my prep time to refresh my thoughts about the lesson. Then I take a few minutes to pray for the Spirit’s help and anointing, knowing that without His help my efforts are futile.

PLANNING the Session

Lesson: 4 Date: September 24, 2023

Title: Joseph's Story Begins

Scriptures: Genesis 37:1-36

Central Truth: God is present with us through the Holy Spirit in good and bad times.

PRESESSION ACTIVITY

Teaching Methods

Fellowship time with coffee, juice, and donuts. Greet visitors and ask them to fill out a visitor card. Hand out copies of the Daily Bible Reading Worksheet to students after they are seated.

Materials Needed

- Food and drinks
- visitor cards

Time Required: 5 min

Transition: This week's study leads us to consider that God is present with us through the Holy Spirit in good and bad times.

INTRODUCING THE LESSON

Teaching Methods

Say: Maybe you've heard the saying, "The waiting is the hard part." Waiting for something good is hard enough, but it is far more difficult to remain patient in uncertainty—when we have to wait and see whether things will turn out right.

Materials Needed

Time Required: 7 min

Teaching Methods

BIBLE COMMENTARY

Materials Needed

1 Joseph's Prophetic Dreams (Genesis 37:1-4)

Ask: What are some of the most exciting times of waiting in a person's life? What are some of the most challenging?

While any messages we receive from God are good and we may feel compelled to share them, it is often wise to keep such revelations to ourselves until God instructs us to share them.

Time Required: 12 min

2 Plot to Harm Joseph (Genesis 37:12-20)

Say: Has anyone ever plotted against you? Maybe they didn't intend to physically harm you, but to undermine you at work or school. Such experiences can be extremely hurtful, and healing takes time. Genesis 37:12-20 records just such a vindictive plot against Joseph.

- Resource Worksheet: "Our Response" for discussion
- Resource Worksheet: "The Decision" case study for discussion

Time Required: 18 min

3 Joseph Sold into Slavery (Genesis 37:28-32)

Say: Even when Joseph's life seemed to hit rock bottom, not all hope was lost. No human interference could keep God's plan from continuing to unfold in Joseph's life.

- Resource Worksheet: "Enduring Promises" to send home for students to think about.

Time Required: 12 min

WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO US?

Teaching Methods

In His perfect time, God will keep His promises and His plan will come to pass. As you move forward in your walk with the Lord today, have faith. He holds your future in His hands.

Materials Needed

Time Required: 3 min

LIVING IT OUT

Teaching Methods

Challenge students to use one of the Living It Out points this week. Close by praying for unity in relationships and for hope, even when circumstances seem hopeless.

Materials Needed

Time Required: 3 min

Total Time Required: 60 min

A full-size "Planning the Session" form is available for you to photocopy on page 5 of each *Adult Resource Packet*.

PLANNING the Session

Study: _____ Date: _____

Title: _____

Scriptures: _____

Objective: _____

PRESESSION ACTIVITY

Teaching Methods

Materials Needed

INTRODUCING THE STUDY

Teaching Methods

Materials Needed

Time Required: _____ min

Time Required: _____ min

Transition: _____

Teaching Methods

BIBLE COMMENTARY

Materials Needed

1

Time Required: _____ min

2

Time Required: _____ min

3

Time Required: _____ min

WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO US?

Teaching Methods

Materials Needed

LIVING IT OUT

Teaching Methods

Materials Needed

Time Required: _____ min

Time Required: _____ min

Total Time Required: _____ min

Dear Teacher,

Thank you for your commitment to the discipleship of adults. As Jesus' return looms nearer, it is increasingly important for His people to be fully immersed in His Word. You serve in a vital role as you guide and encourage your students in their study of the Scriptures.

Adults are challenging in terms of diversity—in educational background, life experiences, and spiritual maturity. Some people may be in your class for many years and some may come and go as jobs or other factors move them in or out of your community. This creates a special responsibility to make the most of every class session.

Such diversity also demands that we, as your curriculum developers, pack as much as possible into each lesson so you have the resources and flexibility you need to tailor the class to the people sitting in front of you. Perhaps you think there is too much material to cover in your allotted time. That's a good problem! You need not cover every nugget of information or to ask every question in the *Adult Teacher Guide* or use every page of the *Adult Resource Packet*.

As you prepare, prayerfully consider the needs in your group and their previous biblical knowledge. You may choose to divide equally the time after your opening activity between the three major points, or you may choose to devote more time to a point that is especially relevant to your class, doing an overview of the other points.

If you do not normally receive the *Adult Resource Packet*, I encourage you to order it for at least one quarter and look at the worksheets, case studies, and other activities it contains. You may want to do one activity in class and send the others home with your students for further study during the week. We certainly hope their Bible study is not limited to the one hour or less that most churches provide on a weekly basis. The resource items and the *Adult Student Guide* are wonderful tools to keep them engaged in the Word all week.

Don't forget to take advantage of the PowerPoint slides for each lesson and the supplemental videos located at: <https://radiantlifecurriculum.com/Age-Levels/Adults>.

We pray that the lessons in this book will enrich your life and the lives of your students.

Dilla Dawson, Managing Editor
Radiant Life Curriculum

CLASSROOM DISCUSSIONS

THAT HONOR GOD

by LIZ HIGHTOWER

Mr. Bradley, I heard on the news that aspartame causes cancer in lab rats. Is that true?”

That’s all it took to completely derail Biology II at my rural high school. Every day a different student would ask a predetermined question about Mr. Bradley’s No. 1 Interest: carcinogens. And every day, his inevitable rabbit trail meant no lesson and no homework. Unsurprisingly, none of us learned much about biology in that class.

Managing classroom discussions can be challenging for any teacher, even if their students aren’t actively plotting against them. But runaway conversations in the Sunday School classroom do more than waste time; they can destroy unity and harm people in our families, churches, and communities.

As we come to the Lord’s house and gather in our classrooms each week to study, talk, and pray together, we would be wise to remember David’s words in Psalm 15: “Who may worship in your sanctuary, Lord? Who may enter your presence on your holy hill? Those who lead blameless lives and do what is right, speaking the truth from sincere hearts. Those who refuse to gossip or harm their neighbors or speak evil of their friends” (verses 1–3, *NLT*).

David says when we pursue holiness, speak the truth sincerely, and refuse to weaponize words, we gain access to the very presence of God.

Pursue Holiness

Listen well. Good teachers are good listeners. Not only do they listen to God’s Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, but they listen carefully to students and encourage them to listen to one another.

Mutual respect demonstrated through careful listening has always been an important ingredient in church unity. Near the beginning of his letter to believers, James (brother of Jesus and leader in the

Jerusalem church) wrote, “Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry” (1:19, *NLT*). Taking these steps in the order James prescribes will set the stage for God-honoring conversations.

Do what God’s Word says. James continues, “Don’t just listen to God’s word. You must do what it says” (verse 22, *NLT*). Aligning our lives with Scripture is the essence of holiness. As Bible teachers, we should allow each lesson to change us first—long before we ever enter the classroom (see 1:23–25; 3:1). Only then can we exhort students and lead God-honoring discussions with integrity and legitimacy.

Speak the Truth Sincerely

Facilitate in-depth discussion. Few tools encourage students to think harder and interact more meaningfully with Scripture than group discussion. Allow plenty of time for the questions included in your *Adult Teacher Guide* and other questions you add to fit the context and personality of your class. Resist the urge to fill every lull in the conversation. Growth happens in those quiet moments when students are processing new thoughts and ideas.

Carefully interpret Scripture. It’s our job to point students back to the Bible with every question or discussion item. Rather than relying on our opinions or limited perspectives, we should constantly ask ourselves and our students: *But what does the Bible say?* When we follow Paul’s instruction to “be a good worker . . . who correctly explains the word of truth,” we don’t “need to be ashamed” and will “receive [God’s] approval” (2 Timothy 2:15, *NLT*).

It’s all too easy to respond to impromptu questions or comments by quoting familiar Scriptures out of context. Let’s resist that temptation. A teacher’s words carry weight and can greatly affect how students understand Scripture and God’s character. As

you prepare to teach each lesson, imagine what questions might come up. Then ask yourself, *How can I respond in a way that reflects the whole truth of the Bible?* When questions come up that you aren't prepared or equipped to answer, simply say, "I don't know that answer." Then assure the class you'll research the subject or ask a student to do so. Remember to follow up the next week!

Share your struggles. If the lesson topic is something you struggle with or don't fully understand, humbly admit that to your students. Every time I teach about God testing Abraham's faith in Genesis 22, I admit how uncomfortable the story makes me as a parent. When I teach about patience, I confess I am still growing in that virtue. Talking about our struggles causes students to let their guard down. They open up when they realize the classroom is a safe place to have honest, even difficult, discussions about Scripture intersecting with real life.

Refuse to Weaponize Words

Shut down gossip. Gossip is condemned throughout Scripture, and Paul even lists it alongside other sins like murder, sexual depravity, and hating God (see Romans 1:24–32). David himself had been the subject of people's praise—"Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands!" (1 Samuel 18:7, NLT)—as well as people's scorn—"Malicious witnesses testify against me" (Psalm 35:11, NLT). It is no wonder his qualifications for pleasing God in Psalm 15 include "those who refuse to gossip" (verse 3, NLT).

When gossip creeps into your class, take a cue from Barney Fife and "nip it in the bud." Start by gently redirecting the conversation. If someone makes a negative comment, immediately respond with a true statement filled with positivity or compassion.

- To "I don't like that song we sang in church last week," you could respond, "I appreciate how hard the worship team works every week. God is really using them."
- To "Linda needs to lose some weight," you could respond, "She is such a kind person. I really enjoy spending time with her."
- To "I can't believe John is drinking again," you could respond, "I understand that it's like to fight hard against sin. What do you struggle with?"

Sometimes a more forceful rebuke is needed, and that is your prerogative and responsibility as teacher. Not only are you protecting people's reputations and upholding their value as image-bearers, but you are sending the message that unwholesome talk has no place in the body of Christ—or your class.

Guard your class prayer time. It is dangerously easy to cross the line from prayer request time to full-fledged gossip session. Sadly, the church crosses that line so often that we have become notorious for it.

Establishing a few parameters for your prayer time will help keep the conversation on track. Pastor Matt Mitchell suggests these:¹

1. **Check your role.** Is it your place to share this request? Set the clear expectation that people must give permission for their names and prayer requests to be shared in your class. Without that permission, needs must be shared without using names (or other identification clues) or not shared at all.
2. **Check your audience.** Some people can be trusted to keep requests confidential. Some cannot. Explain that every prayer need mentioned in your class will not be shared beyond it without permission. As time passes and people honor this commitment, trust will grow.
3. **Check your facts.** Once you have a person's permission to share a request, make sure you have the information straight. Don't share hearsay or rumors. And don't say more than you have to. God knows all the details.
4. **Check your heart.** Like every other sin, gossip starts in the heart (see Matthew 12:35–37). Be honest with yourself: Are you sharing out of genuine love and a desire for God's glory? Or are you trying to impress people with your knowledge? Would you say anything differently if the person was in the room?

Holy conversation—strategically filled with grace and truth—brings honor to God and builds up others. As we lead in this area, let's pray along with David: "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer" (Psalm 19:14, NLT).

LIZ HIGHTOWER is an editor with Adult Radiant Life curriculum, Assemblies of God.

1. Matt Mitchell, "Keeping Gossip Out of Prayer Requests," CareLeader, accessed April 14, 2022, <https://www.careleader.org/keeping-gossip-prayer-requests/>.



WHY WE LOVE OUR SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS

Left to right: Amelia Long, Jake Long, Randy Tindell, Dana Tindell, Dianna Greene, Larry Greene, Penny Davison, Dilla Dawson, Ron Horner, Kathleen Burleton, Ronnie Murray, Abra Derry, Bruce Havens, Jeannie Murray, Julie Horner

By DILLA DAWSON and JULIE HORNER

Dilla: I asked everyone what they love about our Sunday School class, and then asked our teacher, Julie, to give her perspective on what we all shared. The best feature? We start with our quiz questions—and everyone participates.

Dana: We “have to” write our own quiz question, so we can’t just glance at the lesson in the car on the way. We have to be prepared and write a good question that’s going to trip up Ron, Bruce, and Randy—you know, some of the “smarter” people in the class—or at least the ones who think they are!

Ron: What do you mean? I get one hundred percent on every quiz! Of course, we get to grade our own papers. . . .

Randy: I like asking questions about history and customs. So many things can be overlooked or that we might not have known about. It makes me dig deeper.

Dianna: For me, it’s a way to get into the Bible!

Bruce: There’s peer pressure to prepare. I don’t want to sit here acting like I haven’t done my homework.

Kathleen: Honestly, I’m also not one to prepare. Yeah, I hit panic mode to at least know what we’ll be talking about because everyone else knows the lesson and has prepared for it.

Julie (our teacher): I’m a huge believer in systematic Bible learning, but I’ve observed that truly getting everyone engaged in the Bible early on Sunday

morning isn’t easy. So we start every class time with a quiz, but I don’t write it. Everyone has the opportunity to ask one question, including me.

We have two rules. First, your question has to relate to the lesson we’re studying in some way. For example:

- *Bible facts:* How many different animals were mentioned in today’s reading? Bonus: What were they?
- *Geography:* If I went to Babylon today, what country would I be in?
- *Historical research:* Did the Exodus happen before or after the pyramids were built?
- *Current events:* What event in the news recently tied to what we’re studying?

The second rule is: You must know the answer to your own question.

Here’s how it works. After we share God sightings (what God is up to in our lives), we take the quiz. I call on each person by name to ask if they have a quiz question. I call on everyone every week even if they rarely ask a question. That’s one way to build accountability! Of course, people can pass, but students feel a lot of peer pressure to ask a question, even if it’s a simple detail from the reading or Bible notes.

People write down their answers, including me. It’s important for teachers to model what we want everyone to do. Then we go around the group again, rereading our questions and answering them. We have fun interaction as people share their answers.

We *never* share our scores. It’s not about getting

all the right answers. It's about inspiring everyone to engage in learning before they get to class. I leave it up to the Holy Spirit to start to draw their attention to what's important for them. We get to interact and learn from each other, not just from the teacher.

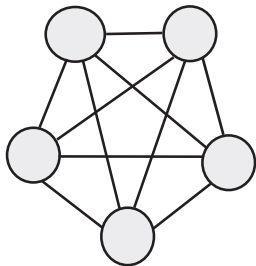
Dana: Our teacher sets the bar pretty high. It's not going to be a class where someone is reading from a lesson book.

Bruce: I've been in classes where the teacher rambles on. *Sometimes* the class gets an opportunity to give input. More often they don't. If the teacher wants everyone to prepare, then they need to engage the class.

Abra: Yeah! In other Sunday School classes I've been in, students talk to the teacher and the teacher talks back. Here we talk to each other and to the teacher. We're in an equal setting. We have time for others to talk. We respond to each other. Our teacher is more of a facilitator, a collaborator. It's more of a teamwork aspect, and we're all learning together.

Julie (our teacher): When I think about a successful learning conversation, I visualize a star. Everyone in the room is one of the points, and the lines of conversation connecting all of us crisscross the group. The conversation doesn't always bounce back to me. That's how I know I'm doing a good job of engaging learning, rather than lecturing. My goal is to talk about half of the time during which I'll be asking questions and interacting with others' responses.

INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION



Also, we sit so everyone can see each other, not people looking at just me. It's a lot harder to interact if everyone is sitting in rows facing me. I call on people to pull them into

the conversation sometimes, but I *always* make sure the question won't embarrass them. This also helps to prevent one person from dominating the conversation. We make sure everyone feels accepted and safe to share.

Kathleen: Our teacher lets us blurt out thoughts without raising our hand. We're allowed to say something, and our teacher doesn't say, "No, you're wrong." She might say, "That's interesting." Facial expressions are something to keep in mind, too! She doesn't show her shock at someone's answer. She appreciates people's contributions.

Dana: Yeah, she might say, "Okay, I haven't considered that." The interaction makes it worth our time to look ahead and be prepared.

Abra: The questions show she has an interest in us and what's going on in our lives. And everyone's respectful, so everyone feels safe to share.

Julie (our teacher): These are fun observations! I want everyone to be able to contribute to the learning conversation, from a new believer to those of us who have been in Sunday School for fifty years. I do get to practice my passive look sometimes! I rarely correct publicly unless someone is way off base, but I control that with the kind of questions I ask the group.

I ask a lot of interactive questions to get us talking, questions that will get unique responses. For example, if we're talking about Joseph, I might ask, "What's a dream you have that hasn't been fulfilled yet?" For Job, "What's the hardest challenge you've faced?" You can learn a lot about your students by the questions you ask.

I don't ask questions that let students show off how well they know the Bible or intimidate others. I rarely ask questions that have right answers or could let others mislead the group. For example, I wouldn't ask, "Do you think the gifts of the Spirit are for the Church today? Why or why not?" I reserve non-negotiable doctrine and important lesson points, or "must knows" for my teaching time. We grow together!

Jeannie: I like the teaching; just how the teacher mixes it up and keeps it interesting. I learn a lot.

Larry: I feel challenged in a deeper walk. Challenged to do better.

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DISCIPLESHIP

GROWING DISCIPLES IN YOUR CHURCH

by ELLY MARROQUIN

Have you considered the opportunity you have been given to cultivate the next generation of “disciplers”—or disciple-makers—for your church? Well, your classroom or small group might be the garden where you can grow disciples who become disciplers.

Each week, you partner with the Holy Spirit and allow God’s Word to nurture those under your care. In addition to teaching the precious truths of Scripture and helping people develop the ability to listen to God, you are also helping them apply His Word the rest of the week. Each student has a unique story and an individual purpose and calling, but you have the privilege of helping each of them along their discipleship journey.

Here are a few ways you can walk alongside your students as they pursue Christ.

Pray for your students and others who will be joining your group. Prayer changes people and situations. The first person who will be impacted is *you*. The atmosphere in your classroom or small group will be altered positively, and you will begin to experience the Holy Spirit’s presence in each gathering.

Consider using a journal, flashcards, or electronic notes to keep a log of each person’s prayer requests. Don’t forget to note when God answers a prayer. Provide opportunities for your students to pray for one another, such as adopting prayer partners for a month. This will allow friendships to form and community to develop.

Discipleship is fostered in community and corporate prayer is a powerful, unifying weapon in a believer’s spiritual arsenal. When you intentionally

build community, your students benefit in multiple ways, including more effective learning. Greater unity will lead to greater participation and growth in the people you disciple.

Share a word of encouragement or a Scripture verse once a week. You could send a group text, email, or make phone calls. Maybe you can create a group chat where students post the ways the Lord has spoken to them through Scripture or ask questions about something they read. (You could then take time to formulate and research the answer before addressing the question in the next class meeting.) Or you might consider sending students a birthday or anniversary greeting. There are multiple ways to keep the lines of communication open beyond your classroom time.

Build relationships with your students. Develop a rotating schedule to ensure you visit your students monthly or bimonthly. Go out for coffee, tea, or ice cream. Walk or hike at the local park. Watch a basketball game or play miniature golf. Invite them to your home for a meal. These meeting times provide you with special opportunities to learn about each student. Maybe they are struggling with an issue or a specific area. As you form relationships, you gain access to speak into their lives, share the counsel of God’s Word, and pray for specific needs.

What else are you accomplishing as you spend time with your students? You are modeling what a discipler does. Invite your class to be generous in sharing their faith stories with coworkers, neighbors, or friends. When a person shares their testimony with someone

and that person comes to faith in Jesus, they just made a disciple. That's exciting! One more person was added to God's family, and the one who led them to Jesus is now a discipler. They are responsible for walking alongside the new believer, modeling what it means to follow Jesus and teaching them to read and study the Bible, pray, and live in obedience to God each day. But it all starts by building relationships.

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you provide accountability and encouragement for each student. Discipleship is about being transformed by the Holy Spirit and formed into the character of Christ. The discipleship process also involves multiplication, and we need to encourage every believer to embrace the privilege of sharing their faith and making new disciples. Our first assignment as believers is to be with Jesus—to remain in Him—and the next step is to invite others to do the same.

During your class time, invite people to come to faith in Christ. Then, remind your class as they depart that they are entering their mission field, and they should embrace every opportunity to share God's love with others.

Provide the means for regular personal growth evaluation. You can decide if this occurs weekly or monthly and whether it's done electronically or on paper, but create a way for students to reflect on what they are learning and applying in the following areas:

- **Bible:** Do I regularly engage with Scripture, listening to God and allowing His Word to guide my decisions?
- **Holy Spirit:** Am I intentionally seeking a relationship with the Holy Spirit? Do I surrender all areas of my life to His complete control? Am I actively pursuing the continual infilling of the Holy Spirit?
- **Mission:** Am I participating in Christ's mission to share the gospel and make disciples?

- **Prayer:** Am I engaged in active conversation with God? Do I pray in faith for God's purposes to be fulfilled in my life and in His church? Do I regularly practice fasting?
- **Worship:** Does my life reflect obedience and display the fruit of the Spirit?
- **Service:** Do I seek opportunities to serve my family, church, and community?
- **Generosity:** Am I sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, seizing opportunities to meet others' needs using my time, treasure, talent, or testimony?

Practice hospitality and show creativity.

Create an inviting meeting space that is neat, attractive, and clean. (A fresh coat of paint covers a multitude of imperfections.) Set out extra chairs to show that you are always expecting your students to invite friends—and that you're ready for them. Greet everyone with a warm smile. Prepare a variety of ways to begin your lesson. Keep students engaged, using unique object lessons or ice breakers. Continually look for new ways to make students—both old and new—feel at home and involved in your class.

As you implement some of these suggestions, your students will flourish, become disciplers, and bless their neighborhoods, workplaces, or schools. Increased prayer, community building, and relationship development centered around God's Word are essentials when raising up disciples and disciplers.

Remember, discipleship requires an investment. Jesus spent time with His disciples, and they became world-changers. Who are the world-changers growing under your care each week? As you provide fertile soil, these disciples will grow and impact their world for Christ.

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DIRECTING STUDENTS

TOWARD INDIVIDUAL STUDY

by DARLA KNOTH

Followers of Jesus can learn to be lifelong disciples by focusing on individual study outside of classroom time. Your students may ask, “Isn’t just reading the Bible enough?” And it is. But one blogger answered that question this way: “Studying the Bible will help you become Bible literate. Being Bible literate not only means that you know the characters and their stories, know the themes and the commands, know where to find various stories and verses, but you can also identify Bible truth from statements that may sound like they came from the Bible.”

Share these suggested methods of study with your students:

Systematic Study

Study with intention. Emphasize to your students that they can study the Bible with intention to know God and what His Word says. God can speak to them through His Word when they take time studying it. Encourage them to seek a plan that will work for their lifestyle, and commit to following that plan. Students will reap the fruit of intentional study during their lifetime.

Studying God’s Word chronologically reveals new insights that many students miss when reading through the books of the Bible sequentially. We know the Bible is composed of sixty-six individual books, sorted by genre: history, law, poetry, prophetic, or personal letter, etc. Encourage your students to look for and purchase a Bible in which the individual books are arranged in chronological order.

When students read through the Bible in the order in which the events occurred, it brings new revelation to their lives. Students will come to understand the “story” better as they read chronologically. They will have a better understanding of the “main character” of the Bible: God—and His plan of redemption for mankind. God reveals His character through the pages of His Word. We will avoid large gaps in our understanding of who He is and what He has done for us when we read chronologically.

Study inductively. Inductive study can usually be fulfilled by using the “observation, interpretation, application” method, a trusted way to get more out of Bible reading. As a student begins studying, he or she should pray to understand what the passage means and how to apply it to life.

Then, suggest these steps to your students: First, **observe what the verse or passage is saying**. Ask yourself some of these questions when reading through a passage:

- What would the original audience have observed in this passage?
- What meaning does the author intend for me to catch?
- How do other Bible translations help me understand this passage?
- What repeated phrases, words, or ideas should I pay attention to?
- Is a particular attribute of God illustrated or celebrated?
- Does the passage have any lists that I

should break down to consider each item individually?

- What words don't I fully understand and should look up in a dictionary?
- How does this passage relate to the prior passage or lead into the next passage?

Second, **study to find the meaning behind what the passage is saying.** Consult cross-referenced verses, Bible commentaries, and use paraphrasing to help grasp the deeper meaning. Consider writing down questions you might have about this passage to study deeper.

Finally, **understand how you can apply it to your life.** How will the meaning of the verse or passage make you a better disciple each day? How will you change personally as a result of studying this passage?

You can find several books on this method of study by searching online or checking with your local Christian bookstore.

Cross-Generational Study

Remind your students that they can actively look for other generations of students to purposefully study God's Word together. The deep relationships formed across generations when probing the depths of God's Word brings energy to the entire congregation.

Help your students find ways to interact with other generations in a meaningful way. Could your class organize an event, or ongoing extracurricular study, and invite others to join? Could your students find individual ways to connect with other generations of students on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis?

Relational Study

Your students can also look for others to study with, including peers, coworkers, neighbors, and friends. Small groups of women or men can actively study God's Word together over coffee. Forming a small group to study with and build community with follows Jesus' example of

forming a small group of disciples who learned in community.

Your students will find that studying with others gives them wisdom, provides encouragement, and builds accountability. They will form meaningful relationships with people they study God's Word with. God promises to reveal himself to even two or three who gather in His name.

One helpful resource in an extracurricular small group study is Bible Engagement Project. The digital sessions are available through a smartphone app that each member of a study group accesses. Weekly learning sessions and individual daily devotions will assist your study group in engaging with God's Word regularly and systematically. Learn more at bibleengagementproject.com.

Life-Change Focus (Outcome-Based Study)

Sometimes, groups of students struggle with the same types of problems or concerns. These individuals could consider forming groups to study solutions to these problems. Life-controlling issues like substance abuse, anger, depression, and more can be addressed in small group studies. Students can gain victory by investigating what God's Word says together. Encourage those who form groups such as these to be accountable to each other beyond just the group's study times. Lifelong bonds can be formed as those who study together conquer their addictions, fears, and more.

Second Peter 1:3 tells us, "By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence." The best way to know Him is to study His Word.

DARLA KNOTH is senior editor, Adult Radiant Life curriculum, Assemblies of God.

1. Kiersten Mehl, "Studying God's Word Methodically," Timberline Church Windsor Women's Blog, published March 22, 2022, https://www.timberline-church.org/timberline-windsor-womens-blog/studying-gods-word-methodically-observation-interpretation-application/?gclid=EAlaQobChMI1urGmLvC-wIVdRXUAR152QMLEAAYASAAEgLO7vD_BwE.

2. Ellen Hopkins, "Systematic Bible Study," Scripture Confident Living, accessed November 23, 2022, <https://www.scriptureconfidentliving.com/blog/systematic-bible-study>.

3. Mehl, "Studying God's Word Methodically."

Early Israelite History

When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, breaking the precious relationship between God and humanity, God already had a plan of redemption. Even as He judged Adam and Eve for their sins, He promised the Savior would one day crush the enemy (see Genesis 3:15).

As years passed and the earth's population increased, God chose a man named Abram (later Abraham), through whom He would send His Son to provide reconciliation. This unit begins with God's choice, tracing the paths of Abraham and his descendants throughout the Book of Genesis.

Lesson one introduces the covenant God made with Abraham. We can be encouraged as we reflect on God counting Abraham among the righteous because of his faith rather than his good deeds.

In lesson two, Abraham's son Isaac is tricked into blessing his younger son, Jacob, although custom dictated the blessing should have gone to Esau as the firstborn son. God's plan often runs counter to human tradition.

Despite his reputation as a deceiver, we'll see how Jacob is blessed in lesson three. The deep flaws in his character show us that God can use anyone, even when they seem unredeemable. We will observe tremendous growth in Jacob's life through the remainder of Genesis.

Jacob's sons, who became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel, engaged in sibling rivalry of the worst kind. Lesson four details their depravity as they sell their brother Joseph into slavery and lie about it to their father.

Lesson five follows Joseph's rise to power in Egypt, and we see God's plan continue to unfold. By granting Joseph favor and blessing everything he does, God will save His people from perishing during seven years of famine.

A family reunion in lesson six shows us a beautiful example of forgiveness. Not only does Joseph radically forgive his brothers, but he also saves their lives by providing homes and sustenance for their families during the famine.

The unit concludes in lesson seven with the deaths of both Jacob and Joseph, lives that were well-lived despite character flaws and trials of every kind. God's plan for His people continued to endure through the generations, eventually resulting in the coming of His Son, Jesus, who would bring ultimate reconciliation.

September 3, 2023

LESSON

1

God's Covenant
with Abraham

Study Text

Genesis 12:1–20; 15:1–21; 17:1–14;
21:1–8; 22:1–19

Central Truth

God still calls people to enter into
covenant with Him.

Key Verse
Genesis 15:6

[Abram] believed in the LORD;
and he counted it to him for
righteousness (KJV).

Abram believed the LORD, and the
LORD counted him as righteous
because of his faith (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will examine how the covenant given to Abraham fits into God's overall plan to bless the nations by bringing salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ.
- Students will explore the lasting significance of God's repeated declaration of His promise to Abraham as well as circumcision as the sign of the covenant.
- Students will examine their own faith, noting how that faith is demonstrated through acts of obedience.

Introducing the Study

Say: People can mean a lot of different things when they say, "I am blessed." These three words might be spoken by someone who just purchased a new car or someone who learned their cancer is in remission. It is important to consider perspective when we look at what it means to be blessed.

Opening Activity—Blessed by God

Ask: *What are some ways God has blessed you?* Examples can range from God providing funds to pay bills during a time of trouble to knowing He has given us everlasting life. Each example is important and worthy of rejoicing.

Say: God has blessed us in many ways. Genesis places these blessings in perspective by reminding us of the perfect relationship people originally shared with God and how it was lost. As we begin this unit, we are reminded that the message of Scripture largely follows the unfolding of God's greatest blessing: His plan to redeem humanity. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Genesis 12 is one of the most critical passages of Scripture when it comes to understanding God's desire for His creation. His overarching plan is rooted in the concept of relationship. It can be said that the rest of Scripture after Genesis 3 tells us God's plan for restoring humanity to the relationship we enjoyed with Him before Genesis 3. When we talk about *blessing* and *covenant*, we must look at the terms in light of God's plan of redemption—a plan sealed by His covenant, which begins to take shape in Genesis 12.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Genesis 12:2. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

3. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

15:9. And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.

10. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not.

17. And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.

18. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.

17:2. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.

10. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.

21:2. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.

3. And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.

22:1. And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.

2. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

10. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

11. And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.

12. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.

New Living Translation

Genesis 12:2. “I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others.

3. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.”

15:9. The LORD told him, “Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.”

10. So Abram presented all these to him and killed them. Then he cut each animal down the middle and laid the halves side by side; he did not, however, cut the birds in half.

17. After the sun went down and darkness fell, Abram saw a smoking firepot and a flaming torch pass between the halves of the carcasses.

18. So the LORD made a covenant with Abram that day and said, “I have given this land to your descendants, all the way from the border of Egypt to the great Euphrates River.”

17:2. “I will make a covenant with you, by which I will guarantee to give you countless descendants.”

10. “This is the covenant that you and your descendants must keep: Each male among you must be circumcised.”

21:2. [Sarah] became pregnant, and she gave birth to a son for Abraham in his old age. This happened at just the time God had said it would.

3. And Abraham named their son Isaac.

22:1. Some time later, God tested Abraham’s faith. “Abraham!” God called. “Yes,” he replied. “Here I am.”

2. “Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you.”

10. And Abraham picked up the knife to kill his son as a sacrifice.

11. At that moment the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Yes,” Abraham replied. “Here I am!”

12. “Don’t lay a hand on the boy!” the angel said. “Do not hurt him in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld from me even your son, your only son.”

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)

Part 1—Called of God; Covenant Instituted

□ Abraham's Calling

Genesis 12:1–5



Say: When we think of Abraham's calling, we rightly focus on the way he put his future fully in God's hands, accepting the challenge to leave everything behind in blind obedience. Yet as we study Abraham's calling, we find that his faith encompassed much more than a change of location. (Share your highlights from the following text.) ▼ **(Play the video describing the archaeology related to Abraham's life—available at [RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult](https://www.RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult).)**



Resource Packet Item 1: The Land that I Will Show You

Distribute the map, and note the location of various key points in Abraham's journeys as you move through the unit.

We are first introduced to Abraham in Genesis 11:27–32. (He was originally called Abram before God changed his name in 17:5.) The son of a man named Terah, Abraham lived in Ur, a prosperous city in southern Mesopotamia located about 120 miles west of modern-day Basra, Iraq. Terah sought to move his family to Canaan, but instead settled in Haran, a city in what is now southeast Turkey that was about a month's journey from Ur. Haran was a popular stopping point for travelers and caravans. Verse 30 notes a critical detail: Abraham and Sarah were childless.



Resource Packet Item 2: God's Covenant with Abraham

Distribute and discuss the information sheet. Note that this information can inform our understanding not only of this lesson but also the way these passages relate to our relationship with God today.

The word *covenant* is familiar in Christianity. At its root, it refers to a treaty, agreement, or promise. In Bible times, a covenant normally took place between a ruler and those subordinate to him. In this case, God is the benefactor, or caretaker, of this covenant. Its existence and administration depend solely upon Him. Abraham—and all humanity—bore the responsibility to follow His commands as the people of His covenant. Abraham would complete the migration to Canaan, but he would do so alone, venturing into an unknown land with only his wife and nephew, separated from the support and care of his extended family.

Genesis 12:1–5 introduces us to the key word *blessing*, variations of which occur five times in verses 2–3. This reminds us of God's blessing upon humanity in Genesis 1:22,28. Here we see that the restoration of God's blessings upon the first human beings would be restored through this one man, Abraham. Conversely, one could also experience God's curse through this one man, just as the world was originally cursed through one man. These verses describe a pivotal moment for humanity, drawing our minds back to the accounts of creation and the Fall.

Abraham's calling included a sevenfold promise (12:2–3, NLT):

1. "I will make you into a great nation."
2. "I will bless you."

3. “I will . . . make you famous” (or “make thy name great,” *KJV*).
4. “You will be a blessing to others.”
5. “I will bless those who bless you.”
6. “I will . . . curse those who treat you with contempt” (or “curseth thee,” *KJV*).
7. “All the families on earth will be blessed through you.”

Note that “make you famous” means more than superficial fame. In the Ancient Near East, a person’s name was more than an identification label. It spoke to one’s character—how he or she was esteemed and regarded in the world. Abraham’s calling included both his identity in the world and his impact upon the world. The same would be true of his children and future generations. They would exemplify greatness and serve as a vessel for the delivery of divine blessing.

It’s important to view this promise of greatness through the eyes of a God-follower. Abraham’s promise included both his innumerable descendants—which would involve a miracle—and his significance as one whose blessing would reach to all the people groups of the earth. Such blessing would occur as people acknowledged the one true God. Until the time of Christ, Abraham’s descendants represented the salvation that would come through Christ. Since Christ’s ascension, the Church—God’s people everywhere—points the world back toward Christ, introducing them to the blessings of God they can enjoy today and forever as His followers.

Sadly, those who responded to Abraham with scorn and ridicule would receive God’s curse. To understand this, we must remember that Abraham’s name focused on his role and character. To curse him ultimately meant cursing the Giver of the blessing being offered. Rejecting God’s plan of redemption is rejecting God himself.

Today, we continue to function as Abraham’s children (see Galatians 3:6–9), bearing the blessing so Genesis 12:1–3 is fulfilled and all the earth might be blessed through Abraham. The journey that began in verses 4–5 continues on a spiritual plane as God’s people declare salvation and new life through Christ.

Discuss

- ? What do you think the word *covenant* means for Christians today?
- ? What blessings of God do you enjoy every day?



□ The Calling Is Confirmed by Covenant

Genesis 15:1–21

Say: Genesis 15 is comprised of a wonderful, twofold divine encounter in which God reaffirms His presence and blessings to Abraham. This encounter reminds us God will always fulfill His promises. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Genesis 15 details God’s powerful covenant promise to Abraham. Verses 1–7 are key, because Abraham’s divine encounter includes two “I am” statements: “I am thy shield” (verse 1, *KJV*; literally, “I am the One who protects you”) and “I am the LORD” (verse 7; literally, “I am the one, true, sovereign God”). The explanations of the covenant promise are built on the foundation of God’s nature and character.

In verse 1, God reminded Abraham of the promise He had originally given him about ten years earlier. Abraham was not questioning God's plan or character in verse 2; instead, he simply wondered how it could be possible for an elderly couple to become parents of a great nation. That is why he considered adopting a servant like Eliezer of Damascus to fill the position of heir. But God said this measure would not be necessary, because the number of Abraham's natural descendants would dwarf the number of stars overhead (verse 5).

Abraham "believed the LORD" (verse 6, NLT). Scripture does not say he simply believed the promises but that Abraham focused on the Promise Giver, holding a steadfast trust in Him. Abraham's faith was personal confidence in God himself. He wrapped his identity in God's promise.

The sealing, or confirmation, of the covenant is described in verses 17–18. It follows a treaty format common to the Ancient Near East—but with some startling differences. In a normal treaty, both parties walked between the sacrificed animals, demonstrating mutual commitment to the promise being made. But in Abraham's covenant, only "a smoking firepot and a flaming torch" (verse 17, NLT) signifying God's presence passed through the animals, indicating that the promise rested on God alone. Ancient Near East treaties often included blessings and curses based on whether the covenant was kept or broken. While God's blessings are clear in these verses, there is no curse attached to failing to keep this covenant. God would uphold His portion, and no human being could thwart its completion or stand in the way of its fulfillment.

This promise would be fulfilled long after Abraham's death (verses 12–16, 18–21). All kinds of hardship would befall his lineage, including slavery in Egypt. Yet deliverance would come, and Abraham's descendants would fill the land as God had promised. Through them, the entire earth would be blessed.

Discuss

- ? What is the significance of God counting Abraham's faith to him for righteousness (Genesis 15:6)? How does this help you better understand the role of faith in Old Testament times?
- ? God told Abraham that almost all of the promise would be fulfilled after Abraham died. How can that reality inform our understanding of faith?

Part 2—Covenant Sign Commanded

□ The Covenant Is Confirmed

Genesis 17:1–8



Say: Human nature makes it easy for people—even Christians—to focus on the negative. Thankfully, God is faithful to remind us of His many promises as we walk through life. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Genesis 17:1–8, God once again reminds Abraham of His promise in the form of a name change. In chapter 16, Abraham had fathered a son with Sarah's servant Hagar. He and Sarah had struggled to reconcile God's promise with the reality of not having a son as they grew older. But God did not desert Abraham or rescind

His promise, despite Abraham's struggles. God's covenant (as established in chapter 15) was lasting and enduring, and Abraham's imperfection would not and could not change that.

God again described Abraham's future: He and Sarah would bear countless descendants (17:1–2). As Abraham fell on the ground in worship, God announced that this was “my covenant” (reaffirming its everlasting surety) and outlined the obligations of each party in the covenant: God himself (verses 4–8), Abraham (verses 9–14), and Sarah (verses 15–16). Each section is accompanied by a sign: Abraham's name change (verse 5), circumcision (verse 10), and Sarah's name change (verse 15). Note that this is what some scholars refer to as an “unequal partnership.” God's people would always depend upon God as the promises came to pass.

Abraham's former name, *Abram*, means “exalted father,” possibly a reference to Terah or to God. But the name *Abraham* means “father of a multitude.” This change, like Sarah's, would be a constant reminder that they and their descendants carried the promises of God.

Discuss

- ? Why is it vital to remember that we must depend on God for His promises to come to pass? What happens if we try to fulfill His promises on our own?
- ? What are some signs today that remind you that God is with you and that He keeps His promises? How do these signs impact your life?

□ The Sign of the Covenant Is Identified

Genesis 17:9–14

Say: While God initiates and fulfills the covenant promises, His people confirm His covenant through obedient response. In Genesis 17:9–14, God commanded Abraham to initiate a sign that would confirm the covenant. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Genesis 17:1–8 describes the covenant as everlasting, or enduring forever. We know from 12:1–3 that the covenant included God's blessing as a promise to all the peoples of the world. Abraham's seed would be the means through which this everlasting covenant would be brought forth and proclaimed.

In Genesis 17:9–14, God commanded a physical sign to accompany His covenant with the people: circumcision. This rite was significant for a number of reasons. The permanent physical alteration would signify the everlasting nature of the covenant. It also served as a reminder of the unique calling from and relationship with God, as well as the people's obligation to walk before Him in holiness, which would later be established in the Law (see Leviticus 11:44; 19:2) and carry over into the New Testament as a command to Christ's followers (see 1 Peter 1:16). While we often think of holiness as purity and cleansing from sin, we cannot overlook its root meaning, which involves being set apart from the world by God for His purposes. For New Testament believers, the “sign of circumcision” would endure, but it would be a circumcision of the heart (see Romans 2:25–29) by which our desires, aspirations, and values are purified and set apart for God.

Discuss

- ? What does it mean to say that your heart is “circumcised”?
- ? How does your heart reflect the transformation God has brought about in your life?

Part 3—Abraham Tested Regarding the Covenant

□ God’s Promise Comes Alive in Isaac

Genesis 21:1–8



Say: As we noted earlier, God’s covenant promise would be fulfilled almost entirely after Abraham’s lifetime. Yet he was able to see that promise begin to come about in Genesis 21. Through Abraham’s experience, we are reminded that God’s promises do not grow weaker or fade away as time passes. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

God’s promise of a child came to pass with the birth of Isaac when Abraham was one hundred and Sarah was ninety. This wasn’t the final fulfillment of God’s covenant promise, but it was the opening scene of God’s plan to bless humanity.

Genesis 21:1–2 emphasizes the faithfulness of God three times: “The LORD kept his word,” did “exactly what he had promised,” and it “happened at just the time God had said it would” (NLT). The account of Isaac’s birth is rather short, but the focus is entirely on God as promise-keeper.

Isaac’s name in Hebrew is a play on the word meaning “laugh” or “to laugh.” It recalls Sarah’s incredulous laughter at the notion that she would have a baby at ninety (see 18:12–15). But her doubtful laughter was transformed into joyous laughter. God honored His promise, and Abraham and Sarah’s faith—weak as it was—became sight.

Discuss

- ? Why is it important to focus first and foremost on God and who He is rather than the blessings He brings into our lives?
- ? Name three ways God has blessed you, and describe how those blessings impact how you view and understand Him.

□ Abraham Is Victorious through Testing

Genesis 22:1–19



Say: Genesis 22 records one of the most familiar stories in the Old Testament.

Despite its familiarity, we must not fail to grasp its powerful message of faith. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

At first glance, Genesis 22:1–14 is among the most peculiar accounts in Scripture. Abraham is told to sacrifice his miracle-child on a burning altar. As the story unfolds, we are not told God’s intentions. Instead, we only hear Abraham’s reflections on what is happening—and apparently, his faith is not shaken.

When the sacrifice of Isaac is halted, God says: “Because you have obeyed . . . I will certainly bless you” (verses 16–17, NLT). God’s promised blessing was never in doubt. In His omniscience, God knew Abraham’s faith. True faith is more than

mental assent; it is a matter of obedience. Verse 12 makes it clear that Abraham feared God. The fear of God might be described as recognizing that He holds life and death in His hands and living accordingly. Abraham shows us that obedience is inseparable from true faith.

Discuss

- ? Why are faith and obedience inseparable (see also James 2:14–26)?
- ? What part does our obedience play in the unfolding of God’s promises?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Faith and works are inseparable. The life of faith is a relationship, an ongoing interaction between God and His children. Take time this week to examine your life and ensure your faith and works are aligned.



Resource Packet Item 3: Promises from God

Complete the worksheet together, noting how God’s promises change the way we live and the way we view our circumstances and God himself.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Invite others to share how God’s promises have helped when their faith was challenged.
- Tell someone what God has done in your life and remind them we all can share each other’s joys and burdens as we walk through this life of faith.
- Examine the ways you put your faith in action, asking God to help you minister to others as an act of worship to God and compassion for them.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

The Noahic Covenant.
Genesis 9:8–17

Tuesday:

The Mosaic Covenant.
Exodus 19:1–8

Wednesday:

The Davidic Covenant.
2 Samuel 7:8–16

Thursday:

The New Covenant Promised.
Jeremiah 31:31–34

Friday:

The New Covenant Instituted.
Luke 22:14–20

Saturday:

The Greatness of the New
Covenant. Hebrews 8:1–13

September 10, 2023

LESSON 2

Isaac Blesses Jacob

Study Text

Genesis 27:1–46

Central Truth

God’s plan for humanity will be fully realized despite the sinfulness of people.



Key Verse Genesis 25:23

The LORD said unto [Rebekah], Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger (KJV).

The LORD told [Rebekah], “The sons in your womb will become two nations. From the very beginning, the two nations will be rivals. One nation will be stronger than the other; and your older son will serve your younger son” (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will examine the account of Jacob stealing Esau’s blessing through deceit.
- Students will recognize God’s plans prevail despite human failures.
- Students will search their hearts to ensure they are not allowing or rationalizing deception in their lives.

Introducing the Study

Say: Few emotions are more powerful than greed, jealousy, and resentment. Unchecked, they can lead people to do almost unimaginable things. Today’s lesson examines a familiar Bible story, reminding us that our own human thoughts and desires can sometimes keep us from fully trusting God. Yet His plans and promises will always come to pass in the end.

Opening Activity—Sibling Rivalry

Ask: *Have you ever been part of a sibling rivalry? How did this rivalry manifest itself?* Kids might compete to see who succeeds at sports or gets better grades. Even adults might joke with their brothers and sisters about their own accomplishments. But not all sibling rivalries are friendly. In fact, they can be harmful, even dividing families.

Say: Today’s lesson looks at one of the most familiar sibling rivalries in history. The struggle between Jacob and Esau started before they were even born, and it eventually became so heated, it split their family in two. However, as ugly as the rivalry was, it did not thwart God’s covenant plan and promises. We can trust God to work out His plan in our lives too. Our job is to accept that plan—whatever it may be. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As we read through the narratives of the Old Testament, it can be difficult to view the characters as everyday human beings with the same kinds of emotions, passions, and flaws we struggle with. But when we come to the story of Isaac’s two sons, human frailty takes center stage.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Genesis 27:2. And he said, Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death:

3. Now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison;

4. And make me savory meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die.

5. And Rebekah heard when Isaac spake to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt for venison, and to bring it.

8. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee.

9. Go now to the flock, and fetch me from thence two good kids of the goats; and I will make them savory meat for thy father, such as he loveth:

10. And thou shalt bring it to thy father, that he may eat, and that he may bless thee before his death.

14. And he went, and fetched, and brought them to his mother: and his mother made savory meat, such as his father loved.

27. And he came near, and kissed him: and he smelled the smell of his raiment, and blessed him, and said, See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the LORD hath blessed:

28. Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine:

29. Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee.

32. And Isaac his father said unto him, Who art thou? And he said, I am thy son, thy firstborn Esau.

33. And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, Who? where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed.

42. And these words of Esau her elder son were told to Rebekah: and she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said unto him, Behold, thy brother Esau, as touching thee, doth comfort himself, purposing to kill thee.

43. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; arise, flee thou to Laban my brother to Haran;

44. And tarry with him a few days, until thy brother's fury turn away.

New Living Translation

Genesis 27:2. "I am an old man now," Isaac said, "and I don't know when I may die.

3. Take your bow and a quiver full of arrows, and go out into the open country to hunt some wild game for me.

4. Prepare my favorite dish, and bring it here for me to eat. Then I will pronounce the blessing that belongs to you, my firstborn son, before I die."

5. But Rebekah overheard what Isaac had said to his son Esau. So when Esau left to hunt for the wild game . . .

8. "Now, my son, listen to me. Do exactly as I tell you.

9. Go out to the flocks, and bring me two fine young goats. I'll use them to prepare your father's favorite dish.

10. Then take the food to your father so he can eat it and bless you before he dies."

14. So Jacob went out and got the young goats for his mother. Rebekah took them and prepared a delicious meal, just the way Isaac liked it.

27. So Jacob went over and kissed him. And when Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he was finally convinced, and he blessed his son. He said, "Ah! The smell of my son is like the smell of the outdoors, which the LORD has blessed!

28. From the dew of heaven and the richness of the earth, may God always give you abundant harvests of grain and bountiful new wine.

29. May many nations become your servants, and may they bow down to you. May you be the master over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you. All who curse you will be cursed, and all who bless you will be blessed."

32. But Isaac asked him, "Who are you?" Esau replied, "It's your son, your firstborn son, Esau."

33. Isaac began to tremble uncontrollably and said, "Then who just served me wild game? I have already eaten it, and I blessed him just before you came. And yes, that blessing must stand!"

42. But Rebekah heard about Esau's plans. So she sent for Jacob and told him, "Listen, Esau is consoling himself by plotting to kill you.

43. So listen carefully, my son. Get ready and flee to my brother, Laban, in Haran.

44. Stay there with him until your brother cools off."

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)

Part 1—Plot to Deceive Isaac

□ Isaac Plans to Bless Esau

Genesis 27:1–4



Say: The Book of Genesis contains account after account of conflict and deception within family relationships, particularly siblings: Cain and Abel (4:1–8); Noah’s sons (9:20–27); Isaac and Ishmael (21:8–10); and Joseph and his brothers (chapters 37–50). This ongoing enmity was foreshadowed at the Fall: Eve’s offspring would be at war with the serpent’s offspring (see 3:15) throughout history, pitting Satan and his forces against the family of God—particularly His Son. Although human conflict was the inevitable result of the Fall, God’s plan will triumph. We see this reality on display in the story of Jacob and Esau. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Genesis 27 must be viewed in light of 25:19–34. God had blessed Isaac and Rebekah with twins, and He revealed to Rebekah that the elder would serve the younger (25:23). God’s plan diverged from the most basic cultural norms of that time. The elder son received the inheritance and held the favored position in the family. Yet throughout Genesis, God fulfilled His plan in ways that ran counter to society’s expectations. The descendants of Adam and Eve’s third son, Seth, would be chosen as God’s people (chapters 4–5). Isaac was chosen over his older brother, Ishmael (17:18–19). Joseph and Judah were both chosen over their older brothers (37:3; 49:8). Even Rachel was chosen over her older sister, Leah (29:16–18). The message is clear: God’s favor is not based on natural rights but His sovereign and eternal purposes.

In Genesis 27:1–4, Isaac was near death. Nearly blind, he called for his elder son, Esau, to receive the fatherly blessing—his birthright—after preparing Isaac’s favorite meal. The birthright included a double portion of the inheritance and signified a position of honor in the family. Although it was reserved for the eldest son, it could be transferred. In fact, just such a transfer had happened when Esau foolishly traded his birthright to Jacob in exchange for a meal (25:29–34). Scripture makes it clear that Esau “showed contempt for his rights as the firstborn” (verse 34, *NLT*) and God intended for Jacob to receive those rights (verse 23). Yet Isaac still determined to give the birthright to Esau, his favorite son.

Discuss

- ? What are some reasons God may have chosen to bring about His plans through unexpected means?
- ? Describe a time when God’s plans surprised you. What caused you to be surprised? What did you learn from the experience?

□ Rebekah Plots for Jacob

Genesis 27:5–13



Say: We often hear people lament the dysfunction of family relationships today, but this is nothing new. Isaac and Rebekah had been childless, just like Abraham and Sarah, and God intervened to give them children—twin

sons (see Genesis 25:21–28). But then Isaac and Rebekah’s parental favoritism not only aggravated the conflict between their children, but it led to division in their own relationship. Isaac wanted to bless Esau over Jacob despite God’s plan, and Rebekah conspired to deceive her husband and secure the blessing for Jacob no matter what. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Genesis 27 is certainly not the Israelites’ finest hour. We know this was the family through whom all the world would be blessed, but their divisions were deep. In verses 5–6, Isaac spoke to “his son” Esau, while Rebekah spoke to “her son” Jacob. Rebekah had overheard Isaac’s plan to bless Esau, and she quickly acted to exploit her husband’s blindness and frailty. She planned for Jacob to receive the birthright before Isaac even knew what had happened (verses 7–10).

Rebekah may have been distressed by Isaac’s plan to grant Esau the birthright without Jacob present. This demonstrated a clear lack of respect for the process, since both sons would receive a portion of their father’s blessing. Yet Rebekah’s ruse was more destructive than any oversight, intentional though it may have been.

Knowing her husband could become suspicious, Rebekah plotted for Jacob to play the part of Esau convincingly. Two goat hides and a delicious meal would give Isaac all the sensory evidence he needed to hand the birthright to his younger son. Jacob had concerns about the plan, and his mother had placed him in a difficult position (verses 11–12). Should he honor his mother’s command or his father’s will? In the end, his greatest concern was that his father would curse him, passing down a public reprimand or word of contempt that would follow him and result in misfortune or even death. Rebekah responded to Jacob’s concerns in a way that might seem startling at first, calling the curse to fall upon herself.

It was a grievous wrong to deceive a blind, dying man in this way, much less one’s father and husband. Rebekah knew the plan of God and recognized Jacob should receive the birthright, but she brought about God’s will using ungodly tactics. She is scarcely mentioned after Genesis 27, and her death is not even recorded (though her nurse Deborah’s death is recorded in 35:8). In the end, this was another example of the way God honors His promise despite the behavior of His chosen people.



Resource Packet Item 1: Family Dysfunction

Distribute the worksheet and discuss it together as a class. Be sensitive to any hurts and issues students may be facing, reminding them the body of Christ can help each other work through issues of dysfunction as we follow the Lord together.

Discuss

- ? What are some ways Christians might be tempted to “take matters into their own hands” when they feel God’s plans are threatened?
- ? How do you respond when your circumstances seem to be at odds with God’s plans? What are some right and wrong responses?

Part 2—Isaac Deceived; Jacob Blessed

□ Jacob's Deception Is Effective

Genesis 27:14–24



Say: The Scottish author Sir Walter Scott wrote, “Oh, what a tangled web we weave, When first we practise to deceive!”¹ Lies rarely stand alone. They soon require more lies and deception to cover them. Sadly, this is what happens in Genesis 27:14–24 when a frail, blind Isaac is deceived by his wife and son. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jacob did as his mother directed, killing two young goats. After Rebekah prepared the meal, she dressed her younger son in Esau's clothes, then covered his arms and neck in the skin of the goats. This would leave Jacob's skin feeling like that of Esau, who was a rugged, hairy man, in contrast to the fairer Jacob. Finally, Rebekah gave Jacob the food and sent him to his father (verses 14–18).

Jacob quickly identified himself as Esau to his father, emphasizing he was Isaac's “firstborn son.” Jacob's lie grew in response to his father's question: How could it be Esau had finished his hunting so quickly? Jacob answered, “The LORD your God put it in my path!” (verse 20, NLT).

Now Jacob was not only deceiving his father but also adding blasphemy to his offenses by using the name of the Lord in vain, using the Name for wrong purposes. It is also noteworthy that Jacob referred to God as “the LORD your God.” Scholars note that Jacob did not refer to the Lord as being *his* God until after encountering Him in a dream during the journey to Haran (28:20–22). It was only after the promise is fulfilled in him that Jacob worshiped the Lord.

Back in chapter 27, Isaac's suspicion of the situation was palpable (verses 21–24). First, he asked to touch his son to confirm that he was, in fact, Esau. He also noticed his son's voice did not sound like Esau's voice. But Isaac ignored these clues. After all, his son's hands felt like Esau's hands. He asked one more time: “Are you really my son Esau?” And Jacob answered, “Yes, I am” (verse 24, NLT). Sadly, this powerful moment of promise and blessing was polluted by Jacob and Rebekah's deception.



Resource Packet Item 2: Deception

Distribute the worksheet and discuss the ways Christians are sometimes tempted to cut corners to achieve certain results. Encourage students to ponder the personal reflection questions on their own this week.

Discuss

- ? Sometimes even Christians are tempted to believe “the end justifies the means.” How can we know when we have crossed that line?
- ? Why is it dangerous to compromise in order to bring about “right” results?

1. Sir Walter Scott, *Marmion: A Tale of Flodden Field*, Canto Sixth, The battle, stanza xvii, Project Gutenberg, accessed April 19, 2022, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4010/4010-h/4010-h.htm>.



□ Isaac Blesses Jacob

Genesis 27:25–29

Say: Have you ever seen God take something flawed or regrettable and turn it into something that perfectly aligns with His purpose? That is what happens in Genesis 27:25–29 when Jacob and Rebekah’s ruse succeeds. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Genesis 27:25, Isaac—having been persuaded that Jacob was Esau—asked to enjoy a celebratory meal with his son. After partaking of the food and wine Jacob gave him, Isaac asked “Esau” to come closer and kiss him. This paternal kiss was not merely a sign of affection but constituted an important part of the ritual. Intended to demonstrate loyalty, it makes the scene even more sadly ironic.

Isaac smelled “the outdoors” on Jacob as he leaned closer (verse 27, NLT), since his son was covered in goat skins. The smell and the feel of the fur on Jacob’s arms convinced Isaac he was speaking with Esau. Although Isaac understood the value of the birthright blessing, he took surprisingly little care to ensure it was delivered properly. As a result, he blessed Jacob (verses 28–29).

This blessing from father to son was much more than a formality. It was not a wish, hope, or prayer; it had legal force. Because this family had been chosen by God to bring about His covenant, Isaac’s blessing would be prophetic and spoken with God-given authority. Give special attention to the words of this blessing. It refers to all God had conferred upon Abraham: prosperity, dominion, protection, and the promise to bless all the nations of the earth through him and his descendants. This blessing was bestowed upon Jacob despite his deception. God’s plan would move forward, even through flawed, fallen people.



Resource Packet Item 3: Sins of the Fathers

Distribute the worksheet and discuss it in class. Note that even the patriarchs struggled to fully trust the Lord. How might we learn from their examples?

Discuss

- ? Some Christians believe past failures disqualify them from taking part in God’s plan for the world. How can Isaac and Jacob’s story give them hope?
- ? What would you say to a Christian who is overwhelmed with discouragement over past failures?



Part 3—A Deceiver Revealed

□ Esau Receives an “Anti-blessing”

Genesis 27:30–40

Say: Although Jacob had received his blessing, this dramatic scene was far from over. Esau soon returned from his hunting trip, and the conflict that ensued had long-lasting consequences. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Mere moments after Jacob had received the blessing and departed from his father, Esau, who had returned from the hunt, brought the food he prepared and

announced: “Sit up, my father, and eat my wild game so you can give me your blessing” (Genesis 27:31, NLT). Isaac responded: “Who are you?” (verse 32, NLT). A short time earlier, he had shrugged off his concerns when Jacob did not sound like Esau during the critical moments of the blessing, and now he fell into utter confusion at the sound of Esau’s voice.

One can sense Isaac’s deep emotion after Esau identified himself. A beautiful family event had turned tragic. Yet in that chaotic, emotional moment when Isaac “began to tremble uncontrollably,” he demonstrated a mental clarity he had not shown with Jacob: “I blessed him just before you came. And yes, that blessing must stand!” (verse 33, NLT). Isaac knew God’s will had been accomplished, although his own plans were dashed. Isaac may have had the wrong son in view, but he spoke the blessing of the firstborn over Jacob, and it carried the full force of a vow spoken before the Lord.

Esau was devastated. Verses 34–36 reveal a range of emotions: bitterness, false hope, fury, and desperation. Yet the reality is, he had despised his own birthright and given it to Jacob in the first place.

Isaac responded to Esau’s outburst with blunt truth: Jacob had received all the blessing entailed, including his descendants’ dominance over Esau’s line. Nothing remained to be given. Yet Esau continue to plead and weep.

Finally, Isaac answered. But his words to Esau were far from a blessing. In fact, some scholars refer to them as an “anti-blessing” that would follow Esau’s lineage for many generations, even centuries. To understand its meaning, we need to look back at Jacob’s blessing—and Abraham’s covenant promise. Jacob’s line would enjoy prosperity, but Esau’s line would “live away from the richness of the earth” (verse 39, NLT). This would be the land of Edom (see 32:3; 36:1–9). Located south-east of the Dead Sea, the region of Edom is a dry, desert wilderness bearing little resemblance to the lush, fruitful areas covering much of Israel.

Furthermore, while the whole earth would be blessed through Jacob’s seed, Esau’s descendants would be known as people of conflict and war. This reality is demonstrated throughout the Old Testament, particularly in their acrimonious relationship with Israel (see 1 Samuel 14:47; 2 Kings 14:7–10; Psalm 60:9–12). From the time of David, Edom was part of Israel’s empire; thus, “serving Jacob” (see 2 Samuel 8:11–14). However, as Isaac had stated, Edom would break free from Israel (2 Kings 8:20–22). After Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians (in 586 BC), Edom took a measure of revenge against Israel (Psalm 137:7; Obadiah 10–14).

Discuss

- ? What is your assessment of what happened to Esau? What can we learn from his life?
- ? What are some long-term effects of family conflict?

□ Jacob Must Flee from Esau

Genesis 27:41–46



Say: Not surprisingly, Esau was furious with Jacob to the degree that he wanted to murder him. This sad situation led to a bitter, long-standing family feud. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Esau immediately began devising a plan to murder Jacob once their father was dead. Jacob was forced to flee and live with his uncle Laban. This was a welcome development for Rebekah, who was concerned about Jacob finding a suitable wife (Genesis 27:46) among the Hittites, a people group who were not under the covenant. While part of Laban's household, Jacob would marry Leah, who would give birth to Judah and continue the lineage to Christ and the ultimate fulfillment of the covenant. Indeed, God's wonderful promise continued to be kept, step by step, even amid turmoil and strife.

Discuss

? Describe a time when conflict led to something good in your life.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Although Jacob and Esau experienced much more turmoil in the coming years, they were reconciled in Genesis 33. By God's grace and power, even the most dysfunctional family situations can be resolved.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Make an effort this week (as far as you are able) to reconcile with someone whose relationship with you is strained.
- Pray with one another at the end of class, asking God to encourage those plagued by memories of past sins or grieved because of a broken relationship.
- Seek accountability with a trusted believer to help you resist any temptation to act dishonestly or unethically, no matter how justifiable the situation might seem.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Prayer of Blessing.
Numbers 6:22–27

Tuesday:

Blessings for Obedience.
Deuteronomy 28:1–14

Wednesday:

Blessed Are God's Dependents.
Psalm 146:1–10

Thursday:

Unexpected Blessings.
Matthew 5:2–12

Friday:

Spiritual Blessings in Christ.
Ephesians 1:3–14

Saturday:

Bless and Be Blessed.
1 Peter 3:8–12

September 17, 2023

LESSON
3

God Blesses Jacob (Israel)

Study Text

Genesis 32:21–32; 35:1–15

Central Truth

God patiently draws sinners to repentance and submission.



Key Verse
Proverbs 3:5–6

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths (KJV).

Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will explore the many Christian life lessons found in Jacob's story, including persistence, restoration, and appreciation for God's promises.
- Students will examine their lives to see whether they have submitted all areas to God, trusting Him to reveal any areas that need to be submitted to Him.
- Students will praise God for His many blessings, most importantly the gift of salvation.

Introducing the Study

Say: The more life experience we gain, the more we are able to look back and see the countless ways we have changed, grown, and matured.

Opening Activity—I've Changed

Ask: Think about the ways you've changed throughout your life. What changes stand out most? What brought these changes about? Examples include physical growth, emotional maturity, new perspectives, and life experience.

Say: We all grow and change throughout our lives. Things we once thought were important now seem trivial and vice versa. This is also true in our spiritual lives as we are disciplined and develop maturity in ways we did not expect. This lesson looks at the later portion of Jacob's life, particularly his decision to lay aside past wrongs and humble himself before the Lord. In his story, we see God's restoring grace and are reminded that His promises endure. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In last week's lesson, Jacob fled from Esau to live with his uncle Laban in the area of Paddan Aram in northern Mesopotamia where the family had originated (see Genesis 24:4,10; 25:20). Twenty years later, Jacob had established a large family, made his way back to Canaan, and sought reconciliation with Esau. God's covenant promise to Abraham was marching forward. In this portion of the story, we see Jacob turn from his ungodly past and become the person of persistent faith God called him—and us—to be.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Genesis 32:24. And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.

25. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.

26. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

27. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob.

28. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

29. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.

35:1. And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother.

2. Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments:

3. And let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.

7. And he built there an altar, and called the place El-bethel: because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother.

9. And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padanaram, and blessed him.

10. And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel.

11. And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins;

12. And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land.

15. And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Bethel.

New Living Translation

Genesis 32:24. This left Jacob all alone in the camp, and a man came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break.

25. When the man saw that he would not win the match, he touched Jacob's hip and wrenched it out of its socket.

26. Then the man said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking!" But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

27. "What is your name?" the man asked. He replied, "Jacob."

28. "Your name will no longer be Jacob," the man told him. "From now on you will be called Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have won."

29. "Please tell me your name," Jacob said. "Why do you want to know my name?" the man replied. Then he blessed Jacob there.

35:1. Then God said to Jacob, "Get ready and move to Bethel and settle there. Build an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother, Esau."

2. So Jacob told everyone in his household, "Get rid of all your pagan idols, purify yourselves, and put on clean clothing.

3. We are now going to Bethel, where I will build an altar to the God who answered my prayers when I was in distress. He has been with me wherever I have gone."

7. Jacob built an altar there and named the place El-bethel (which means "God of Bethel"), because God had appeared to him there when he was fleeing from his brother, Esau.

9. Now that Jacob had returned from Paddan-aram, God appeared to him again at Bethel. God blessed him,

10. saying, "Your name is Jacob, but you will not be called Jacob any longer. From now on your name will be Israel." So God renamed him Israel.

11. Then God said, "I am El-Shaddai—'God Almighty.' Be fruitful and multiply. You will become a great nation, even many nations. Kings will be among your descendants!"

12. And I will give you the land I once gave to Abraham and Isaac. Yes, I will give it to you and your descendants after you."

15. And Jacob named the place Bethel (which means "house of God"), because God had spoken to him there.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)

Part 1—Jacob Wrestles with God

□ Jacob Persists

Genesis 32:21–26



Say: Sometimes life is messy—even for those who follow the Lord. We struggle and fall short, nevertheless believing confidently that God is who He says He is. This was true in Old Testament times as well. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jacob is arguably one of the most complicated figures in the Old Testament. He was deceptive—even manipulative—in his relationships with family, and his trust in God seemed to waver. However, as he fled from a vengeful Esau, he vowed: “If God will indeed be with me and protect me on this journey, and if he will provide me with food and clothing, and if I return safely to my father’s home, then the LORD will certainly be my God” (Genesis 28:20–21, NLT). Jacob expressed a level of confidence here, since the word translated “if” carries with it the sense of “when.” While Jacob did not know when the promise would be fulfilled, he had an eye toward that day. Jacob was growing and learning.

Genesis 32:21–26 picks up the story of Jacob a full two decades after we last saw him. He married both Leah and Rachel, fled Laban in Mesopotamia, and set out with his family to return to Canaan (chapter 31). Upon his return, he sent a message to his estranged brother, Esau, and received a reply that Esau (and four hundred of his men) would soon be heading to meet him. Then Jacob attempted to appease Esau by sending ahead a collection of gifts.

Jacob could not sleep as he anticipated the meeting with Esau, so he took his family and crossed the Jabbok River, which flows into the Jordan River from the east around midway between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. He sent all his possessions over the river as well (32:22–23). Alone in the darkness, Jacob was suddenly grabbed by a man who wrestled with him until daybreak. Hosea 12:3–4 calls this being an angel, though the Old Testament often uses the phrase “angel of the LORD” in reference to God himself (see Genesis 16:7–14; 22:11–15).

As the wrestling match continued, the angel could not win, so he dislocated Jacob’s hip. This left Jacob unable to wrestle; he could only keep the angel from escaping (32:24–25). Jacob then recognized this being was more than a mere man, and he continued to hold on until a blessing came (verse 26). As dawn approached, the angel cried out to be released, but Jacob insisted that he receive a blessing first.

Discuss

- ? What can we learn from Jacob’s persistent wrestling with God?
- ? Have you ever felt the need to be persistent in seeking God’s blessing? Explain.

□ God Empowers Jacob

Genesis 32:27–32



Say: We’ve all had transformational moments in our lives, including spiritual encounters. Genesis 32:27–32 records one such famous moment in the life of Jacob. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

When Jacob was asked, “What is your name?” (32:27, NLT), it wasn’t just a matter of a passing introduction. The name *Jacob* means “supplanter” or “replacer” and is linked with deception (see 27:36). Asking Jacob his name forced him to come face-to-face with his devious past. Answering was an admission of guilt.

But then God did something wonderful, even transformational. He said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob. . . . From now on you will be called Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have won” (verse 28, NLT). The name *Israel* might be defined as “he struggled with God.” Hosea expands on this: “He wrestled with the angel and won. He wept and pleaded for a blessing from him” (12:4, NLT). Such is the name of a victor, one who has matured spiritually. It is also fitting that the name *Israel* became the name of the nation comprised of God’s chosen people. They would contend for the faith, and victory over their enemies would come as they trusted God.

In Genesis 32:29, Jacob asked the mysterious figure to give his name. His response implied Jacob ought to have known it already. And indeed, verse 30 shows that he did. Jacob named the place Peniel, which means “face of God.” Jacob had encountered God face-to-face in the darkness, and he lived to tell about it and even received God’s blessing. That blessing was both simple and indescribably profound. God changed Jacob’s name, reaffirming that his descendants—God’s people, the seed of Abraham—would be blessed by God, and through them the entire human race would be blessed. God’s covenant plan and promise continued to unfold and move forward.

Discuss

- ? Jacob’s encounter left him both humbled and exalted by God. According to James 4:10 and 1 Peter 5:6, what is the relationship between being humbled and being exalted by God?
- ? Jacob’s story reminds us that God’s people share a personal, interactive relationship with Him. How can this help when our faith is challenged?



Part 2—Jacob Submits to God

□ “Get Rid of Your Idols!”

Genesis 35:1–3

Say: One important part of spiritual growth is getting rid of things that bring spiritual harm and dishonor God. Jacob faced this very issue in Genesis 35. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

By Genesis 35, Jacob had reconciled with Esau, and God was directing him back to Bethel, where God had affirmed the covenant decades earlier (see 28:10–22). There, Jacob had made a vow that the Lord would be his God. He had sealed that vow with a memorial pillar, which would become a place of worship to the Lord.

By directing Jacob to return to Bethel, God was acting to renew the covenant promise. Upon his arrival, Jacob was to build an altar “to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother, Esau” (35:1, NLT). This was a reminder of how God had protected and provided for Jacob, and it also served as a rebuke.

Genesis 33:18–19 records that, despite God’s instructions, Jacob had originally settled in Shechem after his reconciliation with Esau. Shechem was a Canaanite city about twenty miles north of Bethel. Chapter 34 records the tragedies that occurred during the family’s time in Shechem, including the rape of Jacob and Leah’s daughter Dinah. By returning to Bethel, Jacob would finally be where God had originally commanded him to go.

Jacob commanded every pagan idol should be destroyed and every household member should go through ritual cleansing. Genesis 35:2–3 provides a useful description of repentance and renewal—even for us today. First, the members of the household were to get rid of the idols they carried with them. This included the idols Rachel had taken from her father’s household (see 31:34–35) and the pagan religious items other members of the clan had undoubtedly collected from Shechem (35:4).

After purging the false gods, they were to purify themselves and change their clothes (verse 2). This is an interesting instruction, because this mention of ceremonial purification comes before the Law was given. Purity before God is always necessary, even beyond the Law. In the case of Jacob’s family, this cleansing would enable them to move from idolatrous influences—which are detestable to the Lord—into a right standing before Him (see Deuteronomy 7:25). We also must be pure before the Lord. Our purity is imparted through Christ (see 1 Corinthians 6:11; Hebrews 9:14), although it does involve a personal response (see James 4:8).

For Jacob’s household to rid themselves of impurity, they would also need to change their garments (Genesis 35:2), symbolizing a new way of life that included trusting in God alone. Then Jacob would build an altar to the one true God, who had been so faithful to him and his family (verse 3).



Resource Packet Item 1: No Other Gods

Distribute the worksheet and complete it as a class. Emphasize the definition of what would make something a “false god” to us today, and discuss ways we can resist the false gods that tempt us.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think God is so insistent that Christians separate themselves from the sinful influences of the world around them?
- ? How would you explain what it means to be pure before God?

□ God Protects Jacob

Genesis 35:4–7



Say: God cares for His own. We tend to forget this simple fact—especially when we’re in the middle of difficult situations. Genesis 35:4–7 reminds us of God’s loving care for His people. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jacob dealt straightforwardly with the problem of his household’s idols and pagan religious items. He buried them “under the great tree near Shechem” (verse 4, NLT). The word translated “buried” (NLT) or “hid” (KJV) is a rare Hebrew word, different

from the word translated “buried” in verse 8. It conveys the sense of hiding, implying that they would leave the gods they worshiped in the past and worship only the Lord. A new season was awaiting Jacob’s family in Bethel.

As Jacob and his clan made their way south, God miraculously prepared the way (verse 5). He caused a sense of panic to grip the population around Bethel, squelching any desire the Canaanites and Perizzites might have had to attack and slay Jacob’s household (see 34:30).

Jacob’s arrival in Bethel (known as Luz in Canaan) illuminated the fact God had been with him each step of the way, faithful through every high and low. So Jacob turned his attention to worshiping God. He built an altar and named the place El-bethel, meaning “God of Bethel.” This was the very place God had profoundly blessed Jacob by giving him the name Israel. His physical travels and his spiritual journey had come full circle.

We may be able to relate to Jacob. Our Creator has a plan for each of our lives—that we would walk with Him and live in His presence. Sometimes we stray far from that purpose, but God can restore us, redeem us, and give us new life.



Resource Packet Item 2: Where Did God Go?

Distribute the case study and discuss it in class. Remind students that God faithfully restores us when we seek Him, even if we have strayed far from His presence and His will.

Discuss

- ? How can we identify and symbolically bury the idols we worshipped in the past or are worshipping now?
- ? Describe a time you realized God had protected you.



Part 3—Abrahamic Covenant Reaffirmed

□ “I Am El-Shaddai—God Almighty”

Genesis 35:8–13

Say: As God’s people, we must never forget that His promises are not based on our circumstances or worthiness but upon His sovereign goodness. Jacob had certainly not proven any worthiness on his part. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

After the death of Rebekah’s nursemaid (35:8), God again affirmed His covenant with Jacob’s family. Verse 9 states that God appeared to him again. The wording alerts us to the unique importance of this moment. God is mentioned as actually “appearing” to Jacob!

This was a key moment for Jacob. God restated his name change, a firm reminder of God’s blessings upon this man who was once a deceiver. Then God declared, “I am El-Shaddai—‘God Almighty’” (verse 11, NLT). He would later explain to Moses, “I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El-Shaddai—‘God Almighty’—but I did not reveal my name, Yahweh, to them. And I reaffirmed my covenant with them” (Exodus 6:3–4, NLT).

God's next words might seem odd: "Be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 35:11, NLT). This was the same instruction God had given Adam and Eve (1:28), and God was still concerned with bestowing His blessings upon all people. He was building one nation—but for a purpose as wide-reaching as the world He had created. The purpose of this promise itself related back to creation and the Fall. God was moving to restore and redeem what had been lost.

Not surprisingly, then, this command was followed by a recap of what God told Abraham in 12:1–3 and again in 17:4–6, plus one further point of clarity. Jacob would become "many nations. Kings will be among your descendants!" (35:11, NLT). This (along with 17:6) likely foreshadows Abraham's role as a spiritual as well as a biological father. Both Galatians 3:6–9 and Romans 9:8 clarify that God's promise encompasses both Jews and Gentiles. Every nation—that is, every people group—is invited to become heirs of the promise.

This promise found its physical reality in the land God would give Abraham and Jacob's descendants. In Genesis 35, Jacob was still a resident alien in the land of Canaan. Yet it was, in fact, his Promised Land (verse 12). It would become the possession of his descendants. Despite many unfortunate circumstances and unwise choices, Jacob found himself in the place Almighty God had intended, and he received the Lord's promise.

Discuss

- ? What does the name El-Shaddai (Genesis 35:11) tell you about God's nature and character? Why do you think He called himself by this name when speaking with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?
- ? Why is it important to recognize God always had the Gentiles in view as part of His covenant promise, even as He worked through the patriarchs in the Old Testament?

□ Jacob Sets a Stone of Remembrance

Genesis 35:14–15



Say: Have you ever saved something as a reminder of a precious moment in your life—perhaps some piece of memorabilia like a baseball from a World Series, a piece of jewelry, or a photo? These memorials can fill us with gratitude and remind us of the ways God has blessed us. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jacob knew this incredible covenant moment had to be remembered for generations, so he once again set up a stone memorial in Bethel, just as he had done years earlier (Genesis 35:14; *see* 28:18). He then poured wine over it and anointed it with olive oil as an offering to God. The place would fittingly be called Bethel, or "House of God," for God had met Jacob there and affirmed His enduring promises. Bethel would continue to be a significant location throughout Old Testament times and is mentioned fifty-nine times after the events of Genesis 35.



Resource Packet Item 3: Stone of Remembrance

Complete the worksheet together. Encourage students to respond to the personal reflection question and then look for an opportunity to share their experiences of God's faithfulness.

Discuss

- ? What special memories do you have of the things God has done? How can you effectively share those stories as a testimony to His faithfulness?
- ? What tools could you use to better remember the blessings of God and respond with gratitude?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Jacob's journey toward the Promised Land in Genesis 32–35 brings the larger story of God's covenant promise full circle, adding physical reality to the promise of Genesis 12. There are times in our own lives when God's promises seem far away, and we might struggle to believe they will come to pass. But we can be assured that God will continually guide and bless us according to His unfailing promises.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Pray and study God's Word to prepare yourself to reach people who struggle with feelings of regret and guilt over past sins. Ask God to help you know what to say in those situations.
- This week, tell someone about a miracle God has done for you.
- Pray for fellow believers who are struggling in their faith. Believe God to draw them back to himself.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Worship God Alone.
Exodus 23:23–33

Tuesday:

Consequences of Not Submitting to God.
Psalm 81:11–16

Wednesday:

Every Knee Will Bow.
Isaiah 45:18–23

Thursday:

Christ's Obedience Brings Life.
Romans 5:12–21

Friday:

Humble Yourselves before God.
James 4:1–10

Saturday:

Submit to Earthly Authority.
1 Peter 2:13–20

September 24, 2023

LESSON
4

Joseph's Story Begins

Study Text

Genesis 37:1–36

Central Truth

God is present with us through the Holy Spirit in good and bad times.

Key Verse
Genesis 39:2

The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian (KJV).

The LORD was with Joseph, so he succeeded in everything he did as he served in the home of his Egyptian master (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will examine the story of Joseph and his brothers, recognizing the dangers of favoritism and bitterness within the body of Christ.
- Students will be challenged to ask God to show them if they are allowing any destructive attitudes to be active in their lives.
- Students will seek God's help for peace and perspective when faced with trials and injustices.

Introducing the Study

Say: Maybe you've heard the saying, "The waiting is the hard part." Waiting for something good is hard enough, but it is far more difficult to remain patient in uncertainty—when we have to wait and see whether things will turn out right.

Opening Activity—Waiting

Ask: *What are some of the most exciting times of waiting in a person's life? What are some of the most challenging?*

Examples include waiting for a birthday or Christmas, looking forward to vacation or a family gathering, and awaiting results from a medical test.

Say: Waiting can be filled with excited anticipation or anxious uncertainty. This is even true—sometimes *especially* true—for God's people. As we continue to move through early Israelite history and trace the fulfillment of God's covenant promises, we come today to Joseph—who endured unthinkable challenges and uncertainty with complete faith and trust in God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Genesis 29:31 through 30:24 contains the interesting account of Jacob's growing family. It is a story of jealousy, heartache, joy, and ruthless competition. At the end of all this, Jacob's beloved wife Rachel gave birth to Joseph. His story comprises the remainder of Genesis and includes critical reminders of God's care for His people and the sovereignty of His plan. This lesson looks at Joseph's first great trial—brought about by family dysfunction, jealousy, malice, and treachery. However, this sad series of events will set the stage for another marvelous display of God's power, provision, and promise.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Genesis 37:3. Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colors.

4. And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.

9. And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me.

10. And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?

11. And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying.

18. And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him.

21. And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him.

22. And Reuben said unto them, Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him; that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again.

27. [Judah said,] Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. And his brethren were content.

28. Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt.

31. And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood;

32. And they sent the coat of many colors, and they brought it to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no.

33. And he knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces.

36. And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, and captain of the guard.

New Living Translation

Genesis 37:3. Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other children because Joseph had been born to him in his old age. So one day Jacob had a special gift made for Joseph—a beautiful robe.

4. But his brothers hated Joseph because their father loved him more than the rest of them. They couldn't say a kind word to him.

9. Soon Joseph had another dream, and again he told his brothers about it. "Listen, I have had another dream," he said. "The sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed low before me!"

10. This time he told the dream to his father as well as to his brothers, but his father scolded him. "What kind of dream is that?" he asked. "Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow to the ground before you?"

11. But while his brothers were jealous of Joseph, his father wondered what the dreams meant.

18. When Joseph's brothers saw him coming, they recognized him in the distance. As he approached, they made plans to kill him.

21. But when Reuben heard of their scheme, he came to Joseph's rescue. "Let's not kill him," he said.

22. "Why should we shed any blood? Let's just throw him into this empty cistern here in the wilderness. Then he'll die without our laying a hand on him." Reuben was secretly planning to rescue Joseph and return him to his father.

27. [Judah said,] "Instead of hurting him, let's sell him to those Ishmaelite traders. After all, he is our brother—our own flesh and blood!" And his brothers agreed.

28. So when the Ishmaelites, who were Midianite traders, came by, Joseph's brothers pulled him out of the cistern and sold him to them for twenty pieces of silver. And the traders took him to Egypt.

31. Then the brothers killed a young goat and dipped Joseph's robe in its blood.

32. They sent the beautiful robe to their father with this message: "Look at what we found. Doesn't this robe belong to your son?"

33. Their father recognized it immediately. "Yes," he said, "it is my son's robe. A wild animal must have eaten him. Joseph has clearly been torn to pieces!"

36. Meanwhile, the Midianite traders arrived in Egypt, where they sold Joseph to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Potiphar was captain of the palace guard.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Say: Every family has issues. Conflict is inevitable when people live together in close relationships for years. Many families move past these problems and enjoy each other’s company for a lifetime. But on occasion, serious problems take root and grow, eventually dividing the family. We see the seeds of this sad reality begin to sprout in Genesis 37:1–4. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Genesis 37:1–2 introduces us to the next chapter in the lineage of Abraham as Joseph takes center stage—although he was (at that time) Jacob’s youngest son. As we have seen time and again throughout Genesis, God’s ways are different from human ways, and He chooses people who might otherwise have been overlooked.

To review the story of Joseph and his brothers’ births, we can look back to Genesis 29–30. Jacob loved Laban’s daughter Rachel, and he worked for seven years to marry her. But Laban deceived Jacob into marrying Rachel’s older sister, Leah, instead. Jacob promised seven more years of work and was allowed to marry Rachel as well. Leah and the servants of both wives bore Jacob ten sons before his beloved Rachel bore him a son “in his old age” (verse 37:3, NLT) and named the boy *Joseph*. His name means “may he add,” and Rachel said, “May the LORD add yet another son to my family” (30:24, NLT).

One might expect that Jacob would have learned from his own life experience that parental favoritism and sibling rivalries lead to serious family problems. However, this kind of dysfunction festered not only between Leah and Rachel but also among Jacob’s own children. Genesis 37:3 is key to this dysfunction: “Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other children” (NLT).

Unsurprisingly, competition and rivalry played a significant role in Joseph’s life. At age seventeen, when Joseph was watching his father’s flocks with four of his brothers, he witnessed them doing “bad things” and reported it to Jacob (verse 2, NLT). It isn’t difficult to imagine how animosity would develop between Joseph and his brothers.

Jacob’s favor for Joseph took the form of a special gift: an elaborately decorated coat (verse 3). This garment would serve as a constant reminder to his brothers that Joseph held an elevated place in his father’s heart. Some commentators suggest the coat was a sign that Jacob wanted to pass family leadership to Joseph, which would only have infuriated his brothers more. They ultimately grew to hate Joseph and expressed their hatred openly (verse 4).

We have read the end of Genesis, so we know God would eventually use Joseph to save his family and his people. But here in chapter 37, only God knew how things would turn out. Joseph’s early family life was full of offenses, misunderstandings, and hostility. In fact, he faced many of the same family challenges we experience today. We can find hope in Joseph’s story. Regardless of our upbringing or any issues or trauma we have experienced, God can use us to bring glory to His name when we trust and surrender to Him.

Discuss

- ? Favoritism is destructive and divisive, and Scripture warns Christians against it (see James 2:1–10). In what ways might Christians show favoritism, and what damage might it do?
- ? What Scriptures or accounts in the Bible could bring hope to someone plagued by the trauma of a difficult childhood?



□ Division over Dreams

Genesis 37:5–11

Say: Jacob openly displayed favoritism to Rachel and then Joseph, showering them with special treatment and gifts. It is not hard to understand why animosity existed between Joseph and his brothers. But things were about to get much worse. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Genesis 37:5 records that Joseph had a dream (followed in verse 9 by a second, similar one). When he told his brothers, they hated him all the more. In the Ancient Near East, dreams were associated with divine communication and prophecy. So in his brothers' eyes, Joseph was not only the favored younger son but he now claimed God was prophesying about his future. Perhaps we can understand their response; after all, Joseph had dreamed he would one day rule over them (verses 6–8).

This begs the question, What might have been Joseph's motivation for telling his brothers about the first dream? Verse 8 gives us a clue: "They hated him all the more because of his dreams and the way he talked about them" (NLT). This suggests they found something offensive in his attitude.

Joseph's insensitivity and immaturity might also be indicated in his father's rebuke after Joseph related the details of his second dream (verses 9–11). While Jacob recognized such dreams could have great significance, he also saw how divisive they could be. The implications of Joseph's dreams upended the entire social order of the family. Would the youngest son presume to exert dominion over even his parents? Perhaps Joseph would have been wise to keep the dreams to himself until he better understood their meaning.

His choices—and their results—may provide guidance for us as well. While any messages we receive from God are good and we may feel compelled to share them, it is often wise to keep such revelations to ourselves until God instructs us to share them.

Discuss

- ? Was Joseph wise to tell his family about his dreams? Why or why not?
- ? Why should we use discretion when talking about God's work in our lives?



Part 2—Plot to Harm Joseph

□ The Trap Is Set

Genesis 37:12–20

Say: Has anyone ever plotted against you? Maybe they didn't intend to physically harm you, but to undermine you at work or school. Such experiences can be

extremely hurtful, and healing takes time. Genesis 37:12–20 records just such a vindictive plot against Joseph. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Joseph’s brothers had moved their flocks of sheep north to Shechem (37:12). This trip of twenty miles created a communication challenge for the family. About two years earlier, the family had experienced a terrible tragedy and killed all the men in that town (see Genesis 34), and Jacob may have had good reasons to feel concerned for his sons’ well-being. So he sent Joseph to check on them (verses 13–14). When he arrived at Shechem, Joseph found his brothers had traveled twenty miles past Shechem to the town of Dothan (verses 15–17). To find them, Joseph had to travel far from the security and familiarity of Bethel.

Joseph finally located his brothers and the flocks in Dothan. Unsurprisingly, his brothers were not happy to see him coming (verse 18), and before he even reached them, they began making plans to kill him. Joseph walked right into their trap.

His brothers mockingly called Joseph “the dreamer” as he approached (verse 19, *NLT*), indicating the deep resentment they felt toward him. The brothers initially planned to kill Joseph and throw his body into a cistern (verse 20), which was a large, bottle-shaped pit or cavern hewn out of rock and used to store water. With a depth of up to twenty feet, a cistern made an excellent dungeon. The brothers reasoned that they would tell Jacob a wild beast had killed Joseph. Viewed strictly from a human perspective, this conspiracy threatened to thwart the promises Joseph had received from God through his dreams.

Crises often challenge our faith in God’s promises. But we must remember that hard times do not indicate our trust is misplaced—even when we cannot perceive how the situation will resolve. When we trust God’s promises, such times are opportunities for the Lord to receive even greater glory for fulfilling His Word.



Resource Packet Item 1: Our Response

Distribute the worksheet and have students complete it on their own. Discuss their responses to the degree that students feel comfortable sharing. Pray for one another, that God will help any who face such feelings or situations today.

Discuss

- ? How should we interpret events that seem to contradict the promises God has given us?
- ? How do you usually respond to challenging circumstances?

Joseph Is Sold into Slavery

Genesis 37:21–27



Say: Why do bad things happen to God’s people? This question has been discussed countless times through history. It is a fact of life in this fallen world that no human is exempt from trouble. Joseph was certainly no exception. Worse still, the injustice he suffered came at the hands of his own brothers. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As the plan to kill Joseph was being formulated by the brothers, Reuben spoke up to intervene on Joseph's behalf (Genesis 37:21–22). As the oldest brother, Reuben took the lead in declaring they should spare Joseph's life so there would be no blood on their hands. Instead, they should throw him alive into a cistern. Reuben planned to come back secretly to rescue Joseph and take him home to Jacob.

When Joseph arrived, his brothers did precisely as Reuben had said (verses 23–24). Shortly afterwards, however, they spotted a caravan of traders passing by (verse 25). With Reuben gone, Judah saw an opportunity to make a profit and get rid of their brother without committing murder (verses 26–27). They sold Joseph to the merchants for twenty shekels of silver—a couple hundred dollars in today's money. The merchants, in turn, took Joseph to Egypt to be sold into enslavement. Joseph's dreams seemed to have been derailed.

In fact, this was just the beginning of Joseph's story. Seemingly hopeless circumstances do not mean God is angry with us or we have missed His will. Sometimes, other people's misguided or sinful behavior unavoidably impacts our lives. When this happens, we must be careful not to allow our attitude toward God to be negatively affected. Instead, we must keep in mind that God is always working out His purposes for our lives and His glory.



Resource Packet Item 2: The Decision

Distribute the case study. Have students read it, and then discuss the questions in class. While we may not face the prospect of enslavement or physical harm, there will be times when God's plans bring opposition. We must be prepared to keep our focus through the hard times.

Discuss

- ? How would you respond to someone who asked, “Why do terrible things sometimes happen to people who have placed their trust in Christ?”
- ? Why is it important for Christians to remember and make peace with the fact we may face hardship directly because of our faith in Christ?



Part 3—Joseph Sold into Slavery

□ The Plot Begins

Genesis 37:28–32

Say: Even when Joseph's life seemed to hit rock bottom, not all hope was lost. No human interference could keep God's plan from continuing to unfold in Joseph's life. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Reuben appears to have gone elsewhere after Joseph was dumped in the cistern. When he returned to find the cistern empty, he was distraught and filled with despair (Genesis 37:29). He tore his clothes in grief, indicating the love and concern he felt for his father Jacob, if not his brother Joseph. He lamented to his brothers, “The boy is gone! What will I do now?” (verse 30, *NLT*). He realized he could not go home to his father without Joseph—or at least a story of what had happened to him.

The brothers proceeded with their original plan to deceive Jacob, faking Joseph's death by ripping his coat and soaking it in goat's blood. Note the tragic irony here: Many years earlier, Jacob had slaughtered a goat to deceive his father at his brother's expense. Now his sons slaughtered another goat to deceive him at their brother's expense. Remember, while this was God's chosen family, their struggles, weaknesses, and failures were all too real.

The brothers sent the remains of Joseph's garment to their father, insinuating a tragedy had taken place (verses 31–32). Note the cunning nature of their message. They established their innocence by claiming not to know if the bloodied coat actually belonged to Joseph while also betraying their hatred for him by refusing to call him their brother: "Doesn't this robe belong to your son?" (verse 32, NLT). Then, displaying unthinkable cruelty, they left it to their aged father to assume Joseph had died a horrible death.

Discuss

? In what ways can you see God's mercy at work in this sad story?

□ Jacob Is Devastated; Joseph Arrives in Egypt

Genesis 37:33–36



Say: Two contrasting scenes unfold in Genesis 37:33–37. The first depicts horrible grief. The second indicates God's plan is still moving forward. As you read, reflect on the marvelous literature of Scripture: It tells an ongoing story while also reminding us that a larger story is unfolding. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

It is difficult to imagine the agony Jacob must have felt when he recognized the torn, bloody remains of the coat he had given his beloved son Joseph (verses 33–34). The one he cherished above all others had been violently taken from him. He had no idea his other sons were the true source of his grief. It is the height of hypocrisy that the brothers attempted to console Jacob rather than confessing their treachery and attempting to rescue Joseph while it remained a possibility.

Jacob refused to be comforted (verse 35), vowing to take his grief to the grave. His sorrow is understandable given the circumstances. Grief is a natural emotion. Even Jesus grieved, indicating that it is in no way sinful (see John 11:32–35). However, inconsolable grief is dangerous, because it can harden into bitterness against God and others.

The days to come would be difficult for both Jacob and Joseph, but Genesis 37:36 hints at the future of God's people. Joseph would be enslaved in Egypt, but his destiny would shift dramatically through God's intervention. Likewise, the people of God would be enslaved in Egypt, but God would ultimately deliver them into the Promised Land. That pattern of enslavement and redemption foreshadows our own exodus from sin to eternal life through Christ. It also reminds us that God's plan for our future may be far different from whatever circumstances we are facing today.



Resource Packet Item 3: Enduring Promises

Distribute the worksheet and encourage students to complete it during their personal devotion times throughout the week.

Discuss

- ? Describe a time when God and others helped you through a season of grief.
- ? What changes in a Christian's life when he or she recognizes God is always at work in every circumstance?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Viewed out of context, there is not much hope or joy evident in this lesson. Maybe you could say the same about your life today. But learn this truth from the story of Joseph: In His perfect time, God will keep His promises and His plan will come to pass. As you move forward in your walk with the Lord today, have faith. He holds your future in His hands.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Pray together that God will help you treat others equally, regardless of their status or your personal feelings.
- Take the initiative to seek unity and reconciliation with a fellow believer with whom you have differences.
- Seek out someone who is going through difficult circumstances and offer to pray with them.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Sin Prevented by a Dream.
Genesis 20:1–7

Tuesday:

God Revealed in a Dream.
Genesis 28:10–17

Wednesday:

Encouraged by a Dream.
Judges 7:9–18

Thursday:

Instructed by a Dream.
Matthew 1:18–25

Friday:

Warned by a Dream.
Matthew 2:7–12

Saturday:

Spirit-Inspired Dreams.
Acts 2:14–21

October 1, 2023

LESSON
5

Joseph and Pharaoh

Study Text

Genesis 41:1–57

Central Truth

God gives wisdom and understanding to His followers.

Key Verse
Genesis 41:52

God hath caused me [Joseph] to be fruitful in the land of my affliction (KJV).

“God has made me [Joseph] fruitful in this land of my grief” (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will examine how God blessed and rewarded Joseph after he suffered in prison because of his family’s betrayal.
- Students will observe how the presence of the Spirit of God was seen in Joseph’s life and pray that such a testimony might be seen in their lives as well.
- Students will identify how Joseph kept God in focus during his time of challenge and look for ways to do the same today.

Introducing the Study

Say: Most of us can identify someone in our families that we “take after,” whether in looks, personality, or talents.

Opening Activity—Someone You Take After

Ask: Identify someone that you take after. How do you resemble that person? Examples can include parents, grandparents, and other family members. We might also resemble a non-biological loved one who helped raise us, because of their impact and influence.

Say: Just as there are people whose traits we share, people can also see God’s influence upon us as they look at our lives. While this has been true of all the patriarchs we’ve studied, it is especially true of Joseph. Just as we’ve previously seen God’s intervention, today we see God’s blessings on Joseph, as Joseph was faithful to the Lord. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Old Testament records God repeatedly making some form of this statement to His people: “You will be my people, and I will be your God” (cf. Exodus 6:7; Isaiah 46:4; Jeremiah 30:22). Often this statement is joined by the promise that God would live among them—pointing to the relationship they would share (cf. Leviticus 26:12; Exodus 29:45). This promise recalls the perfect relationship held between God and humanity in the Garden of Eden before the Fall, and also looks forward toward salvation coming to the world through Christ (see Zechariah 2:11; Revelation 21:3).

The promise begins to take shape among the patriarchs, especially Joseph. Through this lesson, we will see how God walked with Joseph in Egypt, just as He had preserved Joseph earlier. We will also see how this relationship was accompanied by faithfulness.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

Genesis 41:2. And, behold, there came up out of the river seven well favored kine and fatfleshed; and they fed in a meadow.

3. And, behold, seven other kine came up after them out of the river, ill favored and leanfleshed; and stood by the other kine upon the brink of the river.

4. And the ill favored and leanfleshed kine did eat up the seven well favored and fat kine. So Pharaoh awoke.

5. And he slept and dreamed the second time: and, behold, seven ears of corn came up upon one stalk, rank and good.

6. And, behold, seven thin ears and blasted with the east wind sprung up after them.

7. And the seven thin ears devoured the seven rank and full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and, behold, it was a dream.

15. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and there is none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of thee, that thou canst understand a dream to interpret it.

16. And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.

25. And Joseph said unto Pharaoh, The dream of Pharaoh is one: God hath shewed Pharaoh what he is about to do.

26. The seven good kine are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years: the dream is one.

27. And the seven thin and ill favored kine that came up after them are seven years; and the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind shall be seven years of famine.

39. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art:

40. Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou.

41. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt.

42. And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck;

43. And he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt.

Genesis 41:2. In [Pharaoh's] dream he saw seven fat, healthy cows come up out of the river and begin grazing in the marsh grass.

3. Then he saw seven more cows come up behind them from the Nile, but these were scrawny and thin. These cows stood beside the fat cows on the riverbank.

4. Then the scrawny, thin cows ate the seven healthy, fat cows! At this point in the dream, Pharaoh woke up.

5. But he fell asleep again and had a second dream. This time he saw seven heads of grain, plump and beautiful, growing on a single stalk.

6. Then seven more heads of grain appeared, but these were shriveled and withered by the east wind.

7. And these thin heads swallowed up the seven plump, well-formed heads! Then Pharaoh woke up again and realized it was a dream.

15. Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream last night, and no one here can tell me what it means. But I have heard that when you hear about a dream you can interpret it."

16. "It is beyond my power to do this," Joseph replied. "But God can tell you what it means and set you at ease."

25. Joseph responded, "Both of Pharaoh's dreams mean the same thing. God is telling Pharaoh in advance what he is about to do.

26. The seven healthy cows and the seven healthy heads of grain both represent seven years of prosperity.

27. The seven thin, scrawny cows that came up later and the seven thin heads of grain, withered by the east wind, represent seven years of famine."

39. Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has revealed the meaning of the dreams to you, clearly no one else is as intelligent or wise as you are.

40. You will be in charge of my court, and all my people will take orders from you. Only I, sitting on my throne, will have a rank higher than yours."

41. Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the entire land of Egypt."

42. Then Pharaoh removed his signet ring from his hand and placed it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in fine linen clothing and hung a gold chain around his neck.

43. Then he had Joseph ride in the chariot reserved for his second-in-command. And wherever Joseph went, the command was shouted, "Kneel down!" So Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of all Egypt.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)

Part 1—Pharaoh’s Disturbing Dreams

□ The Wise Men Were Stumped

Genesis 41:1–8



Say: When we last saw Joseph, he had been taken to Egypt after being sold into enslavement by his brothers. There, Joseph was purchased by Potiphar, an officer in Pharaoh’s palace guard (Genesis 39:1). The Lord blessed Joseph in all he did (verse 3), and he soon was put in charge of the entire household (verse 4). However, Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce him and falsely accused him of assault, causing Joseph to be imprisoned for years. (The exact length of his imprisonment is unknown, but it would have been between two and twelve years.) Even in his cell, God was preparing Joseph for a key moment in the history of God’s people. (Share your highlights from the following text.)



Resource Packet Item 1: Pharaoh, King of Egypt

Distribute the information sheet and discuss it as a class. The last couple of paragraphs are more pertinent to this particular lesson, but the information as a whole can offer insight into where Egypt and Pharaoh fit within our understanding of the Bible. Students may find it to be an informative study to read in the coming week.

As noted above, Genesis 41 should be understood in light of the preceding chapters. We need to keep in mind that, in Egypt, Pharaoh was the chief lawgiver and judge as well as the supreme authority on religious matters. Most scholars believe the Egyptians viewed Pharaoh as divine himself. Thus, the dilemma posed in Genesis 41:1–8 was especially serious. Dreams were believed to bear evidence of a special connection between a king and the divine. How could the source of divine understanding be struggling to understand a spiritual matter like this? Pharaoh needed answers, but where would he go?

Pharaoh’s two dreams contained some important details (verses 1–7). The Nile River was the source of Egypt’s power, fertility, prosperity, and life. The growth it fostered caused Egypt to later be known as the breadbasket of the Roman Empire. The cow was uniquely a symbol of Egypt itself as well as a representation of at least one of its gods. That means Pharaoh’s dreams focused on two critical symbols of Egyptian life and power. In addition, Egyptians considered the number seven to be significant. It’s not surprising Pharaoh was awakened by each of these ominous dreams.

As soon as he awoke the next morning, Pharaoh called for his key advisors: “magicians and wise men” (verse 8, NLT). These individuals had shown themselves to possess great insight. They had been trained in the mysterious supernatural arts of the day, and Pharaoh hoped that if he could not interpret these dreams, then perhaps these men could offer understanding. Unfortunately for Pharaoh, however, “not one of them could tell him what they meant” (verse 8, NLT).

Discuss

? What sources do unbelievers consult for understanding and direction when they are troubled?

- ? How can you help an unbelieving friend or relative when he or she needs direction or understanding?



□ Joseph: Forgotten No More

Genesis 41:9–13

Say: During Joseph’s time in prison, Pharaoh’s cupbearer had personally observed God’s grace upon Joseph when he had been able to interpret the cupbearer’s dream. Sadly, he had forgotten Joseph after being released from prison, despite having promised to help him (see Genesis 40:12–14,23). But God had not forgotten Joseph. When Pharaoh began to fret over his troubling dreams, Joseph again entered the picture. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Two years had passed since Joseph interpreted the dream for Pharaoh’s cupbearer, and he remained in prison, abandoned and forgotten (Genesis 41:1). But with Pharaoh in crisis, the cupbearer suddenly remembered Joseph.

Verses 10–13 recount the events of Genesis 40. Note that in 40:8, Joseph had not only stated what every Egyptian would believe about dreams, but he also clarified that only God would be able to bring the answer: “Do not interpretations belong to God?” (40:8, *KJV*).

It is hard to imagine how the cupbearer could have forgotten his promise for two long years. Joseph had correctly discerned not only that Pharaoh would release and promote the cupbearer but that the chief baker would be executed because of Pharaoh’s wrath (40:9–13,16–19). But this two-year delay proves God was sovereignly working things out in His perfect timing.

By the time he was told about this lowly Hebrew slave languishing in prison, Pharaoh was desperate. He was ready to listen to anyone with divine insight or knowledge, regardless of where the interpreter came from or what he may have been accused of. God had worked things out, and in this key moment, Joseph could be called upon to do what no magician could do.



Resource Packet Item 2: Bitter or Blessed?

Distribute the worksheet and invite students to complete it individually. Then discuss their responses. Reflect upon the difficulty Joseph must have faced in prison, both physically and emotionally. Talk about how challenges can be difficult when we don’t know God’s timing.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think the cupbearer forgot about Joseph, even after he had interpreted such an important dream?
- ? How can we remain faithful when we don’t understand God’s timing?

Part 2—Joseph’s God-Given Interpretation and Plan

□ Joseph Alone Can Answer Pharaoh’s Question

Genesis 41:14–32



Say: Most of us can recall a time when God helped us in ways that went far beyond our own abilities. Joseph experienced such a moment in Genesis 41, a key moment in the unfolding history of God’s people. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Hearing the cupbearer’s story, Pharaoh quickly called for Joseph. The mention of Joseph changing clothes reflected a status change; he was not presented as a prisoner but a free man and an advisor to the king. After Pharaoh explained the situation, Joseph stated that only God could provide the answer. Joseph’s implication is clear: His God had given these dreams to Pharaoh, and He alone could tell Pharaoh what they meant (verse 16).

Pharaoh recounted the dreams with a key point of added information. Describing the cows, he stated, “I’ve never seen such sorry-looking animals in all the land of Egypt” (verse 19, NLT). This indicated Pharaoh was an eyewitness to what was happening in Egypt in his dream. This great king, believed to be connected to the divine if not divine himself, was incapable of intervening. He could only watch as the scrawny cows ate up the healthy cows and remained as scrawny as before (verse 21) and the shriveled grain devoured the healthy grain (verses 22–24). Is it any wonder the darkness of these dreams so deeply upset the most powerful individual in Egypt?

Joseph was quick and concise in his explanation, conveying a clear sense that God was speaking through him. He spoke as an interpreter, not as a magician like the others. There was no mystery for him to discern here. He simply spoke the words God gave him (verses 25–27). Each dream carried the same message: Fat, rich, and prosperous things would be devoured by lean, withered, and sickly things. Egypt would enjoy seven years of prosperity followed by seven years of famine so severe that the prosperity would quickly fade from memory (verses 28–31). The most sobering news came in verse 32: “As for having two similar dreams, it means that these events have been decreed by God, and he will soon make them happen” (NLT). The God who rules the nations, who is sovereign above kings and Pharaohs, would soon bring His words to pass. Egypt was in crisis, and preparations needed to be made without delay.

Discuss

- ? Why was it important for Pharaoh to understand Joseph’s God sent the dreams and would also send the interpretation?
- ? How can we ensure God gets the credit for the things He does in our lives?

□ Joseph Instructs Pharaoh

Genesis 41:33–36



Say: As we can see in this passage, God gives His people a wide variety of gifts to bring about His purposes. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Joseph's next statement to Pharaoh displayed a certain amount of bravery (Genesis 41:33–36). He gave unfiltered, unsolicited advice to a ruler with unequaled power and irrefutable authority. But Joseph fearlessly spoke the words of God with the authority they carried.

Joseph's advice displayed unarguable wisdom, and the steps he outlined were logical solutions to the problem: Find someone wise to manage the work that needs to be done throughout Egypt. Appoint supervisors to oversee the storage of twenty percent of the crops in each of the good years. Make sure the storage is guarded. This will ensure adequate food for the seven lean years. Note that verse 36 ends on an ominous prophecy: "Otherwise this famine will destroy the land" (NLT). The future existence of this mighty nation rested upon the words of a Hebrew slave.

As we ponder these verses, it is important to note Joseph's courage. He spoke specifically regarding the dreams, then outlined specific steps in response. Following these steps would alter Egypt's economy and no doubt uproot the way society functioned. Had he been wrong, Pharaoh would have ended his life without a second thought. We don't face such high stakes today, of course. But there are times in life when we need courage to surrender to God and trust His plan for us. May we reflect the courage of Joseph as we step out in faith.

Discuss

- ? Describe a time when you needed to be brave in your faith.
- ? How can we overcome doubt and the desire to take matters into our own hands when surrendering our needs to God?



Part 3—Joseph's Faithfulness Rewarded

□ Joseph Is Elevated

Genesis 41:37–46

Say: When God calls and leads us, we can also trust Him to provide what we need in order to accomplish what He has called us to do. This was certainly true for Joseph, and Pharaoh duly appointed him to manage the famine response according to God's plan. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Not only was Pharaoh pleased with Joseph's suggestions, but he recognized something special about Joseph: "Can we find anyone else like this man so obviously filled with the spirit of God?" (Genesis 41:38, NLT). This marks only the second time in Genesis where "the Spirit of God" is mentioned (see 1:2). In this case, the phrase is used to describe God's presence and anointing upon Joseph's life. Throughout the Old Testament, the Spirit of God is described as being at work in the lives of godly people, gifting them in extraordinary ways for God's purposes (see Exodus 31:1–3; Numbers 11:16–17; Judges 6:34; Micah 3:8). Joel 2:28–29 prophesies of the Spirit being poured out on all of God's people in the Church Age—which includes today (see Acts 2:16–18).

These words are especially surprising here, since an Egyptian pharaoh, himself viewed as deity, observed the Spirit of God in an enslaved Hebrew. Clearly, he saw something special in Joseph that not even his own magicians and counselors had.

Pharaoh said to Joseph, “No one else is as intelligent or wise as you are” (Genesis 41:39, NLT). “Intelligence” here referred to discernment and understanding. Through the enlightenment of the Spirit, Joseph grasped the critical nature of what was going on and knew how to respond.

Joseph was then placed in charge of Pharaoh’s court: “All my people will take orders from you” (verse 40, NLT). Only Pharaoh himself would outrank Joseph in all of Egypt. What an incredible turnaround from the prison cell Joseph had lived in until that very morning.

To seal the proclamation, Joseph was dressed in royal attire and given Pharaoh’s signet ring and new clothing and jewelry. The people were instructed to kneel in reverence for him as he rode in his official chariot (verses 41–43). Joseph had received an unsurpassed level of honor and authority in Egypt.

Scripture also records Pharaoh giving Joseph a new name as well as a wife (verse 45). This marriage connected Joseph with the most powerful families in Egypt. His new name, Zaphenath-paneah (likely meaning “God speaks and lives”), would be in keeping with his new identity. Joseph’s new name, much like Daniel’s new name Belteshazzar in Daniel 1:7, was a pagan name handed down from a pagan king, but it in no way implied an acceptance of pagan religion.

At this time, Joseph was thirty years old (verse 46). He had risen from enslavement to the highest ranks of Egypt in only thirteen years. Such a trajectory was only possible through God’s favor—and His miraculous plan for His people.

God also stations us in various roles as He builds His kingdom. Sometimes our role places us in lofty positions that may include status or even wealth. But we must take care not to adopt the pagan values and priorities of the world around us. Like Joseph (and later, Daniel), we must strive to stay free from the stain of this world. As we will see next, Joseph was careful to do that.

Discuss

- ? How do Christians show the world the Spirit of God is working within us?
- ? What role do you believe you fill in the kingdom of God?

□ Joseph Remembers the Lord

Genesis 41:47–57



Say: What a joy when our prayers are answered after a time of waiting and trusting! We must allow these times of blessing to remind us of the necessity of continual trust and remember that God is the true source of every blessing. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

After inspecting the entire land of Egypt (Genesis 41:46), Joseph went about the work of preparing for the coming famine. During the years of abundance, he put away immense stores of food—so much that “there was too much to measure” (verse 49, NLT). Then, just as Joseph had said, a devastating famine struck Egypt and the surrounding nations. Because of Joseph’s God-given wisdom, he was able to distribute food to the people of Egypt and those of other nations as well (verses 53–57).

Through all of this, Joseph gave glory to God. When he named his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim (verses 50–52), he memorialized God’s blessings and His consolation and compassion. As we move forward in his story, we will see how these blessings given to Joseph ultimately led to God’s great plan to bless all peoples of the world through Israel.



Resource Packet Item 3: Wisdom and Understanding

Encourage students to complete the worksheet this week, identifying ways in which they need godly wisdom.

Discuss

? Read verses 51–52 again. What do the names Manasseh (meaning “cause to forget”) and Ephraim (meaning “fruitful”) tell us about how God blessed Joseph—and how He blesses us?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Sometimes we may wonder how we can make an impact on the world around us and the people who so desperately need Jesus. Joseph reminds us that our faithfulness is a testimony the Lord can use to help us minister to others.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Ask other Christians to talk about the ways God has blessed them, giving them an opportunity to express gratitude and share encouragement.
- Find a loved one or acquaintance who is struggling with a problem or issue, and minister to them by sharing God’s love and offering prayer.
- Pray with one another that God will help you stand strong and faithful when challenged by hard times—and when blessed by good times.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

God Defends Moses’ Faithfulness.
Numbers 12:1–9

Tuesday:

Faithfulness Results in Leadership.
Nehemiah 7:1–4

Wednesday:

The Faithful Persecuted.
Daniel 6:1–5

Thursday:

Faithfulness Commended and Rewarded.
Matthew 25:14–23

Friday:

Faithfulness Highlighted.
Colossians 1:1–8

Saturday:

Faithful and True Sayings.
Revelation 22:1–7

October 8, 2023

LESSON
6Joseph Reunited
with His Brothers

Study Text

Genesis 44:1 through 45:28

Central Truth

God desires for families and the family of God to be unified around His Word.



Key Verse

2 Corinthians 13:11

Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you (KJV).

Dear brothers and sisters, I close my letter with these last words: Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will note what the story of Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers can teach us about reconciliation with others today.
- Students will identify ways in which Joseph's story affirms that God works out His promises even through flawed human beings.
- Students will pray that God will bring restoration and unity to members of the body of Christ.

Introducing the Study

Say: The desire for revenge is a common human impulse, and in an increasingly rude culture, the temptation can seem overwhelming at times.

Opening Activity—I'm Gonna Get You!

Ask: Have you ever had the chance to get back at someone who wronged you, no questions asked? How did you respond? Examples range from doing something at work that would be blamed on a spiteful coworker to pouring soda on the window of a car that cut you off in a parking lot. We might even struggle to admit such temptation; such moments “test our sanctification,” as some might say.

Say: Nobody likes to admit to holding a grudge. But acting on grudges—and therefore grudges themselves—can be destructive. In Joseph, we see the value of forgiveness, both in our relationships with others and in our walk with God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Romans 12:21 can be one of the most challenging verses in the Bible: “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (KJV). Normally, we focus on the first half of the verse, but the second half can be most difficult. What do we do when people do evil things to us: hate us, gossip about us, hurt our reputation, or take something from us? What happens when they get away with it and we suffer as a result?

These are not easy questions because there are a lot of seemingly legitimate reasons to repay evil with evil. Joseph had the opportunity to do this very thing in Genesis 44–45. Yet he chose instead to repay evil with good, thus restoring family relationships that seemed hopelessly broken, and propelling forward the history of the Jews—God's chosen people—toward His precious promises.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Genesis 44:1. And he commanded the steward of his house, saying, Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put every man's money in his sack's mouth.

2. And put my cup, the silver cup, in the sack's mouth of the youngest, and his corn money. And he did according to the word that Joseph had spoken.

4. And when they were gone out of the city, and not yet far off, Joseph said unto his steward, Up, follow after the men; and when thou dost overtake them, say unto them, Wherefore have ye rewarded evil for good?

5. Is not this it in which my lord drinketh, and whereby indeed he divineth? ye have done evil in so doing.

45:3. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence.

4. And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.

5. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.

12. And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you.

13. And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither.

21. And the children of Israel did so: and Joseph gave them wagons, according to the commandment of Pharaoh, and gave them provision for the way.

24. So he sent his brethren away, and they departed: and he said unto them, See that ye fall not out by the way.

25. And they went up out of Egypt, and came into the land of Canaan unto Jacob their father,

26. And told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt. And Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not.

27. And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them: and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived:

28. And Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die.

New Living Translation

Genesis 44:1. When his brothers were ready to leave, Joseph gave these instructions to his palace manager: "Fill each of their sacks with as much grain as they can carry, and put each man's money back into his sack.

2. Then put my personal silver cup at the top of the youngest brother's sack, along with the money for his grain." So the manager did as Joseph instructed him.

4. But when they had gone only a short distance and were barely out of the city, Joseph said to his palace manager, "Chase after them and stop them. When you catch up with them, ask them, 'Why have you repaid my kindness with such evil?'"

5. Why have you stolen my master's silver cup, which he uses to predict the future? What a wicked thing you have done!"

45:3. "I am Joseph!" he said to his brothers. "Is my father still alive?" But his brothers were speechless! They were stunned to realize that Joseph was standing there in front of them.

4. "Please, come closer," he said to them. So they came closer. And he said again, "I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt.

5. But don't be upset, and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives."

12. Then Joseph added, "Look! You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that I really am Joseph!"

13. Go tell my father of my honored position here in Egypt. Describe for him everything you have seen, and then bring my father here quickly."

21. So the sons of Jacob did as they were told. Joseph provided them with wagons, as Pharaoh had commanded, and he gave them supplies for the journey.

24. So Joseph sent his brothers off, and as they left, he called after them, "Don't quarrel about all this along the way!"

25. And they left Egypt and returned to their father, Jacob, in the land of Canaan.

26. "Joseph is still alive!" they told him. "And he is governor of all the land of Egypt!" Jacob was stunned at the news—he couldn't believe it.

27. But when they repeated to Jacob everything Joseph had told them, and when he saw the wagons Joseph had sent to carry him, their father's spirits revived.

28. Then Jacob exclaimed, "It must be true! My son Joseph is alive! I must go and see him before I die."

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Say: A lot has happened since we last saw Joseph in Genesis 41. The famine reached Joseph’s family, compelling them to go to Egypt for food, where Joseph recognized his brothers but they did not recognize him. Since Jacob’s youngest son did not go to Egypt with them, Joseph required them to retrieve Benjamin and bring him to Egypt. As we move into chapter 44, we see how God is shaping events in such a way that His plan will move forward. And He does so through one of the most beautiful scenes of reconciliation in all of Scripture. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

To understand the full impact of Genesis 44–45, it can be very helpful to read chapters 42–43. Joseph has treated his brothers first harshly, and then very kindly. In the midst of this, the brothers concluded the terrible act of selling Joseph into slavery had brought this trouble to them (see 42:21–22). Then they were forced to return home and take Benjamin (the only other, and younger, son from Rachel) away from Jacob. Yet upon their return, Joseph treated them with exceptional kindness, sharing a feast that brought him to tears (see 43:29–30). Amid this very tumultuous two-chapter account, the seeds of reconciliation were planted.

Genesis 44 opens as Joseph and his brothers are concluding the great banquet he has prepared for them. But while the brothers believe that they will be returning to Jacob with grain and—perhaps more importantly—his beloved son Benjamin, Joseph has other plans. Upon his instruction, his “steward” (KJV) or “palace manager” (NLT) planted Joseph’s personal silver cup in Benjamin’s bag of grain (verses 1–2). In this way, Joseph has set the stage for the brothers to face the same dilemma they faced with him: Would they abandon Benjamin in Egypt like they did Joseph, or would they refuse to betray him?

The brothers didn’t get far before Joseph’s ruse began to unfold. The steward caught up to them and accused them of the theft (verses 3–6). Verse 5 includes an important detail. Joseph has made it part of the ruse that his cup is a cup of divination. That is, a cup that was used “to predict the future” (NLT). This was done by pouring oil or wine into the cup then adding another liquid, such as water, then observing the surface patterns. But this was not mentioned in verse 2, since Joseph did not actually take part in divination. As a servant of the God of Jacob, he relied on the Lord alone—as has been established in previous chapters. The manager likely mentioned this to emphasize the seriousness of the theft.

The brothers were shocked. They had been entirely honest with Joseph and the other officials (verses 7–10). Earlier, on their first trip to Egypt, the money they’d paid for grain had been placed back in their sacks, making them look like thieves (and leaving them wondering if God was judging them; see 42:27–28; 43:21–22). But they had returned that money, demonstrating their honesty. Yet now their integrity was questioned. Thus, they felt secure in and passionate about swearing an oath. They would suffer dire consequences if they’d stolen anything. The guilty man would be put to death.

To their horror, the cup was found in Benjamin's sack (verses 11–13). Jacob's beloved, youngest son would, by their oath, become a slave in Egypt. The terrible injustice that they had inflicted upon Joseph was now to be inflicted upon Benjamin. Their father's heart would be broken.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think Joseph set up the situation where the brothers would be made to look like thieves?
- ? Have you ever been falsely accused, or set up to look guilty of something you did not do? How did it make you feel?



Judah Pleads with Joseph

Genesis 44:14–34

Say: Joseph's brothers are coming face-to-face with the consequences of injustice, and they receive a terrifying reminder of the pain their own injustice has caused. But this time, they responded differently when their young brother was threatened. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Genesis 44:14–34 indicates that Judah has clearly emerged as the leader among the brothers, as they all are brought in to face Joseph. They quickly fall on their faces before him in an act of humiliation and recognition of his authority.

Joseph responded in an interesting way: “Don't you know that a man like me can predict the future?” (verse 15, *NLT*). As noted earlier, Joseph did not take part in divination. So, this should not be taken in a literal sense any more than his feigned anger at them. Rather, Joseph was establishing that they had no way of proving their innocence. They stood before a man who held absolute power over them—and a man with a reputation for discerning the truth. They could not expect justice, but only beg for mercy.

The reality of the situation is seen in Judah's response, in verse 16. He openly admitted that this terrible predicament seemed to be divine punishment for their sins, which, as we know, were sins of injustice. And so, when he said that all of them were returning to be his slaves, he was owning up to their previous guilt. He did not admit any guilt for the cup. This situation had become a matter of what happened with Joseph years earlier (verse 16).

Joseph countered that he could never make them slaves (verse 17). It would be unjust to do so. They were innocent. Only the guilty one—Benjamin—would stay. The rest could return to their father in peace. Yet Joseph said this knowing that peace would not be possible if Benjamin stayed. Joseph was, in a sense, forcing them to relive the events of years earlier. Would they follow the same course?

Over the next seventeen verses, Judah, who had convinced his brothers to sell Joseph into slavery, proceeded to recount all that had happened, bringing them to this point. Note that his focus was on Jacob; he is referred to as father more than a dozen times in this passage. To leave Benjamin would cause indescribable grief. Years earlier, with Joseph, they had *no* concern for their father (or for Joseph). Now Jacob was their chief concern. Truly, they had changed.

Discuss

- ? What signs do you see in Genesis 44 that the brothers had changed since they'd sold Joseph into slavery?
- ? What are some signs that change is taking place in our lives, as we begin to let go of past resentment against others?

Part 2—Joseph Reveals His Identity to His Brothers

□ “It Was God Who Sent Me Here”

Genesis 45:1–8



Say: As Christians, we know that God calls us to show mercy. This was the teaching of Christ, who called the merciful “blessed” (Matthew 5:7), and later instructed Peter that our willingness to forgive should be without limit (Matthew 18:21–22). But words can be hard to put into action. In Genesis 45, Joseph shows us the key to mercy and forgiveness—recognizing that our Lord has our lives in His hands. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Genesis 45 describes the climactic moment when all the events of chapters 42–44 come together to reveal something amazing. Years of suffering, grief, and injustice are resolved, and God’s marvelous plan emerges unscathed.

After Judah’s speech, Joseph could no longer restrain his emotions. So, he ordered everyone except for his brothers from the room, then began to weep uncontrollably (verses 1–2). “I am Joseph!” he declared to his brothers. “Is my father still alive?” (verse 3, NLT).

Not surprisingly, the brothers were shocked. They were in such disbelief that they needed a chance to look closely at him before they would believe (verse 4). Notice especially that in verses 4–5, Joseph mentioned that they had sold him into slavery, but then says, “Don’t be angry with yourselves” (verse 5, NLT). Any bad feelings that had come about because of what they’d done were now gone. Joseph no longer held it against them. He had forgiven them.

Joseph’s forgiveness is amazing in a number of ways. He had been wronged in such a cruel way, separated from his father and mother who dearly loved him. Now, after many years, he had an opportunity to exact revenge on his brothers without fear of retribution. But Joseph was a godly man, a man who heard from God and trusted God. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that he saw God’s hand in all that had happened (verses 5–8). As a result of what they had done, he would be able “to preserve life” (verse 5, KJV). This would include the lives of strangers—Egyptians and others. And it would include the lives of his brothers and his father. Thus, the life of the covenant family was preserved. God had used this terrible situation, and the unjust actions of the brothers, to preserve the Jewish people and the worldwide promise that He would bring into the world through them.



Resource Packet Item 1: Forgiveness

Distribute the worksheet and complete it as a class. Talk about why forgiveness is important as well as how we can overcome challenges to forgiveness. Have students complete the bottom of their sheet on their own.

Discuss

- ? Why might God sometimes use difficult circumstances to bring good results?
- ? Describe a time when God has brought forth something good from a bad experience in your life.



“You Can Live Safely in Goshen”

Genesis 45:9–15

Say: Have you ever been part of a family reunion? This can be a joyous time of reconnecting, and it can even help heal wounds that have occurred over the years. In Genesis 45:9–15, Joseph called for a kind of family reunion in which they could all come and live together. What a change from how things had been before. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In verses 9–15, Joseph told his brothers to return to Canaan to gather their entire family and possessions. Then they were to return to Egypt, where Joseph could care for them throughout the five years that remained in the famine. He recognized that unless they all found safety and provision from him, they would starve.

Joseph focused especially on his father in verses 12–15. He wanted to make sure that Jacob knew what had happened to him. Benjamin would be able to vouch for the truthfulness of their words, since the rest had been involved in Joseph’s disappearance. Joseph wanted to see his father as soon as possible.

At that point, they wept together and embraced one another. The hurts of the past found healing. Unlike their previous times together, they could talk freely and warmly as brother to brother. They were, as a family, more tightly bound at this moment than ever before. Joseph, who had been an object of their scorn, would now preserve the family line. He had not given in to any temptations toward revenge, but kept his heart pure and in close relationship with God. This moment, as much as any in the account of his life, allows us to see Joseph’s deep desire for and devotion to God. Through it all, God’s promise remained intact.



Resource Packet Item 2: God’s Promises

Distribute the worksheet and have students complete it individually or in groups. Discuss the sheet as a class.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think Joseph specifically mentioned telling his father that he was alive and held a high position in Egypt?
- ? What are your most favorite among all the promises of Scripture? Why?



Part 3—Jacob’s Family Saved and Restored

“The Best of Egypt Is Yours”

Genesis 45:16–24

Say: Have you ever found that sometimes God gives us blessings beyond what we ask for? Joseph and his family found unexpected blessings in Genesis 45. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Joseph's story might best be described in a single word: Providence. God's purposes are fulfilled through—or even in spite of—human action. With every human failure or shortcoming, God makes a way for the final outcome to be good. Genesis 45:16–24 is a good example. When Pharaoh heard that Joseph's brothers had arrived in Egypt, he made it possible for the entire family to ride out the famine in Egypt. There they could be assured of provision and protection, as Joseph himself could care for them. In this way, God preserved His plan through the favor of a pagan Pharaoh.

Notice some key points from Pharaoh's instruction. He went beyond even Joseph's invitation. Joseph called them to come to Goshen so he could be near them (verse 10), but Pharaoh added that they should come so they could “eat the fat of the land” (verse 18, *KJV*). Amid a terrible famine, Joseph's family would enjoy the best food of Egypt. Likewise, they wouldn't need to bring possessions, such as tents or furnishings. The best of Egypt would be theirs (verse 20).

They also received wagons and supplies for their journey, as well as new clothing (verses 21–22). It is fitting that a gift of clothing would be included. Just as a fine garment formed the basis of their animosity when Joseph was betrayed, now fine garments would become part of the reconciliation of the family.

Joseph also gave extra gifts to Benjamin—gifts that represented a special status (verse 22; note also 43:34). This serves to highlight the change that has taken place in the hearts of the brothers. They were no longer put off by personal grievances. Even though Benjamin received the extra food from Pharaoh's second-in-command in 43:34, they were still willing to be enslaved for him.

As they prepared to depart, Joseph had one last word of instruction: “Don't quarrel about all this along the way” (verse 24, *NLT*). Most scholars today see this as an instruction not to dispute with one another about the past, specifically to make accusations over what they did to Joseph. Their brother had forgiven them, and now they needed to forgive one another.

Joseph's words are valuable for families today. Forgiveness plays a huge role in maintaining the unity and affection that holds families together. This is not to say that it is easy to put past hurts behind us. Rather, it is important to see the value of making the effort—and trusting in God's help—to do so (see Ephesians 4:32).

Discuss

- ? In what ways do you see God's providence in the story of Joseph?
- ? What are some valuable pieces of advice that would help us forgive, or accept forgiveness, even after many years? Cite Scriptures that occur to you.

□ “Joseph Is Alive!”

Genesis 45:25–28



Say: Have you ever received good news that absolutely shocked you? As a feeble old man nearing the end of his life, Jacob had this wonderful experience. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The return to Jacob in Genesis 45:25 stands in stark contrast from the last two times Scripture recorded them returning to him (see 37:33–35; 42:36–38). In the

past these were scenes of sorrow, grief, and fear for Jacob. But now he can exclaim, “Joseph is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die!” (verse 28, κλν).

Not only was he alive, but he had prospered beyond all imagination. Jacob could scarcely believe it and was only convinced when he saw the wagons. Yet what is shocking to man is commonplace to God. This was God’s family of promise. He had preserved them by His hand, despite so many challenges. Nothing could—and nothing can—thwart God’s plan to bless the nations.



Resource Packet Item 3: Godly Principles for the Family

Distribute the worksheet and complete it as a class. Use this sheet to identify the value of strong, healthy family relationships.

Discuss

- ? What are some thoughts that may have gone through Jacob’s mind upon hearing that Joseph was alive?
- ? How would you describe, in your own words, God’s plan to bless the nations?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Nothing can stand in the way of God’s plan to bring salvation to the nations. This is great encouragement to us when we feel that we have fallen short of God’s plan for us. Remember—He is still working in us, and in the world.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Seek out someone you have wronged and, inasmuch as you are able, reconcile with them.
- Make an effort to tell the significant people in your life, be they family or friends, why they are important to you.
- Pray for unity in the family of God, that we may demonstrate to the world that we are one in Christ.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

God Created the Family.
Genesis 5:1–5

Tuesday:

God Chose a Family.
Genesis 12:1–9

Wednesday:

A Family Restored.
Job 42:10–17

Thursday:

A Family Saved.
Acts 16:25–34

Friday:

Prayer for God’s Family.
Ephesians 3:14–21

Saturday:

Encouragement to a Family.
2 John 1:1–6

October 15, 2023

LESSON
7

Jacob and Joseph Die Well

Study Text

Genesis 49:28 through 50:26

Central Truth

God enables His children to finish life well.



Key Verse

2 Timothy 4:6–7

For I [Paul] am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith (KJV).

As for me [Paul], my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will examine the deaths of Jacob and Joseph, recognizing what filled their hearts at the end of their lives.
- Students will consider how God's promises were reaffirmed and clarified through the passage of time and generations.
- Students will pray for God's help in focusing on and trusting His promises even to the end of life.

Introducing the Study

Say: It can sound odd to speak of someone as having “died well.” For the Christian, this usually means that a person died as he or she lived. That is, the person can reflect upon life and see the hand of God at work while also looking forward to everlasting life.

Opening Activity—Dying Well

Ask: What do you think it means to “die well”? What examples can you give of someone who has died well?

Answers might include dying without regret—but this does not mean that the person lived a near-perfect life. Rather, the person leaves this world with a sense that his or her purpose in God's eyes has been realized. Students might cite family members or church leaders who have left a strong spiritual legacy.

Say: Dying well is not defined by the status of the person.

Rather, it reflects the legacy of that person and the peaceful assurance that he or she leaves this world as a devoted follower of the Lord. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

This final lesson of the unit on early Israelite history touches on several key points. First, as we examine the last words of Jacob, we gain insight into not only his legacy, but the future of each of his sons within God's great plan. We also can learn from the importance he placed upon being buried in Canaan—not because a place of burial matters in itself, but as a reminder of the promise that drove Jacob's life. Second, we see in the life and death of Joseph his enduring love for his brothers, played out in his lasting forgiveness, as well as a foreshadowing of how God's promise through His people will proceed in the generations to come.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

Genesis 49:29. And he charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite,

30. In the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a buryingplace.

33. And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.

50:7. And Joseph went up to bury his father: and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt,

8. And all the house of Joseph, and his brethren, and his father's house: only their little ones, and their flocks, and their herds, they left in the land of Goshen.

12. And his sons did unto him according as he commanded them:

16. And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying,

17. So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him.

18. And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants.

19. And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God?

20. But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

21. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.

24. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

25. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence.

26. So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

Genesis 49:29. Then Jacob instructed them, "Soon I will die and join my ancestors. Bury me with my father and grandfather in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite.

30. This is the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite as a permanent burial site."

33. When Jacob had finished this charge to his sons, he drew his feet into the bed, breathed his last, and joined his ancestors in death.

50:7. So Joseph went up to bury his father. He was accompanied by all of Pharaoh's officials, all the senior members of Pharaoh's household, and all the senior officers of Egypt.

8. Joseph also took his entire household and his brothers and their households. But they left their little children and flocks and herds in the land of Goshen.

12. So Jacob's sons did as he had commanded them.

16. So they sent this message to Joseph: "Before your father died, he instructed us

17. to say to you: 'Please forgive your brothers for the great wrong they did to you—for their sin in treating you so cruelly.' So we, the servants of the God of your father, beg you to forgive our sin." When Joseph received the message, he broke down and wept.

18. Then his brothers came and threw themselves down before Joseph. "Look, we are your slaves!" they said.

19. But Joseph replied, "Don't be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you?"

20. You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.

21. No, don't be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children." So he reassured them by speaking kindly to them.

24. "Soon I will die," Joseph told his brothers, "but God will surely come to help you and lead you out of this land of Egypt. He will bring you back to the land he solemnly promised to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."

25. Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath, and he said, "When God comes to help you and lead you back, you must take my bones with you."

26. So Joseph died at the age of 110. The Egyptians embalmed him, and his body was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Say: What kind of legacy has been left to you by the people who shaped your life? What kind of legacy are you leaving to the people you influence? These questions can have several answers for every individual. Yet we must keep in mind that part of the answer for the Christian involves a spiritual legacy. This can be seen in Jacob’s final days with his sons. (Share your highlights from the following text.)



Resource Packet Item 1: The Last Words to Jacob’s Sons

Distribute the information sheet, which discusses Jacob’s prophetic blessings given to his sons in Genesis 49:1–27. Note that this sheet describes the futures of the tribes, as given by Jacob. Of particular importance are the entries on Judah and Joseph. Students may want to study the sheet further for their own information during the coming week.

Genesis 49:28 concludes an important section where Jacob addresses each of his sons. These blessings are applied to the tribes that will later come from each—with Judah and Joseph having preeminence (see also Moses in Deuteronomy 33). The tribe of Judah dominated the history of the south, and the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh were dominant in the north. Ephraim and Manasseh were the tribal representatives of their father, Joseph. (If you look at an Old Testament map, it will demonstrate the immense land areas of these tribes, relative to the others. Note also that Jerusalem rested in the land of Judah.)

Beginning in Genesis 49:29, Jacob spoke to his sons about his burial wishes. First and foremost, he asked to be buried with Isaac and Abraham. He had made a similar request in 47:29–31. Why? Because, first of all, God had told him this would be so (see 46:4). And it also demonstrated that Jacob’s faith in God’s covenant promise stayed strong in his heart unto death. He wanted to be laid to rest in that land of promise, just as his family had been. The location of “Mamre in Canaan” (verse 30, NLT) is on the outskirts of the city of Hebron in Israel today.

Fittingly, Genesis 49:33 closes this passage by saying that Jacob finished speaking, “gathered up his feet into the bed,” breathed his last, and “was gathered unto his people” (KJV). His final words declared the reality of the promises of God, and his faith in those promises. There could be no better way for this great patriarch to die.

Discuss

- ? In what ways would Jacob’s desire to be buried with his fathers in Canaan testify to his confidence in God’s promises?
- ? What would you like your last words to your loved ones to be when you leave this world for the presence of Jesus? Why?



Say: Grief is a reality in every person’s life at some time. And, just as it cannot be avoided, it cannot be strictly defined. Every person will grieve differently when death strikes close to home. As Genesis 50 opens, we see Joseph as an example of a God-follower experiencing intense grief. We can learn from him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Roughly half of Genesis 50 is occupied with descriptions of grief over the death of Jacob. It is important to see that the Bible recognizes grief as a legitimate, even necessary, human emotion and process. In fact, the process of grief is described in the New Testament as well as the old. Mark 5:38, for instance, reflects the practice of hiring professional mourners, which was not uncommon in the ancient world. It was part of the process of mourning and grief for the family.

All of this is to say that Scripture does not cast a negative light on this healthy human response to loss. Yet while we grieve, we do not grieve the same as those who do not have hope in Christ (see 1 Thessalonians 4:13).

Genesis 50:1 describes Joseph openly acting out his grief in very personal ways. He laid himself across Jacob’s face (likely including his upper body) and kissed him. Kissing was a common expression of affection when someone departed, just as is the case today. Clearly, Joseph felt deep grief.

Verses 2–3 describe the preparation of Jacob’s body for the journey to Canaan. Embalming was an Egyptian process, but it served an important purpose in allowing Joseph to preserve Jacob’s remains for the extended trip. From a larger perspective, however, scholars note that Jacob’s death and mourning are described in far greater detail than other deaths in the stories of the patriarchs. Why? Many believe that this emphasizes the enduring character of God’s promises. Jacob would return to the land of promise. This land is a focal point of all the Old Testament. It is a source of rejoicing as His people live there. And when they are taken from it, returning to the Promised Land is their heartfelt desire. Even the prophets focus their messages on exile as punishment and return as blessing.

This is an important message to us today. What is the focus of our deepest desires? For us, it is a restoration to the presence of God. This is ultimately the hope found in yearning for the new heavens and new earth, where we will live in perfection with our Lord forever. Death has no power to keep us from inheriting that promise.

Verses 2–3 also mention extended times of mourning for Jacob among the Egyptians. In Egypt, seventy days of mourning was a period of time reserved for the Pharaohs. Even this pagan nation mourned the patriarch, and to the degree of a king. Truly, God had blessed the seed of Abraham—the carriers of God’s great promises—in the land of Egypt.

**Resource Packet Item 2: Grief**

Distribute the worksheet and have students complete it in groups. First discuss their responses, as time allows, then discuss the personal response section at the bottom of the page.

Discuss

- ? What are some common ways that Christians express grief?
- ? Why is it important for Christians to recognize grief and sorrow as a normal and healthy part of dealing with the death of those we love?

Part 2—Jacob’s Burial

□ Jacob Buried in Canaan

Genesis 50:4–9



Say: Few moments in life help us appreciate friends and loved ones more than times of grief. When we feel vulnerable and emotionally on edge, there is great comfort in knowing that we do not face those difficult days alone. Joseph experienced this from a source that we might see as unexpected, described in Genesis 50:4–9. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Notice how verse 4 begins: “When the period of mourning was over . . . “ (NLT). Seventy days had been devoted to grieving Jacob. No doubt the pain of loss still stung Joseph and his brothers. But the time had come where Joseph also needed to move forward in action. He had made a promise to Jacob, and it was no small promise. By acting to make sure Jacob was buried in Canaan, he affirmed the reality of God’s promise that the seed of Abraham would occupy the land of Canaan.

And so, Joseph proceeded to ask Pharaoh (through his advisors) permission to bury his father in the tomb Jacob had prepared. (As a side note, scholars have concluded that Joseph didn’t go to Pharaoh personally because of mourning customs. There was no disrespect in his avoidance of Pharaoh.) Take special notice of the words used here. Joseph asked to “go up” to Canaan to bury his father (verse 5, KJV). This imagery of going “up” to Canaan is a key term in chapter 50 (see also verses 6–7,9,14,25, KJV). The same terminology is often applied to the Exodus (e.g., Exodus 3:8,17; 33:1). This passage foresees a time in the distant future, four hundred years later, when the seed of Abraham would go up from bondage in Egypt to the land where they belonged—the land of promise. Much would happen in the interim, and much of that would be difficult for God’s people. But His promise would endure.

As believers today, we have the advantage of being able to look at the full picture. We know of the centuries of slavery that awaited the descendants of Jacob. This slavery required the miraculous hand of God to bring deliverance. But in the terrible moments of Joseph’s grief, these Egyptians who would become slave masters here acted as friends. Pharaoh graciously included all his officials in this grand funeral procession, as well as a great number of chariots and chariot drivers (Genesis 50:6–9). It was, in a sense, a parade worthy of a king. And how appropriate this procession would be. They carried Jacob, grandson of Abraham, from whom would come the One who would give His own life to save people from their sins.

Discuss

- ? Have you ever been especially blessed by a friend or loved one during a time of grief or sorrow? Explain.



Say: Many people have a place that is special because of some event that took place there earlier. For some, this might be a place they associate with a person they have lost through death. The very thought of this location in the future can lead the person into reflection and contemplation. As Joseph and his brothers took their father to the place of burial, they stopped for a week of mourning in Canaan—which would later become a place of deliverance. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Genesis 50:10 records that Joseph, along with the entourage of family and Egyptians, stopped at “Atad, which is beyond Jordan” (קנז). This was likely a location near Jericho. And so, scholars note, it is very possible that the entourage followed the same route to Canaan that the Israelites would follow some four hundred years later. Once again, Scripture here foreshadows the fulfillment of God’s promises in Scripture later on.

There, the entourage held a memorial and time of intense mourning for seven days (verses 10–11). This event was so striking that the Canaanites took notice and named the place Abel-mizraim, which means “mourning of the Egyptians.” It is worth noting, then, that this place would be remembered as a place where Egyptians mourned the seed of Israel—the very people they would later enslave.

It appears that Joseph and his brothers left the entourage in Abelmizraim to proceed as a family to Jacob’s burial place. Such an intimate scene also reminds us of the reconciliation that has taken place. Often, it is in times of death that such reconciliation occurs. It is far better for this to happen in life than in death. There, together, the brothers honored their father’s heartfelt—and prophetic—request to be buried in the land of promise (verses 12–13). Afterward, they and the entourage returned to Egypt (verse 14).

Discuss

- ? Why might God have placed so many parallels in His Word between the accounts of the patriarchs and the Exodus?
- ? What causes families to resist reconciliation until a time of grieving, and how can following the example of the brothers here, having already reconciled, make for a better family time when grief does come?



Part 3—Joseph Reassures His Brothers

Say: We all experience times in life when we have trust issues. Sometimes this happens when we wonder if our past mistakes and wrongs will come back to haunt us. Joseph’s brothers faced these kinds of concerns after their father died. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As Joseph and his family returned to Egypt, his brothers made a disturbing realization. Now that their father was dead, their brother could take revenge upon them

without concern for offending Jacob. Perhaps they were still plagued by guilt in spite of Joseph's assurances that he had forgiven them (see Genesis 45:1–15). Now, they found themselves in fear of their powerful brother (50:15).

So, in verse 16, they hatched a plan. The brothers knew Joseph always submitted to the will and authority of his father. Motivated by fear (see verses 15,19), they invented a story, sending a message to Joseph that their father had left some important instructions: "Please forgive your brothers for the great wrong they did to you—for their sin in treating you so cruelly" (verse 17, NLT). Note that in the Hebrew language, verse 17 includes three of the four words in the Old Testament for wicked deeds: In literal terms, what they did was a crime, a sin, and evil. They had committed a horrible sin against Joseph and against God.

It seems, then, that at this moment the brothers finally came to terms with the depth of the wickedness they inflicted upon their younger brother. Now, all they could do was beg for his forgiveness. Yet Joseph had already forgiven them, as seen in his response to their message. He wept intensely.

The message had been sent through an intermediary, likely to prepare the way for what could be a tense meeting. Upon seeing Joseph, they threw themselves at his feet declaring, "Look, we are your slaves" (verse 18, NLT). Scholars see this as the dramatic climax to the story beginning in chapter 37. The word "slaves" in 50:18 is the same as that which is translated "servants" of God in verse 17. The brothers had come full circle. They once treated Joseph as worthless, selling him into slavery. Now they see him as a surrogate for God, holding their fate in his hands.

But Joseph had no intention of treating them with anything other than affection (verses 19–21). There was no need to fear. They shouldn't equate him with God. He was not God's surrogate, but God's instrument during this critical chapter of His chosen family. The brothers must recognize that God ruled their future, not Joseph.

In the course of God's plan, He had taken what they intended for harm and transformed it into something incredibly good. They sought death for Joseph, but God used him to preserve life. They sought to end him, but God used him to bring a new beginning in the next step on the path of His promise to bless the world.

We will likely never be sold into slavery. But we will experience very difficult circumstances. In such times, it is easy to ask, "Why?" With God's grace, we can take the path Joseph chose, recognizing that God can take what is meant for evil and make something from it that is good beyond our imaginations.

Discuss

- ? Describe a time when God took something bad in your life and made it into something good.
- ? Why can it be challenging to remember that God holds our future?

□ God Will Help You

Genesis 50:22–26



Say: Life is filled with good times and hard times. Yet no matter our circumstances, we can share in the same message Joseph would give to his brothers: God will help you. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The death of Joseph, which closes the Book of Genesis in 50:22–26, includes two important points. First, Joseph emphasized his desire to eventually be buried in Canaan. He, like his forefathers, clung to God’s great promise unto his last breath. Moses would later fulfill this request in Exodus 13:19.

Second, Joseph reaffirmed God’s promises by declaring, “God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land of Egypt” (verse 24, κλν). It would be four centuries, and a profound change in status from welcomed guests to slaves, before this would be fulfilled. But God would help His people—just as He surely helps them today.



Resource Packet Item 3: Lord of History

Distribute the worksheet and complete it as a class. Note the critical role early Jewish history plays in the fulfillment of God’s promise in the earth.

Discuss

? Describe a time when God has helped you in a supernatural way.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Just as centuries passed before God’s people returned to Canaan, millennia have passed since God’s chosen people were given the promise to help them. Yet that promise endures, even to us today, no matter the circumstances of our lives.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Find someone experiencing grief today, and do something to be a blessing to them amid their difficult time.
- Encourage someone today by describing for them why they are important to you. Remind them that their life matters to God, and to you.
- Take time this week to study some of God’s promises in Scripture. Commit these to memory so that you might encourage one another with reminders of these promises in the days to come.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Moses’ Final Blessing on Israel.
Deuteronomy 33:1, 26–29

Tuesday:

Joshua’s Final Words to Israel.
Joshua 24:14–28

Wednesday:

David’s Last Public Prayer.
1 Chronicles 29:10–19

Thursday:

Jesus’ Final Words to His Followers.
Acts 1:4–9

Friday:

Paul Prepared to Die.
2 Timothy 4:6–8

Saturday:

The Final Words of the Bible.
Revelation 22:10–21

The Bible and Today's Issues

God's Word is not silent on today's most controversial issues. As Paul instructed Timothy, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine" (2 Timothy 3:16, KJV). His Word is "quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12, KJV).

But how do we apply biblical principles to the complex challenges facing our families, communities, and churches in 2023? How do we uphold Scripture—and "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15, NLT)—when our society is running headlong in the opposite direction?

Written by experts in their fields, these lessons are designed to equip you to answer difficult questions using biblical truth. It would be impossible to exhaustively address these complex issues here, but this unit serves as a starting point, helping the students in your class engage with these topics and learn how to reach the people who are affected by them.

Jesus promised, "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13, KJV). The Holy Spirit inspired the Bible in the first place, and He will come alongside and help as you prayerfully interpret it. **▼** (*Many of today's issues addressed in this unit can be traced back to a distorted view of the image of God and what it means to bear His image as humans. Play the video describing this concept—available at [RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult](https://www.RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult).*)

Featured Writers

Sheila Harper (Lesson 8: "The Sanctity of Human Life") is the founder and president of Save One, a ministry helping men, women, and families recover from the trauma of abortion. After choosing abortion at age nineteen, Sheila spent years battling addiction and suicidal tendencies until she accepted Jesus' forgiveness through an abortion recovery class. She soon began helping women, men, and families deal with the aftermath of abortion, founding Save One in 2000. The ministry has grown to include three hundred groups in twenty-five countries.

Joe Dallas (Lesson 9: "Pornography Is Destructive" and Lesson 10: "The Bible on Homosexuality") is an author, conference speaker, and ordained pastoral counselor. He directs a biblical counseling ministry for individuals and families dealing with sexual and relational problems. He received his master's in Christian counseling from Vision University and is a member of the American Association of Christian Counselors. Joe has authored six books on human sexuality from the Christian perspective.

With degrees in the computer science field, a biblical education, and years of ministry experience, **Kenneth Crawford** (Lesson 11: "Discerning the Messages of Media" and Lesson 12: "Use Technology Wisely") has a knack for connecting the seemingly unrelated fields of technology and God's truth. He is an ordained minister with the Assemblies of God and shares a blessed life with his wife and three children.

Michael Tenneson, Ph.D., (Lesson 13: "The Bible on the Environment") is a professor of biology and chair of the Department of Natural and Applied Sciences at Evangel University, where he has taught for more than thirty years. Initially trained as a field behavioral ecologist, he has done field research on birds, frogs, porcupines, lizards, and snails. His current research examines attitudes and beliefs of people related to science and theology.

October 22, 2023

LESSON

8

The Sanctity of Human Life

Study Text

Genesis 1:26–28; 2:4–7, 18–22;
Job 33:4; 34:10–15; Psalm 139:13–16;
Isaiah 42:5; Jeremiah 1:5;
Luke 1:39–44; Acts 17:24–28

Central Truth

Because humans are created by God in His image, all human life must be valued.



Key Verse Genesis 1:27

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them (KJV).

So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will recognize God alone gives life.
- Students will acknowledge every human being is made in God's image and should be respected and valued.
- Students will actively uphold the sanctity of life—from the beginning of life at conception until the end of life at the time appointed by God.

Introducing the Study

Say: The first lesson in this unit reminds us of the inherent value of every person. While certain terms usually take center stage in discussions of the sanctity of life—*abortion*, *euthanasia*, *pro-life*, and *pro-choice*—the heart of the matter is, God values all human life and so should we.

Opening Activity—Defining *Sanctity of Life*

Ask: Most people consider abortion to be the primary issue related to the sanctity of life, and there is no question it is of utmost importance. But can you think of other issues in our society that call for us to champion the value of each human life? As you prepare to teach this lesson and guide the class discussion, we recommend reading the two Assemblies of God official position papers regarding the sanctity of life at ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers.

Say: The overarching concept of the sanctity of human life includes many issues: abortion, care for elderly people, the use of life-sustaining medical equipment, assisted suicide, the availability of medical services, care for the poor, and more. The Bible must be our guide as we navigate these difficult issues. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Cultural norms have a way of slipping into our minds and hearts. Left unchecked, this infiltration can turn our eyes from Scripture, close our minds to the Holy Spirit, and warp our worldview.

Though countercultural, the right perspective on the value of human life is revealed through the Bible's teachings and the Spirit's leading. When we rely on these and build our lives upon their foundation—everything they say about the sanctity of life and the character of the One who created and sustains it—we can measure the world's ideas against the truth of God.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Genesis 1:26. And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

27. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

28. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

Psalms 139:13. For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.

14. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

15. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

16. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.

Isaiah 42:5. Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein.

Acts 17:24. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

25. Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

26. And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

27. That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:

28. For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

New Living Translation

Genesis 1:26. Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground."

27. So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

28. Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground."

Psalms 139:13. You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb.

14. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.

15. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.

16. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.

Isaiah 42:5. God, the LORD, created the heavens and stretched them out. He created the earth and everything in it. He gives breath to everyone, life to everyone who walks the earth.

Acts 17:24. "He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn't live in man-made temples, and human hands can't serve his needs—for he has no needs. He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need.

26. From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries.

27. His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us.

28. For in him we live and move and exist. As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'"

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Part 1—Humans Created in God’s Image

□ The Value of Life

Genesis 2:4–7,18–22

Say: *Valuing* something means giving it special importance. We value things that have meaning for us—like our grandmother’s china or an expensive car—sometimes even making sacrifices to obtain them. Then we spend money and energy to protect them. But think of how much more we value our family and friends. You would throw your grandmother’s china in the trash if you had to choose between it and your spouse’s life. You would sell the car in a second if you needed money to take care of your child. The reason we have this deeper connection with the people we love is because God placed within our nature the ability to treasure His greatest gift—the gift of life. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

God spoke, giving form and life to plants, fish, birds, animals—all living things. But He took a different approach when He created humans, showing the unique value He places on them. After carefully forming man from the dust, He “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7, *KJV*). Filled with God’s breath, Adam was different from the rest of creation, demonstrating the unique way God would interact with humanity.

God’s care for humans is evident several verses later when He acknowledged Adam was without adequate companionship. In His goodness, God determined to “make a helper who is just right for him” (verse 18, *NLT*). After naming all the animals, Adam had not found the right helper, so God used one of Adam’s ribs to create a woman, who would later be named Eve (2:21–22; 3:20). This is one of many examples where God’s value of humanity manifests through His seeing and providing for their needs.

Discuss

- ? What is the significance of God’s choice to form Adam from the dust and breathe life into him, rather than speaking him into existence like the rest of creation?
- ? Why do you think God employed another unique method to create Eve, forming her from one of Adam’s ribs?



□ In His Image

Genesis 1:26–28

Say: In our divisive society, even Christians can be guilty of using humiliating or disrespectful methods to discredit other people’s ideas. Taking that route means we value winning a debate more than we value the individual we’re debating. Attacking a person’s worth or value dishonors the One whose image they bear. Instead every interaction should be guided by our value of God and His image reflected in the person we are communicating with. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Have you ever visited a museum and noticed a crowd of people gathered around a surprisingly unremarkable painting? It’s likely the artwork was famous for the

artist who created it rather than its own beauty. Likewise, every person on earth is a masterpiece—regardless of appearance, intelligence, or wealth—because of the One who created them (see Ephesians 2:10).

Not only did God form Adam and Eve, but He imprinted them with “his own image” (Genesis 1:27). Unlike the rest of creation, humans carry the very likeness of our Creator. That likeness gives every person unique value and should affect how we treat one another. Several chapters later, God explains to Noah that His image in each person is the reason murder is prohibited (9:6). Our respect for God informs our respect for His image in others.

Bearing God’s image establishes our identity, but it also gives us authority (see Psalm 8:4–8). Like Adam and Eve, we work on God’s behalf to care for the things and people He has made, coupling prayer with action so His will is “done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10, *KJV*). When we recognize God’s image in ourselves and each other—and begin to understand what that truly means—we treat one another with respect and value human life at every stage.



Resource Packet Item 1: *Imago Dei*

Distribute the worksheet and discuss the meaning of *imago Dei*. Then divide into groups to look up the Scriptures and note the various ways God’s image is reflected in each.

Discuss

- ? God chose to use himself as the template when He created humans. How does being created in God’s image add value to your life? to others’ lives?
- ? In what ways has God given you authority as an image bearer? How can you best reflect God’s character as you carry out this responsibility?

Part 2—Life Begins at Conception

□ The Moment of Life

Psalm 139:13–16



Say: God knows every child before birth, and His sovereign hand is at work as they grow. David beautifully described the intricate detail with which God fashions each person: “You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother’s womb” (Psalm 139:13, *NLT*). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The miracle of life doesn’t begin in the second trimester or when a baby descends the birth canal. Life begins when two living entities, the sperm and the ovum, make contact. At the moment of fertilization, a baby’s genetic makeup is complete. The child has forty-six chromosomes at conception, twenty-three from each parent. Fully alive and fully unique, the baby is instantaneously comprised of fifty thousand genes, determining gender, hair color, body type, skin tone, and many other characteristics. David may not have known these scientific details, but he understood the miracle taking place when he wrote, “I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works” (verse 14, *KJV*).

In God's eyes, no human being is a surprise or mistake. Even a child conceived in horrific circumstances has a future according to God's plan. "You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed" (verse 16, NLT). When we view a person from God's perspective, we see an amazing creation, a valuable, sacred life for whom God has a plan.

Discuss

? How could you use Psalm 139:13–16 to explain to a friend that life begins at conception?



The Personhood of Life

Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:39–44

Say: What makes someone a *person*? Some medical and legal experts insist personhood is determined by *viability*—the ability to sustain life outside the womb. But the Bible reveals God's heart for those who are weak and overlooked (Isaiah 61:1–3). In fact, His power is perfected through human weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Abortion goes beyond the evil of ending a child's life; it also thwarts God's purpose for them. God assured the prophet Jeremiah, "Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5, NLT). Clearly, God viewed this unborn child as a person, calling and appointing Jeremiah for a specific purpose before he was medically viable.

The New Testament also reinforces the personhood of an unborn child. One example is found in Luke 1:26–38, where the angel Gabriel visited Mary and the Holy Spirit came upon her, conceiving the Messiah. A few days later, she traveled approximately seventy miles from Nazareth to the hill country of Judea to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who was also expecting a child. Six months earlier, an angel of the Lord had appeared in the temple sanctuary and told Zechariah the priest, "God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son and you are to name him John . . . He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth" (Luke 1:13,15, NLT).

When Mary arrived at the house and spoke a greeting, "the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost" (verse 41, KJV). Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth declared, "The babe leaped in my womb for joy" (verse 44, KJV). This was no typical baby movement. Instead, Scripture assigns the motivation as the emotion of joy, a clear sign of John's personhood. Even in the womb, he had already begun his God-given mission of bringing attention to the Messiah.

More than thirty years later, John again recognized Jesus for who He was. "John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29, NLT). He echoed the gladness he had experienced in Elizabeth's womb, reacting to Jesus' growing ministry by saying, "I am filled with joy at his success. He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less" (3:29–30, NLT).

Miraculously conceived and set apart for a specific purpose, the unborn John may not have been medically viable, but he clearly exhibited personhood. Encountering the Messiah, John experienced the same reaction as an unborn child that he would as a grown man.

While not every baby is filled with the Holy Spirit before birth, every conception results in a person who has a purpose. Allowing the sinful world to define *personhood* gives the power of life and death to parents, doctors, and the government rather than leaving it in God's hands where it belongs. When we violate God's nature and His Word, we suffer the results—not only the eventual judgment against all sin but the dreadful consequences of abortion here and now.

Discuss

- ? How do miscarriage grief and abortion regret demonstrate the personhood of unborn children?
- ? When you truly understand God-given personhood—that every life is a miracle and every person has a purpose—how should it affect the way you view and treat people?



Resource Packet Item 2: Life-Giving Alternatives

Distribute the worksheet and review the ideas for helping moms and dads choose life. Then ask the class for their ideas and discuss the questions at the bottom of the page.

Part 3—God Gives and Sustains Life

□ The Breath of Life

Isaiah 42:5; Job 33:4



Say: God is the giver of all life. Only He holds ultimate authority over life and death. As Samuel's mother, Hannah, declared when God answered her prayers and miraculously blessed her with a son, "The LORD gives both death and life; he brings some down to the grave but raises others up" (1 Samuel 2:6, NLT). When human beings ignore godly wisdom and take it upon themselves to decide who lives and who dies, they are rebelliously usurping authority that belongs to God alone. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Through the ages, societies and cultures have justified taking life for various reasons. One of the most targeted and vulnerable demographics in our society is unborn children, but other groups are devalued as well, including the elderly, poor, and people with disabilities. Tragically, governments, some legal and medical professionals, and even families have attempted to wrest sovereignty away from God and decide for themselves who is worthy of life.

God breathed His breath of life into Adam, and as we see throughout Scripture, He did not stop with the first generation of humans. David declared, "You are the fountain of life" (Psalm 36:9, NLT). Isaiah added, "[God] gives breath to everyone, life to everyone who walks the earth" (Isaiah 42:5, NLT). The Book of Job

says, “The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life” (Job 33:4, *NLT*). Paul later wrote that God is the One who “gives life to all” (1 Timothy 6:13, *NLT*). Every living person—at every age and stage—has received the gift of life from God alone.

A child’s worth is not determined by the details of conception, even in the tragic cases of rape and incest. The One who formed that child in the womb is the only One who can determine his or her value. The concept that death is an option when a child has been conceived in violence takes God, the omnipotent Creator of life, out of the equation. Not only is an innocent child’s life taken, but additional trauma is heaped on a woman who has already been victimized.

Other times, an unborn child may be diagnosed with an incurable illness, and abortion is the course of action a doctor recommends. But who are we to play the role of an all-knowing God? Who are we to deem a child unworthy of life or accuse God of making a mistake? When we start dealing out life and death, we cross into territory that only belongs to Him.

Discuss

- ? What are some of the potential consequences when human beings wield the power of life and death?
- ? Read Isaiah 42:1–7 to better understand the context of verse 5. What does this prophetic passage tell us about the character of the Lord and His chosen Servant (the Messiah)? How should this knowledge affect our view of the sanctity of life?



□ The Sustainer of Life

Job 34:10–15; Acts 17:24–28

Say: God has not abandoned His creation. He has a plan for His people, and even amid rampant sin and rebellion, God continues to sustain life. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Job 34, Elihu declares, “If God were to take back his spirit and withdraw his breath, all life would cease, and humanity would turn again to dust” (verses 14–15, *NLT*). Unlike Job’s other three friends who were rebuked by God for speaking out of turn (see 42:7), Elihu speaks for God. His remarks carry weight. What Elihu states in Job 34:10–15 reminds us that life itself is under God’s control. We can rest in that knowledge and abide in His care.

There is not a moment when God is not sustaining our lives. As Paul explained to the people of Athens, “He is the God who made the world and everything in it. . . . He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need . . . For in him we live and move and exist” (Acts 17:24–25,28, *NLT*). The same breath of God that created life in us continues to sustain us until the time God has appointed our lives to end (see Hebrews 9:27). This knowledge should forever inspire the way we use our own lives and the way we respect others’ lives.



Resource Packet Item 3: Valuing Every Life

Every human life—regardless of age, stage, or level of ability—is sacred. Distribute the worksheet and discuss the case studies. How could the people in each situation uphold the sanctity of life? (Use the tips on pages 2–3 in the article, “Classroom Discussions that Honor God,” to ensure the discussion honors God and protects others’ privacy and dignity.)

Discuss

? Someday we will have accomplished God’s purpose, and He will withdraw His breath and call us home. What importance does that place on our remaining time here on earth?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Human life is sacred, and only God has the ultimate authority and ability to give life, sustain life, and end life. Working through the issues related to the sanctity of life can be daunting, but as in all things, God’s Word is our source of truth. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can advocate for life in a way that acknowledges His image in all people, honors their value, and treats each life as a sacred gift from the Father.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Find a way to bless a single parent this week. You could deliver groceries, offer to babysit, take care of home or car repairs, or simply share a few words of encouragement.
- Make a donation or sign up to volunteer at your local pregnancy care center, either as a class or individually.
- Take time this week to fast and pray concerning sanctity of life issues. Ask the Holy Spirit for His guidance, courage, and compassion.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

God’s Value for Human Life.
Genesis 9:1–7

Tuesday:

Life in God’s Hands.
Job 12:1–10

Wednesday:

Called from the Womb.
Isaiah 49:1–7

Thursday:

Value Life and Living.
Matthew 5:21–26

Friday:

Care for All People.
Matthew 25:31–40

Saturday:

No Longer Foreigners.
Ephesians 2:11–22

October 29, 2023

LESSON
9

Pornography Is Destructive

Study Text

Numbers 15:37–40; 2 Samuel 11:2–5; 12:1–13; Job 31:1–8; Matthew 5:27–30; 1 Corinthians 6:12–20; James 1:13–15; 1 John 2:15–16

Central Truth

God demands sexual purity.



Key Verse Proverbs 4:23

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life (KJV).

Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will recognize the danger of pornography.
- Students will discern the various ways Satan introduces people to pornography and will take steps to avoid being caught in the trap.
- Students will evaluate their lives and actively remove anything that could lead them into pornography.

Introducing the Study

Say: Although the topic of today’s lesson is rarely addressed in the Church, we are not immune to the scourge of pornography sweeping our society. According to the accountability software company Covenant Eyes, 64 percent of Christian men and 15 percent of Christian women say they watch pornography at least once a month; 1 in 5 youth pastors and 1 in 7 senior pastors use pornography on a regular basis; and 43 percent of pastors say they have struggled with pornography in the past.¹ While we may not all agree on the criteria for determining what constitutes *pornography*, these statistics indicate the problem is alarmingly prevalent—even in the Church.

Opening Activity—Innocent or Not?

Ask: What seemingly innocent activities does Satan use to ensnare believers in pornography? Often, people stumble into pornography addiction through accidentally viewing it online or by consuming media with sexualized themes.

Say: No one is immune to the temptation of pornography, so we must stay on alert and guard against Satan’s attacks. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The growing problem of Christians using pornography is morally devastating for two reasons. First, Christians using pornography defile themselves, disobeying God’s desire for sexual purity (1 Thessalonians 4:3–4). Second, its use among believers hinders the Church’s impact. In this lesson, we’ll learn why pornography is so destructive, how it affects users, and what steps we can take to avoid and overcome it.

1. “Pornography Statistics.” CovenantEyes. Accessed March 29, 2022. <https://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats>.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

Matthew 5:27. Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: 28. But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

29. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

30. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

2 Samuel 11:2. And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.

4. And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house.

5. And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am with child.

12:11. Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun.

12. For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.

13. And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.

Job 31:1. I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?

2. For what portion of God is there from above? and what inheritance of the Almighty from on high?

4. Doth not he see my ways, and count all my steps?

5. If I have walked with vanity, or if my foot hath hastened to deceit;

6. Let me be weighed in an even balance that God may know mine integrity.

Matthew 5:27. “You have heard the commandment that says, ‘You must not commit adultery.’

28. But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

29. So if your eye—even your good eye—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

30. And if your hand—even your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.”

2 Samuel 11:2. Late one afternoon, after his midday rest, David got out of bed and was walking on the roof of the palace. As he looked out over the city, he noticed a woman of unusual beauty taking a bath.

4. Then David sent messengers to get her; and when she came to the palace, he slept with her. She had just completed the purification rites after having her menstrual period. Then she returned home.

5. Later, when Bathsheba discovered that she was pregnant, she sent David a message, saying, “I’m pregnant.”

12:11. “This is what the LORD says: Because of what you have done, I will cause your own household to rebel against you. I will give your wives to another man before your very eyes, and he will go to bed with them in public view.

12. You did it secretly, but I will make this happen to you openly in the sight of all Israel.”

13. Then David confessed to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” Nathan replied, “Yes, but the LORD has forgiven you, and you won’t die for this sin.”

Job 31:1. “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look with lust at a young woman.

2. For what has God above chosen for us? What is our inheritance from the Almighty on high?

4. Doesn’t he see everything I do and every step I take?

5. Have I lied to anyone or deceived anyone?

6. Let God weigh me on the scales of justice, for he knows my integrity.”

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Part 1—Sexual Lust Is Serious Business

□ Don't Take It Lightly

Matthew 5:27–30

Say: People often fail to treat the sin of pornography seriously, because they choose not to treat the sin of lust seriously. After all, lust is unseen and private (though the consequences can be all too public). Those who are caught up in lust can delude themselves by thinking, “I’m not hurting anyone,” or “Everybody looks. It’s only natural!” But the sin of lust connects the destructive activity of a person’s eyes to the condition of their heart. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Our culture compounds the problem of pornography. While other sins like greed, violence, and racism are often condemned, lust is an advertising tool and entertainment standard. Erotic imagery sells products and entices the eye in virtually every public place. The temptation to lust is ever present, and society’s approval makes it easier to justify.

Scripture points us in the opposite direction, emphasizing God’s knowledge of both outward and inward sins. God pointed out to Ezekiel the foolishness of thinking certain vices could remain unseen. “Son of man, have you seen what the leaders of Israel are doing with their idols in dark rooms? They are saying, ‘The LORD doesn’t see us; he has deserted our land!’” (Ezekiel 8:12, NLT). Our choices are never hidden from Him.

Then in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made it clear that God abhors lust specifically (Matthew 5:27–30). The measures Jesus mentions to avoid sin—cutting off offensive hands and gouging out offensive eyes—may seem drastic, even shocking, but they clearly illustrate the gravity of His teaching. Lust is as serious as other sins, and believers should do whatever is necessary to avoid and overcome it.

At its essence, sexual lust is envy. While sexual desire between marriage partners is normal and ordained by God, lust involves coveting a person completely outside the bounds of what God has given you. That makes the sin of pornography all the more serious, because it personalizes the sin of lust—usually relegated to the mind—by using the faces and bodies of real people, each of whom is made in God’s image. Pornography is commercialized fantasy, exploiting participants and viewers alike.



Resource Packet Item 1: Paul on Purity

Distribute the worksheet, and encourage students to look up the Scriptures and note Paul’s teaching about purity.

Discuss

- ? In what ways do you avoid materials in your home that could incite lust? What additional measures might be necessary?
- ? Should church leaders be talking to young people about pornography? Or should the responsibility of addressing this issue be left up to parents?



Say: The “lust of the flesh” and the “lust of the eyes” (1 John 2:16, *KJV*) are products of loving the world more than God. They embrace a moment of desire without the connection God intended for sexual relations between husband and wife. There is no intimacy in pornography—just an intense experience in which a user connects with no one, communicates with no one, and grows in relationship with no one. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As we discussed in last week’s lesson, God designed people with an inherent need for companionship. “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18, *KJV*). In response to that human need, God created a heterosexual covenant partnership that included permanence (verse 24) and faithfulness (Hebrews 13:4). Husbands and wives are instructed to meet each other’s sexual needs (1 Corinthians 7:3–5), which were created and celebrated by God.

God has always called His people to be holy, or set apart from the ways of the world (Deuteronomy 14:2; 1 Peter 2:9–10). He is a God of covenant faithfulness, and He requires the same of us. Pornography thwarts God’s design. It appeals to the lust of the flesh, circumventing sexual purity and replacing it with a momentary, hyper-stimulating experience.

People use pornography in an attempt to meet their desire for physical intimacy without committing themselves to a marriage covenant. In that sense, pornography not only gratifies sexual lust, but it also caters to human selfishness and fits the unholy circle John described: “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16, *KJV*). Pornography caters to the mindset that says, “It’s all about me.” This kind of self-centeredness limits a person’s ability to create a deep bond with someone else and sustain it in a marriage relationship.

The world peddles in lust and pride, offering temporary and meaningless pleasures in return, but God’s sober reminder is to seek His will and His kingdom first (Matthew 6:10,33). “You are not controlled by your sinful nature” (Romans 8:9, *NLT*), and you “do not belong to this world” (John 17:16, *NLT*).

Discuss

- ? What effect do you think the widespread use of pornography might be having on people of all ages?
- ? Do you think a person can become addicted to pornography? Why?

Part 2—Cost and Consequences



Say: The world may strategize ways to draw people into pornography, but each individual decides whether they will yield to temptation. Avoiding the snare of pornography is every believer’s responsibility. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

James asserted that temptation never comes from God, but it “comes from our own desires, which . . . give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death” (James 1:14–15, NLT). The tempting path to pornography follows a pattern as well: arousal, consideration, and indulgence. The immediate result of giving in to the temptation is mental and spiritual defilement. One of the many long-term consequences is the person’s heart becomes increasingly less receptive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit (see Ephesians 4:17–19).

A person who is tempted to view pornography may be looking for a distraction from life’s hardships or a temporary rush to numb a deeper pain. The thrill of looking at erotic imagery sends powerful chemicals to the brain, creating lasting neural pathways that can affect future behavior. It’s almost as if the pornography were saying, “When you need to feel good or be distracted, I’m here for you.”

The craving to repeat that experience is what it means to be “drawn away of his [or her] own lust, and enticed” (James 1:14, KJV). That’s when a decision is made: I *will* yield, or I *will not* yield. Before giving in to temptation, there is a moment when a Christian must say, “I know this is wrong. I know it hurts the heart of God. But I give myself permission to do it anyway.”

Our evil desires then “give birth to sinful actions,” leading eventually to death (verse 15, NLT). This could include the death of a marriage, ministry, career, and reputation. It could cause the death of a person’s conscience—the hardening of the heart—and eventually result in condemnation and spiritual death.

Each time a person yields to temptation, the heart is hardened all the more toward God, loved ones, and fellow believers. Saying “I will do what I want” makes our conscience more calloused toward the Spirit of God and the truth of His Word. Before long, rebellion grows in other areas of life, since a little yeast always “spreads through the whole batch of dough” (Galatians 5:9, NLT). Where pornography is allowed, compromise, carnality, and a lukewarm attitude will surely follow.



Resource Packet Item 2: Purity in Practice

Distribute the worksheet, read the case studies aloud, and discuss the best way to respond in each situation. (Use the tips on pages 2–3 of this guide to ensure the classroom discussion honors God and protects others’ privacy and dignity.)

Discuss

- ? Have you ever had difficulty breaking a habit? How did you overcome the problem? What worked, and what didn’t?
- ? Why do you think a believer who “has become a new person” (2 Corinthians 5:17, NLT) still experiences old temptations?
- ? Do Christians ever reach the point of being immune to temptation? Why or why not?



Broken Hearts

2 Samuel 11:2–5; 12:1–13

Say: Some may claim pornography is a “victimless” sin that doesn’t affect anyone else. Nothing could be further from the truth. The lust behind

pornography use is the same driving force that leads to any sexual sin. Not only does lust harm an individual's purity, but it is often a gateway to further sexual activity that is destructive for others. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

David may have thought the risks were low when he leered at Bathsheba from his palace rooftop. *Nobody will know. Nobody will get hurt.* But sin never plays out that way. Lust in any form damages the perpetrator—clouding judgment, creating dependence, distorting reality, and hardening the heart—and can cause irreparable harm to the person being objectified.

Pornography in particular destroys marriages, depriving spouses of intimacy, betraying their trust, insulting their dignity, and causing them to doubt their value. It breaks families apart and confuses children. It damages the church, since the spiritual state of each member of the body of Christ affects the entire Body (1 Corinthians 12:26). It exploits the people involved in the creation of pornography, since their inherent value, due dignity, and personal purity are exchanged for financial gain. It warps God's good gift of sexual intimacy, turning it into something twisted and ugly. Pornography is no victimless sin.

David's initial sin of lust grew to include deceit, adultery, and even murder. Although God forgave him when he confessed (2 Samuel 12:13), there were lasting consequences, including the death of the child he conceived with Bathsheba (verses 14–23). Amazingly, in a beautiful picture of God's grace, the eternal throne He had promised David in 2 Samuel 7 would be established through Jesus, a descendant Bathsheba's son Solomon.

Discuss

- ? God described David as “a man after mine own heart” (Acts 13:22, KJV). How can you explain why a godly man would behave in such an ungodly way?
- ? Do you think consuming pornography is equivalent to committing adultery? Why or why not?

Part 3—Staying on Guard

□ Guard Your Eyes

Job 31:1–8



Say: Following Jesus means staying alert, ready for any attack the enemy may launch against us. In many cases, guarding our eyes is the first line of defense. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Job's covenant with his eyes—“not to look with lust at a young woman” (Job 31:1, NLT)—is crucial for each of us to make. The lethal repercussions of lust all begin with a simple look. David looked at Bathsheba, and because he kept looking, a child died and an innocent man was murdered. As Jesus taught, “Your eye is like a lamp that provides light for your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is filled with light. But when your eye is unhealthy, your whole body is filled with darkness” (Matthew 6:22–23, NLT).

So what should a person do to break the habit of viewing pornography? First and foremost, confess the sin to God, praying like David for both forgiveness and cleansing (see Psalm 51). But since pornography is highly addictive, rarely can anyone overcome it alone. The seriousness of the issue calls for *confession* to another person (see James 5:16, NLT), *separation* through blocking software or other means (Matthew 5:29), ongoing personal accountability (Hebrews 3:13; Galatians 6:1–2), commitment to regular fellowship and spiritual disciplines (Acts 2:42,46), and godly counsel from a pastor or Christian mentor (Proverbs 11:14; 24:6). With time, diligence, and the Holy Spirit’s help, a person can learn to manage temptation when it happens.



Resource Packet Item 3: The Power of Accountability

Encourage students to put accountability measures in place and prayerfully consider the personal reflection question on their own.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think humans are so easily ensnared by what we see? What practical steps do you take to battle this tendency?
- ? Have you ever asked someone to “hold you accountable” as you were trying to overcome a deeply ingrained habit or addiction? What was the result?



□ Guard Your Heart

Numbers 15:37–40; 1 Corinthians 6:12–20

Say: Not only do we defend ourselves against the enemy’s attacks by guarding our eyes, but we also must guard our hearts. As the writer of Proverbs admonishes, “Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life” (Proverbs 4:23, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In His kindness, God gave His people methods to help them remember not to follow their own desires or defile themselves “as you are prone to do” (Numbers 15:39, NLT). He knew they would need constant reminders to guard their hearts against habitual sins—and so do we. Finding practical methods to guard against sin can be just as useful as committing to spiritual methods or disciplines.

We tend to think we own ourselves. We’re largely in charge of our bodies, so we mistakenly assume they’re our property. But the truth is, we belong to God. He is the owner; we are the managers. This makes our commitment to purity even more necessary. Owners commission managers to oversee their property, entrusting them with authority to make decisions, correct problems, and generally “keep the place up.” But we should always remember the difference between a *manager* and an *owner*. One has responsibility; the other has final authority.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians regarding sexual purity, he appealed to the theme of God’s ownership. “You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19–20, NLT).

According to the Parable of the Three Servants (Matthew 25:14–30), God has entrusted each of His followers with certain assets and responsibilities, including

our physical bodies. As in the parable, the Owner will one day demand an account from the manager for the way the property was cared for, including “the good or evil we have done in this earthly body” (2 Corinthians 5:10, *NLT*). One of the best ways to guard our hearts against lust is to keep in mind the moment we’ll answer for the choices we made and the ways we invested in our relationships.

Considering all this, it’s clear pornography is a weight we cannot afford to carry if the goal is to finish the race well (Hebrews 12:1). If pornography has never ensnared you, be sure to avoid the trap. If you are currently struggling with pornography, (1) confess your sin to God, (2) distance yourself from it, and (3) immediately reach out for help in order to (4) “make sure that you stay free” (Galatians 5:1, *NLT*).

Discuss

- ? Read Romans 7:14 through 8:2. Why do you think Christians sometimes fall back into their old sinful ways? What is the solution?
- ? What are some practical ways believers can guard their hearts?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Pornography is far more prevalent in our culture and our churches than we want to believe. The severity of this sin cannot be overlooked, and God calls His people to “speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church” (Ephesians 4:15, *NLT*). When we pursue holiness and integrity in our private lives—the secret moments nobody else sees—we glorify God and enjoy the blessings of healthy relationships.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Spend some extra time in prayer and self-examination. Are you entertaining thoughts that displease God? Are you reading or watching things that dishonor Him and people created in His image? Are you dangerously close to giving in to sexual temptation?
- Sign up for internet and screen accountability software (like Covenant Eyes) to help you avoid online temptation.
- If someone confides in you that they’re struggling with pornography addiction, offer to be an accountability and prayer partner.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Run from Temptation.
Genesis 39:1–12

Tuesday:

Turn My Eyes Away.
Psalm 119:33–40

Wednesday:

Beware of Sexual Traps.
Proverbs 7:10–12, 21–27

Thursday:

Rebuke of Sexual Immorality.
1 Corinthians 5:1–13

Friday:

Do Not Live in Darkness.
Ephesians 5:8–16

Saturday:

Dragged Away by Lust.
James 1:13–15

November 5, 2023

LESSON 10

The Bible on Homosexuality

Study Text

Genesis 19:1–24; Leviticus 18:22–30; 20:13; Romans 1:18–32; 6:1–14, 18–23; 1 Corinthians 6:9–10

Central Truth

Your identity and God-given gender come from Christ, your Creator.



Key Verse Mark 10:6

But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female (KJV).

“But ‘God made them male and female’ from the beginning of creation” (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will recognize the danger of embracing homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle.
- Students will be prepared to share the truth of the Scriptures in a loving way with those they know or meet who are engaged in a homosexual lifestyle.
- Students will be able to pray effectively for those caught up in the sin of homosexuality.

Introducing the Study

Say: The church and the culture often agree on moral issues. Both, for example, condemn greed, prejudice, thievery, and violence. But sometimes a sharp division exists between the two, with one legitimizing what the other cannot. Many sexual sins, including homosexuality, fall into this category.

Opening Activity—Gradual

Ask: What things in daily life may gradually develop and cause problems before they are noticed? Examples might include peeling paint or rotting boards in the house, a small malfunction in a car, or even the buildup of dust or clutter.

Say: Sin in our culture is like the board that begins to rot or the tiny noise in the car that we may not notice until the doors won't close properly or the car refuses to run. Sins become popular as a society continually portrays them as acceptable behavior. Eventually, that society becomes so accustomed to seeing them there that they become normal. There's even the threat of that happening in the church. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Our culture looks to a number of resources to distinguish right from wrong. Science and medicine are often the ultimate authority. The news media, entertainment industry, and educational system also weigh in, sometimes insisting we revise our understanding of moral issues to comply with theirs.

But for Christians, the Bible has the final say. As Paul wrote, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true . . . It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right” (2 Timothy 3:16, NLT). This lesson examines what the Bible does and does not say on the matter of homosexuality.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

Leviticus 18:22. Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination..

1 Corinthians 6:9. Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,

10. Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

Genesis 19:1. And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground;

2. And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night.

3. And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat.

4. But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter:

5. And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them.

12. And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place:

13. For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord; and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it.

Romans 6:1. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

2. God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

21. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.

22. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

23. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Leviticus 18:22. “Do not practice homosexuality, having sex with another man as with a woman. It is a detestable sin.”

1 Corinthians 6:9. Don't you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality,

10. or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God.

Genesis 19:1. That evening the two angels came to the entrance of the city of Sodom. Lot was sitting there, and when he saw them, he stood up to meet them. Then he welcomed them and bowed with his face to the ground.

2. “My lords,” he said, “come to my home to wash your feet, and be my guests for the night. You may then get up early in the morning and be on your way again.” “Oh no,” they replied. “We'll just spend the night out here in the city square.”

3. But Lot insisted, so at last they went home with him. Lot prepared a feast for them, complete with fresh bread made without yeast, and they ate.

4. But before they retired for the night, all the men of Sodom, young and old, came from all over the city and surrounded the house.

5. They shouted to Lot, “Where are the men who came to spend the night with you? Bring them out to us so we can have sex with them!”

12. Meanwhile, the angels questioned Lot. “Do you have any other relatives here in the city?” they asked. “Get them out of this place—your sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone else.

13. For we are about to destroy this city completely. The outcry against this place is so great it has reached the Lord, and he has sent us to destroy it.”

Romans 6:1. Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace?

2. Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it?

21. And what was the result? You are now ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom.

22. But now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life.

23. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Part 1—Homosexual Practices Are Forbidden

□ They Were Never Intended

Leviticus 18:22–30

Say: Popular culture often pressures Christians to change their view on sins such as homosexuality, claiming that the Christian view is outdated, unenlightened, or even hateful. This creates tension for all involved, leading some believers (and even some entire denominations) to adjust their theology and opinions to make Christianity more “user friendly” and culturally acceptable. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Faithfulness to God and His Word is more important than the desire to appear relevant. Serious woes are pronounced on those who twist the truth to better fit the times (Isaiah 5:20), leaving us with a mandate to consider when facing a controversial issue: We cannot condone what God condemns, and we cannot condemn what God condones.

A foundational part of our faith is our belief that God purposefully created us. From the creation account in Genesis, God established and blessed the partnership between one male and one female. The fruit of that union was to be the perpetuation of humanity. A few verses later, God declared what He established was good (Genesis 1:31). These verses—along with Genesis 2—set a powerful precedent for God’s intent regarding the marital relationship. His intention for the human sexual and marital relationship is clarified in Genesis and reiterated by Jesus himself:

“Haven’t you read the Scriptures?” Jesus replied. “They record that from the beginning ‘God made them male and female.’” And he said, “This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one. Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together” (Matthew 19:4–6, NLT).

We must also follow God’s lead by condemning what He has declared to be less than, or other than, what He intended. Having given His intention for the human sexual union in Genesis, He subsequently clarified behaviors He did not intend. Adultery, prostitution, fornication, incest, and homosexuality are specifically condemned in both the Old and New Testaments. This is not because God is “anti-gay,” but because they fall short of what He knows to be in the best interest of the people He created.

Since homosexual practices violate His design, they appear alongside other such prohibited behaviors in the Law. In fact, they are called “an abomination” (Leviticus 18:22, KJV; “detestable,” NLT). God intentionally created the male/female union in the Garden of Eden, and marriage is referred to throughout Scripture as a representation for His relationship with His people (Isaiah 54:5; Ephesians 5:25–33). It stands to reason that He would abhor any perversion of the heterosexual marriage union.



Resource Packet Item 1: Cultural Shift

Distribute the information sheet and review the time line of the cultural shift on the issue of homosexuality. (Use the tips on pages 2–3 of this guide to ensure the classroom discussion honors God and protects others’ privacy and dignity.)

Discuss

- ? Do you think it is too harsh to refer to homosexual behavior as “abominable”? Why or why not?
- ? Do you think the church condemns other sins as vehemently as we condemn this sin? If not, why do you think that is?

□ They Were Never Condoned

1 Corinthians 6:9–10



Say: Homosexuality is not a new phenomenon. We have already looked at instruction from the Old Testament. Now, we will examine what the New Testament has to say. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The two Greek words behind the King James Version text of 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 (translated as “effeminate” and “abusers of themselves with mankind”) are referring to homosexual activity. This is why the majority of Bible translations simply translate the words as “homosexuals” or something similar. The presence of the two words is likely clarifying that both active and willing passive participants in homosexual activity are among the unrighteous who will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Even a casual reading of the original language cannot yield anything other than clear prohibitions against any form of homosexual behavior. In fact, the very words making up the term *arsenokoites* (*arsen* and *koite*) are taken directly from the verses in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) that condemn homosexuality: Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.

While homosexuality is condemned throughout Scripture, it can also be argued that it is never condoned. That’s significant, because while the Bible contains guidance for heterosexual couples, none can be found for same-sex couples. Not one positive example of a homosexual person can be found in the Bible. If God condoned this behavior, surely He would have provided positive examples of it and marital guidance for those practicing it as He did for heterosexual marriages.

Discuss

- ? Have you ever known someone who claimed to be both gay and Christian? If so, how did they interpret or deal with the Scriptures we’ve studied so far?
- ? Many people are revising their view of homosexuality, adopting a “gay friendly” approach to the Bible. Why do you think this is happening?

Part 2—Homosexual Practices Are Condemned

□ The Penalty for Sin

Genesis 19:1–24



Say: The destruction of Sodom is a frightening example of God’s wrath poured out on the wicked. And there’s universal truth behind this account that still applies today. It’s true that God offers opportunities for repentance to people engaged in homosexuality—like He does to all who’ve sinned—but it’s also true that brazenly sinful acts can result in horrendous penalties. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In fairness, we should note that homosexuality wasn't the only sin Sodom was condemned for. According to Ezekiel, "Sodom's sins were pride, gluttony, and laziness, while the poor and needy suffered outside her door" (Ezekiel 16:49, *NLT*). The vehemence shown by the men surrounding Lot's home indicates cruelty and utter disregard for others, so these charges make sense. But Sodom also committed "detestable sins" (Ezekiel 16:50, *NLT*). Jude elaborates on those "detestable sins" by indicting Sodom for "every kind of sexual perversion" (Jude 1:7, *NLT*).

Theologian Thomas Schmidt notes that second-century literature refers to "Sodom, which departed from the order of nature" and that both Philo and Josephus view same-sex relations as characteristic of the Sodomites.¹ Clearly, then, homosexual acts are forbidden and, when broadly celebrated, they have carried a severe penalty.

Discuss

- ? Why do some Christians consider homosexuality as more deserving of God's judgment than other sexual sins, such as adultery or fornication?
- ? How might 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 offer hope to those who see their sins as unforgivable in God's sight?



□ The Origin of Sin

Romans 1:18–32

Say: All sin is symptomatic of a broken relationship with God, which began with Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden. Paul's discussion of homosexuality, along with other sins in Romans 1, points out just how far humanity has fallen from God's plan. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

While noting that homosexuality is a problem, the broader point Paul made in Romans 1 is that homosexual relations between men and between women are indicative of something even more wrong. Creation has determined to have its own way. This is the same rebellion that manifests itself today through transgenderism. Though God created them as male or female, their rebellion is so deep that they reject even their own nature. And whether one is rejecting gender or heterosexual marriage, it's all sinful denial of God's created order. Renouncing knowledge of the true God, fallen humanity chooses other gods and is given up to a multitude of ungodly and unnatural passions by the Maker who "abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done" (Romans 1:28, *NLT*).

Homosexuality, like the other sins in Paul's long list in Romans 1, is a result of fallen nature and the depth of depravity it yields. The fact it appears as a prime symptom is no surprise, as Paul was hearkening back to the Genesis account of creation in which the Creator fashions humanity as male and female, bringing the first man and woman together in a remarkable union of contrast.

Paul then seems to say, "Look how far we've fallen! The creation rejects the Creator, and things have become so topsy-turvy that even the most basic relationship has been turned on its head from a heterosexual union to a homosexual one."

1. *Testament of Naphthali* 3:4, quoted in Thomas Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow?* (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1995), 88-89.



Resource Packet Item 2: Reactions to Sin

Distribute the worksheet and encourage students to complete the activity at home with prayer and reflection.

Theories on the origins of homosexuality abound. For decades it was assumed to be an emotional or mental illness, springing from faulty parenting, early abuse, or stunted psychosexual development. Then as society became more open to homosexuality, the notion of it being an inborn condition began to take root. Many experts concluded that something so deeply ingrained must be present at birth.

But these theories miss the point. Homosexuality, like any deviation from what God intended, is a result of that human tragedy we call the Fall. When God lamented the consequences of Adam and Eve's sin, including the sin nature their descendants would inherit, He explained the human experience would now contain painful and tragic elements He had never intended (Genesis 3:16–19).

And so it has been ever since. Humans are born into sin, beset with tendencies God never intended us to have. Some tendencies—like greed, selfishness, and dishonesty—are universal, meaning we all share them and can relate to them. But other tendencies—like the sexual acts condemned in Leviticus and Deuteronomy—are experienced by only some people. Homosexuality is a tendency many people do not relate to, but it is one of many consequences of the Fall.

This is why arguments about what causes homosexual behavior are secondary to the larger question of whether the behavior is something our Maker intended. According to His own Word, it clearly is not.

Many will argue that God loves all people and He made no mistakes when He created us. It is true we are all loved by God and created by God, but the fact remains that we have each chosen to sin by rebelling against what God created us to be.

Discuss

- ? What theories have you heard about the cause of homosexuality?
- ? Read Romans 1:32 through 2:1. How can believers maintain humility and avoid judgmental attitudes regarding sins they do not personally struggle with?

Part 3—Freedom from Homosexuality Is Found in Christ

□ The Freedom to Die

Romans 6:1–14



Say: God does not force anyone to accept freedom from sin. He gives us the will to choose. God calls people to abstain from sin, and He also empowers them to die to that sin. This enables a person to say no to a tendency or behavior she or he has become accustomed to and even identified with. (Share your highlights from the following text.) ▼ ***(Play Linda Seiler's testimony of being miraculously delivered from homosexuality and gender confusion. The video is available at RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult.)***

Homosexuality is not just a sexual act or feeling. It's an identity declared proudly in parades and "coming out" announcements and clung to as an inborn trait which

many claim they were born with by God’s design. While that is untrue, we should remember that the average person involved in homosexuality has felt “different” from early in life and has struggled, perhaps for decades, to find peace with his or her sexual orientation and identity. When confronted with God’s plan for human sexuality, such a person will often say, “How can I say no to what I feel? How can I be free of it? It’s always been there!”

Paul’s words in Romans 6 about our identification with Christ introduce an exhilarating hope to anyone who repents, including homosexuals. We are not required to free ourselves from the power of sin. Instead, we are invited to consider our sin nature to be dead, identifying it with Christ’s own death. Thereby, we claim a release from the power of our old nature, just as we would declare freedom from a once-powerful enemy who has died. Sin holds no dominion over anyone who takes Jesus at His word when He says, “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36, *KJV*).

Discuss

- ? What does it mean to “consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin” (Romans 6:11, *NLT*)?
- ? Do you think a homosexual person can truly change? Why or why not?



□ The Freedom to Live

Romans 6:18–23

Say: Paul’s audience would have been well aware of the oppressive nature of slavery. The Roman Empire was filled with enslaved people. Paul’s powerful illustration leveraged this reality to depict the tragedy of being held captive to sin. He then described how a person could be freed from the bonds of sin by committing themselves to God. Amazing news today, when so many take a “once gay, always gay” position towards homosexual people. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Paul’s time, many people found freedom from homosexuality. Many still do. Like all of us, they are free to die to their sinful tendencies and walk in new life, no longer servants of sin but of God.

The modern church is in grave twofold danger regarding this issue. On one hand, too many Christians are compromising truth, fearful of offending gay friends and loved ones by holding to the biblical view. This constitutes doctrinal compromise on an essential issue that no serious steward of truth can make peace with.

Yet holding the right position in the wrong way is just as dangerous. When our culture embraces an error, it’s easy to condemn blatant sins without considering the wounded souls in the grip of those sins. God loves these people, and our commission is not only to speak the truth about sexual morality but also to speak the truth about God’s desire to bring all lost people to himself. As ambassadors for Christ, we share the whole message of the gospel, yearning for people to be “reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20, *KJV*).



Resource Packet Item 3: Showing Love and Telling the Truth

Distribute the case studies and discuss as a class how truth and love could be balanced in each situation. (Use the tips on pages 2–3 of this guide to ensure the classroom discussion honors God and protects others' privacy and dignity.)

Discuss

- ? In what wrong ways have you heard someone speak the truth about homosexuality?
- ? How do you think the Church can more effectively share the gospel with homosexual people?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: The truth about homosexuality is spelled out biblically in the clearest, most unequivocal terms. It was never intended by God, cannot be blessed by God, and is prohibited by God. However, when it comes to the truth, it is not only *where* we stand that counts. It's also *how* we stand. As we navigate this issue, we must always be compelled by the love of Christ and not reject or condemn the person caught in the grip of sin.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- If you know someone struggling with their sexual identity, pray for ways to demonstrate God's love to them while maintaining your commitment to the truth.
- Think about how you identify yourself, and be sure your identity reflects your relationship with God.
- Pray for the younger generation in your church who may be struggling with who they are in Christ.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Sexual Perversions Judged.
Genesis 19:1–13

Tuesday:

Asa Does What Is Right.
1 Kings 15:9–12

Wednesday:

Freedom from Sin and
Condemnation.
John 8:1–11

Thursday:

Sexuality between a Husband
and Wife.
1 Corinthians 7:1–5

Friday:

The Law for Lawbreakers.
1 Timothy 1:8–11

Saturday:

God Judges Evildoers.
Jude 1:5–7

November 12, 2023

LESSON 11

Discerning the Messages of Media

Study Text

1 Kings 12:1–19

Central Truth

In a world that is constantly shouting at us, we must be careful to heed God's voice.



Key Verse Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom (KJV).

Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will acknowledge the need for wise counsel.
- Students will evaluate the messages they receive and discern whether they are wise or unwise.
- Students will choose to seek wise counsel when going through a struggle.

Introducing the Study

Say: Whether on the nightly news or a social media feed, everyone is trying to give their opinion. With the prevalence of “smart” devices and the easy access they provide, those messages seem louder than ever before. It is as though everyone has an answer to offer and is avidly pushing it. Learning which voices to listen to—and which to ignore—will help Christians stick to God's path.

Opening Activity—Unavoidable News

Ask: Have you ever felt like you could not get away from a news story? How did that feeling impact how you viewed the story? Ask students to provide brief answers to allow everyone the opportunity to speak.

Say: Christians are constantly bombarded with messages from all angles. Who's safe to listen to? The best way for God's people to take in the right messages is by carefully evaluating the counsel they receive and prayerfully discerning whether it is wise or unwise. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The reign of Rehoboam provides a stark example of how listening to the right or wrong voices can have a profound effect. He found himself in a complicated situation after he became the fourth king of Israel shortly after Solomon's death. Though he had the benefit of being the son of the wisest king in Israelite history, he could no longer lean on his father's counsel for the problems he was about to face. Not long after he was crowned, a group of people approached him to give their opinions about how he should rule and to submit a request. Like we often do, Rehoboam asked for the advice of his peers and mentors. He soon discovered not all input is of equal value or produces the same outcome.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

1 Kings 12:1. And Rehoboam went to Shechem: for all Israel were come to Shechem to make him king.

2. And it came to pass, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who was yet in Egypt, heard of it, (for he was fled from the presence of king Solomon, and Jeroboam dwelt in Egypt;)

3. That they sent and called him. And Jeroboam and all the congregation of Israel came, and spake unto Rehoboam, saying,

4. Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee.

6. And king Rehoboam consulted with the old men, that stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, and said, How do ye advise that I may answer this people?

7. And they spake unto him, saying, If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever.

8. But he forsook the counsel of the old men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with him, and which stood before him.

10. And the young men that were grown up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou speak unto this people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it lighter unto us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins.

11. And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.

16. So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents.

18. Then king Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was over the tribute; and all Israel stoned him with stones, that he died. Therefore king Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem.

19. So Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day.

1 Kings 12:1. Rehoboam went to Shechem, where all Israel had gathered to make him king.

2. When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard of this, he returned from Egypt, for he had fled to Egypt to escape from King Solomon.

3. The leaders of Israel summoned him, and Jeroboam and the whole assembly of Israel went to speak with Rehoboam.

4. "Your father was a hard master," they said. "Lighten the harsh labor demands and heavy taxes that your father imposed on us. Then we will be your loyal subjects."

6. Then King Rehoboam discussed the matter with the older men who had counseled his father, Solomon. "What is your advice?" he asked. "How should I answer these people?"

7. The older counselors replied, "If you are willing to be a servant to these people today and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your loyal subjects."

8. But Rehoboam rejected the advice of the older men and instead asked the opinion of the young men who had grown up with him and were now his advisers.

10. The young men replied, "This is what you should tell those complainers who want a lighter burden: 'My little finger is thicker than my father's waist!'"

11. Yes, my father laid heavy burdens on you, but I'm going to make them even heavier! My father beat you with whips, but I will beat you with scorpions!"

16. When all Israel realized that the king had refused to listen to them, they responded, "Down with the dynasty of David! We have no interest in the son of Jesse. Back to your homes, O Israel! Look out for your own house, O David!" So the people of Israel returned home.

18. King Rehoboam sent Adoniram, who was in charge of forced labor, to restore order, but the people of Israel stoned him to death. When this news reached King Rehoboam, he quickly jumped into his chariot and fled to Jerusalem.

19. And to this day the northern tribes of Israel have refused to be ruled by a descendant of David.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Say: It’s easy to be confused by so-called experts who have opinions about everything. As Rehoboam discovered, some people will even seek you out to share their expertise and beliefs. When faced with these unsolicited opinions, Rehoboam wisely said, “Give me three days to think this over. Then come back for my answer” (1 Kings 12:5, *NLT*). It’s always a good idea to pause and evaluate the thoughts and opinions coming your way. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In this age of social media, everyone has a voice—whether or not they have the expertise to back it up. The moment a person mentions a struggle they’re going through, self-proclaimed experts rush to solve the problem. Whether it comes from a person with a home remedy for every ailment or a conspiracy theorist who always finds someone else to blame, unsolicited advice can be unreliable—even when it’s offered confidently and enthusiastically. But then again, not *all* suggestions are incorrect. It can be challenging to sort through conflicting thoughts and answers that seem to come all at once.

When Solomon’s son Rehoboam became king of Israel, he was approached by Jeroboam and “all the congregation of Israel” (1 Kings 12:3, *KJV*) with the request that he lighten the labor demands and taxation Solomon had imposed on them. As the leader of the group making this request, Jeroboam created an interesting dynamic. He had fled to Egypt from Jerusalem to keep Solomon from killing him after the prophet Ahijah foretold the kingdom would be divided and Jeroboam would be king over ten of the twelve tribes. Perhaps now that Rehoboam was king, Jeroboam was giving him a chance to do the right thing and keep the kingdom from being divided.

Rehoboam took three days to consider the people’s request rather than reacting immediately. He showed wisdom by setting aside time to think and seek counsel. We also would do well to slowly and carefully think before making quick responses and snap judgments.



Resource Packet Item 1: The Awkward Request

Distribute the information sheet and summarize it for the class. Understanding the historical and biblical context will enable students to grasp the situation Rehoboam was in.

Discuss

- ? Share about a difficult time in your life when you were overwhelmed with advice from people around you.
- ? How can we wisely handle advice received from unreliable sources? What can you do if the sources are your friends or family?



Say: Making highly impactful decisions can be challenging. Rehoboam was confronted with just such a decision as the newly crowned king of Israel. The consequences of his choices would affect many more people beyond himself; in fact, they would shape the kingdom's future. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

For especially significant and seemingly life-changing choices, trusted and experienced men and women of God can offer direction based on godly knowledge and wisdom. While it may feel like admitting a lack of knowledge, recognizing that you need outside help is inherently wise, particularly when making decisions that impact other people.

Rehoboam first requested the opinion of the men who had counseled his father. The advisors were not only tested in making decisions of this magnitude, but they had benefited from working alongside Solomon, who was renowned for his extraordinary God-given wisdom. They advised Rehoboam to show humility by serving the people so he could gain their trust. This group of older counselors likely understood the people well, having observed their behavior during Solomon's reign. They attempted to guide Rehoboam as they had his father, and the new king would have been wise to listen to them.

In our day, it seems everyone with a platform claims to be an expert. It is critical for Christians to know how to discern whose voice to trust—especially when talk show hosts act as relationship counselors, radio DJs report pop culture gossip as news, and social media influencers do whatever it takes to get more views and likes. The size of a person's following—and even their résumé and qualifications—do not guarantee their advice will have the intended consequences.

Instead of listening to the voices talking the loudest, Christians should listen to experienced believers who offer wise, godly counsel as well as the confirming voice of the Holy Spirit.

Discuss

- ? Where should a Christian start when seeking wise counsel for a challenging decision?
- ? Share a positive or negative experience you had when asking for advice. What did you learn as a result?

Part 2—Be Careful to Whom You Listen



Say: From Illuminati conspiracy theorists to practitioners of the absurd religion of Pastafarianism, you can find a community of people online who will agree with whatever you choose to believe. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Rehoboam decided to ignore the wisdom of his father’s counselors and asked for his friends’ advice instead. The great danger in seeking counsel only from people who agree with you is that no matter how wrong the idea may be, they will defend it—if only for the sake of being right themselves. It’s impossible to get wise and impartial advice in an echo chamber. Unfortunately, Rehoboam chose this kind of counsel. He allowed popularity and camaraderie to cloud his judgment, and many people do the same today. Often, ratings and upvotes are the standards people use to discern credibility rather than wisdom, education, or experience.

Rehoboam appears to have been guided by a desire for approval from his friends, so he gave their advice more weight than the advice of the counselors who had experience in the exact issue he was facing. The decision point can be similar for us. A person who is going through a hard time sometimes ignores good advice that calls out their wrongdoing or sinful behavior, choosing instead to listen to the affirming words of their so-called friends. The prevalence of relative truth and political correctness in our culture can influence us to heed advice that runs counter to the Word of God and the leading of the Spirit. However, Christians must not turn away from godly correction, “for the LORD disciplines those he loves” (Hebrews 12:6, NLT).



Resource Packet Item 2: The Wise vs. the Unwise

Distribute the worksheet and divide the class into small groups to look up the passages and answer the questions. Then discuss the two questions at the bottom of the page in light of the Scriptures the students have read.

Discuss

- ? Have you ever tried to avoid godly counsel during a difficult season because you knew it would cause discomfort or conviction? What were the results?
- ? Describe a time in your life when you chose to listen to the advice of friends instead of wise counsel.



□ Social Injustice

1 Kings 12:10–11

Say: Some define *social justice* as the fair treatment of all people in society, while for others it means punishing certain people for their perceived social crimes. Due to the fluid nature of what constitutes a social crime, it is all too easy for people in power to wield absolute authority on such matters. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Rehoboam’s acceptance of unwise counsel led him down the wrong path. His friends recommended that he place heavier restrictions on the people, presumably to bring them under his subjection. Like many in our culture who would sooner cancel or publicly shame someone than help them, Rehoboam chose a policy of harsh judgment that would have lasting consequences.

Cancel culture has sprung from a legitimate outcry for social justice. There is a genuine need for evil people to be punished and wicked systems to be reformed, but the opportunity has been seized by others who misuse *their* power, attempting

to elevate their own opinions as the only right ones and monopolize every conversation. Following the counsel of his friends, Rehoboam decided to assert his authority by a show of strength instead of compassion. This unfair oppression would push the people away from him instead of uniting them.

Nearly all of us will have the responsibility to lead others at some point in our lives. Your leadership may be as apparent as a mentoring relationship or as obscure as unknowingly modeling patience or kindness to a coworker. Christians should avoid the folly of Rehoboam and instead decide to lead like Jesus—through compassion and grace. Such leadership can have eternal results.

Discuss

- ? How can Christians avoid the temptation to abuse their power?
- ? What are some ways a Christian can show godly compassion when placed in a position of authority?

Part 3—Heeding Unwise Advice Has Consequences

□ Public Display of Stupidity

1 Kings 12:12–15



Say: People made many of the same mistakes in the Iron Age as they do in the Internet Age—although now thousands of people can watch your failure online within minutes! Unfortunately for Rehoboam, his epic fail was on display for all the kingdom to see. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Certain segments of the media have made a living by curating lists of people’s failures. Some are viewed so many times they become “viral” sensations. Because of his visibility, Rehoboam didn’t have to wait for the news of his failure to spread. After three days of deliberation, “Jeroboam and all the people returned to hear Rehoboam’s decision” (1 Kings 12:12, NLT). The entire kingdom could see what was happening when “Rehoboam spoke harshly to the people” (verse 13, NLT), promising to lay heavier burdens on them and show more cruelty than his father had. By following the unwise advice of his friends instead of the counsel of experienced elders, Rehoboam “paid no attention to the people” (verse 15, NLT), alienating ten of the twelve tribes of Israel. His foolish mistake cost him a majority of the kingdom and fulfilled the words of the prophet Ahijah (1 Kings 11:29–32).

Decisions as pivotal as Rehoboam’s may not seem likely to come up in the lives of Christians today. Most of us do not hold the power to divide countries or cause kingdoms to rise or fall. However, we will make many impactful decisions throughout our lives, often with eternal consequences for ourselves and the people we influence. We must understand how to discern between right and wrong voices in the media. There are dramatic consequences when we do not.

Discuss

- ? Have you ever made a mistake that embarrassed you publicly? How did you deal with the fallout?
- ? What should a Christian do after making a mistake with dire consequences?



Say: The court of public opinion—defined as the beliefs and judgment of the majority—seems to be social media’s rule of law. If enough people push hard enough for a particular outcome, it tends to happen. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Rehoboam may have been the king of all Israel, but his disrespect of the people caused every tribe except Benjamin and Judah to decide to no longer follow him or acknowledge his rule. The court of public opinion decided Rehoboam was not fit to be king and Israel was split in two. Regardless of a person’s intention when they choose a certain course of action, other people’s perception cannot be controlled. There will be inevitable consequences.

Listening to the wrong voices made Rehoboam an adversary to most of his kingdom. Though his intention may have been to earn the respect of his people through fear, the consequence of his actions proved quite different. His irresponsibility tarnished the legacy of his forefathers, tore apart his kingdom, and diminished the inheritance of his descendants for generations. Listening to the wrong media or counsel in our day and age can also have serious unintended consequences.

Christians are commanded to abandon the ways of the world and discern God’s will by letting Him work in their lives. “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect” (Romans 12:2, *NLT*). Public opinion is often diametrically opposed to the will of God. His opinion is the only one that truly matters. The closer our relationship with Him, the more wisdom we have in making decisions.

God has also established elders and overseers to guide others according to Scripture. Their role includes correcting those who oppose the teaching of God’s Word (Titus 1:9). Elders should be sought out for advice, because there is great benefit in the gifts and experience God has given them. As Rehoboam found out, ignoring wise counsel and following unwise counsel can have severe consequences—both in the court of public opinion and in one’s standing with God.



Resource Packet Item 3: The Loudest Voice

Distribute the worksheet, and suggest that your students take it home and evaluate the way they spend their time and the voices they are listening to. Encourage them to pray for wisdom to correctly discern the messages of media.

Discuss

- ? Discuss a time you did something with good intentions, but it was negatively received.
- ? How can a Christian silence the voices vying for their attention and focus on hearing from God?
- ? Whom has God placed in your life to offer wise counsel and guidance?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Christians are flooded with innumerable opinions and biased information every time we turn on the TV or pick up our phones. From 24-hour news cycles and incessant push notifications to social media influencers desperate for likes and political talking heads disguising opinion as fact, the media is constantly telling us how to live. However, God's people aren't left to sort all this out alone. His Word and His Spirit are like a compass pointing us toward the truth. When we listen to Him and the trusted people He sends our way, we will be able to discern wisely between good and evil and stay on the path that leads to life (Matthew 7:14).

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Evaluate the voices that are allowed to speak into your life, whether wise or unwise.
- Seek God's counsel before making significant decisions.
- Be open to correction and guidance from trusted, godly elders.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

God's Words in Your Mouth.
Exodus 4:10–17

Tuesday:

Trust in God's Wisdom.
Proverbs 3:1–8

Wednesday:

Words of Wisdom.
Proverbs 18:1–7

Thursday:

Renew Your Mind.
Romans 12:1–3

Friday:

Discern What Is Best.
Philippians 1:9–11

Saturday:

Distinguish Good from Evil.
Hebrews 5:11–14

November 19, 2023

LESSON 12

Use Technology Wisely

Study Text

Genesis 11:1–9; Exodus 31:1–5;
2 Chronicles 26:15; 1 Corinthians
10:1–13, 31

Central Truth

Our actions must glorify God, not ourselves.



Key Verse

1 Corinthians 10:31

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God (KJV).

So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will recognize the many gifts and responsibilities God has given to them and other people.
- Students will evaluate the ways they are using technology in their daily lives.
- Students will choose to express Christlike attitudes and messages in their online activity.

Introducing the Study

Say: Technology has completely changed how the world shares information and ideas. With the rise of digital communication, handwritten letters and face-to-face meetings are becoming things of the past. As technology continues to advance and evolve, Christians must be careful to represent Christ in everything they say and do, whether in-person or online.

Opening Activity—Daily Technologies

Ask: What are the ways you use or interact with technology in your daily life? Write students' responses on the board. Examples might include credit/debit card transactions, video calls, text messages, phone calls, vehicle GPS, wireless vehicle key, digital registers at the store, Bluetooth or wireless hearing aids, smart home devices (locks, lights, assistants, etc.), Facebook or other social media, online news feeds, and online tithing or charity donations.

Say: Whether they consider themselves technologically savvy or not, people interact with technology more than they realize. Christians are called to represent Jesus to the world, and it has never been easier to share that message of hope than in today's interconnected world. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The people who built the Tower of Babel had one goal in mind: to glorify themselves. "Come, let's build a great city for ourselves. . . . This will make us famous" (Genesis 11:4, NLT). Instead of obeying God's command to "fill the earth" (9:1, NLT), their plan would "keep [them] from being scattered all over the world" (11:4, NLT). When God confused their language, they learned a valuable lesson we would do well to remember: His plans cannot be thwarted, and His glory cannot be shared.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

Exodus 31:1. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

2. See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah:

3. And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship,

4. To devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass,

5. And in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship.

Genesis 11:1. And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.

3. And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.

4. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

6. And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

7. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

8. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.

1 Corinthians 10:1. Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;

2. And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;

3. And did all eat the same spiritual meat;

4. And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.

5. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

6. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.

31. Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

Exodus 31:1. Then the LORD said to Moses,

2. "Look, I have specifically chosen Bezaleel son of Uri, grandson of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.

3. I have filled him with the Spirit of God, giving him great wisdom, ability, and expertise in all kinds of crafts.

4. He is a master craftsman, expert in working with gold, silver, and bronze.

5. He is skilled in engraving and mounting gemstones and in carving wood. He is a master at every craft!"

Genesis 11:1. At one time all the people of the world spoke the same language and used the same words.

3. They began saying to each other, "Let's make bricks and harden them with fire." (In this region bricks were used instead of stone, and tar was used for mortar.)

4. Then they said, "Come, let's build a great city for ourselves with a tower that reaches into the sky. This will make us famous and keep us from being scattered all over the world."

6. "Look!" [the LORD] said. "The people are united, and they all speak the same language. After this, nothing they set out to do will be impossible for them!"

7. Come, let's go down and confuse the people with different languages. Then they won't be able to understand each other."

8. In that way, the LORD scattered them all over the world, and they stopped building the city.

1 Corinthians 10:1. I don't want you to forget, dear brothers and sisters, about our ancestors in the wilderness long ago. All of them were guided by a cloud that moved ahead of them, and all of them walked through the sea on dry ground.

2. In the cloud and in the sea, all of them were baptized as followers of Moses.

3. All of them ate the same spiritual food,

4. and all of them drank the same spiritual water. For they drank from the spiritual rock that traveled with them, and that rock was Christ.

5. Yet God was not pleased with most of them, and their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

6. These things happened as a warning to us, so that we would not crave evil things as they did.

31. So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Part 1—God Gives Abilities to Create

□ The Worldwide Platform

Exodus 31:1–5

Say: In this Internet Age, all kinds of creative people—from athletes and gamers to musicians and preachers—can create platforms to share information and entertainment worldwide. Whether the scope of our influence is large or small, God has given each of us a unique ability to share with the world to bring Him glory and accomplish His purposes. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

February 2020 statistics¹ indicate YouTubers uploaded more than 500 hours of video content every minute, a growth of 40 percent since 2014. This may seem staggering, but the supply is a reaction to the demand. More than 2.1 billion people used YouTube in 2020, and 27 percent of internet users worldwide watched over 10 hours of online videos per week. YouTube is not the only media company experiencing explosive growth. With new platforms constantly being created, there are more ways than ever to communicate with people, whether they're next door or around the world. The possibilities are endless!

God has always given people special abilities to imagine and create new technologies and methods of communication. In Exodus 31, God filled Bezalel with His Spirit, “giving him great wisdom, ability, and expertise in all kinds of crafts” (verse 3, *NLT*). Indeed, Bezalel was “a master at every craft” (verse 5, *NLT*). God empowered and anointed him to use his skills to lead the team that built the tabernacle and created its contents—including the ark of the covenant. For generations, these objects would facilitate worship, serving as a meeting place between God and His people.

God also anoints creative people today to share the gospel and bring about positive social change via countless powerful online platforms. The message of Jesus can be quickly and inexpensively presented in a compelling way, leading millions of people to Jesus in a surprisingly simple way.

Discuss

- ? What are the potential risks for Christians with an online presence? What are the potential rewards?
- ? Do you know anyone who is anointed in online media and digital communication? How can you encourage and support their ministry?



□ Unique Abilities

2 Chronicles 26:15

Say: God has given certain people the unique anointing to utilize technology to reach others in exciting and impactful ways. As with any gift God gives, the recipient is responsible for using it in a way that glorifies God alone. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

1. “Hours of Video Uploaded to YouTube Every Minute 2007–2020,” Statista, accessed March 31, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/259477/hours-of-video-uploaded-to-youtube-every-minute/>.

Centuries after anointing Bezalel and his team to fashion the tabernacle and its components, God gave King Uzziah and his military experts the ability to build structures of warfare that protected Jerusalem from invading armies. Uzziah’s “name spread far abroad; for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong” (2 Chronicles 26:15, *KJV*). Unfortunately, Uzziah’s power gave way to pride, which led to his downfall (verse 16). When God gives us gifts for His glory, we must be cautious to remember that any success we have comes from the Source himself. We must not become prideful, enamored with our own accomplishments; that could lead to our destruction (Proverbs 1:18).

God anoints people with talents that span the array of creativity. Some are found in the traditional church setting—like preaching, teaching, and singing—while others thrive online where countless people can benefit from them. Lots of people know how to post videos online, but some are uniquely gifted to captivate their viewers and grow their influence. As their platform broadens, they are able to spread God’s Word in increasingly unique and powerful ways.

Discuss

- ? What are some creative gifts God has given people in your church? How do they add to the effectiveness of your ministry?
- ? Are there any creative people online whose ministry you enjoy? Explain how others could access their content if they were interested.
- ? Jane Austen wrote in *Pride and Prejudice*, “Vanity and pride are different things, though the words are often used synonymously. A person may be proud without being vain. Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us.”² How does this relate to the discussion above?



Resource Packet Item 1: Unique Abilities

Distribute the worksheet and give students a few minutes to respond. If time is short, suggest they take it home and prayerfully consider their gifts and how they are using them for God.

Part 2—When Abilities Are Used to Glorify Self

□ Focused on Followers

Genesis 11:1–4



Say: Social media influence is measured by number of followers. The drive to increase views and likes can lead content creators to become so focused on feedback that they forget their reason for posting in the first place. However, the gifts God has given are intended to fulfill His purposes and glorify Him—not build an army of online followers. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The people gathered in Babel had extraordinary building skills. They knew how

2. Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (Whitehall, London: T. Egerton, 1813), 31.

to fire bricks instead of simply drying them in the sun, greatly increasing their strength and durability. They also used tar bubbling up from underground pits near Babylon to bind and seal the bricks. The structure they built was unlike anything humans had created before, and using new skills to accomplish a common goal unified the people. This sounds like good news, but the people's motivation—to become famous and build one civilization rather than filling the earth as God had commanded—led them astray. They had missed God's purpose.

God gives extraordinary gifts for specific reasons. Public gifts like speaking or singing can minister powerfully to people, but they can also distract from God himself. It's all too easy to get caught up in other people's feedback and forget the reason God gave us a sermon or song in the first place. The people of Babel chose to abandon God's purpose and use their gifts to elevate themselves, and Christians today face this same danger. We must focus on giving all the glory to God and keeping our motivations pure, remembering that God's purposes may be completely different from ours. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," saith the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8–9, *KJV*).

Discuss

- ? How can you tell the difference between ministry motivated by trying to impress others and ministry focused on honoring God alone?
- ? What are the dangers of focusing too much on an individual's gift in a corporate church setting?



Kingdoms that Crumble

Genesis 11:5–9

Say: Great ability may lead to a large following, but it also leads to greater responsibility. As Jesus said, "When someone has been given much, much will be required in return" (Luke 12:48, *NLT*). People who build followings and kingdoms on the weak foundation of their own abilities must bear the impossible weight alone until inevitably crumbling. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The people of Babel constructed their tower with the intent of making a name for themselves (Genesis 11:5–9). Such a lofty and superficial goal was bound to create problems. In fact, selfish pride has led many kingdoms to destruction. Pharaoh defied God's command to let His people go, and his entire army was swallowed by the sea (see Exodus 14:21–28). King Belshazzar threw a royal party for himself using cups stolen from the temple, and the kingdom of Babylon fell to the Persians that same night (see Daniel 5). The legendary pride of Moab crumbled when their kingdom was invaded and the people were forced to flee (see Isaiah 16:6–14). Those who build online kingdoms with the intent of self-glorification and advancement are following the same path, essentially constructing their own virtual towers of Babel.

In Romans 2:6–8, Paul made it clear that God will judge everyone based on their actions. For those who seek God's honor and glory and continue to do good, there

is the promise of eternal life. However, God “will pour out his anger and wrath on those who live for themselves, who refuse to obey the truth and instead live lives of wickedness” (verse 8, *NLT*).

Christians may fall into the trap of living for themselves even in a church setting. When we focus on people’s gifts and abilities instead of the message of Christ, ministries collapse and leaders fail. Paul said, “I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me” (2 Corinthians 12:9, *NLT*). He understood an effective ministry and a godly life could be built on God’s power alone.



Resource Packet Item 2: Kingdoms that Crumbled

Distribute the information sheet and, if time allows, briefly summarize the reason each kingdom fell.

Discuss

- ? What can happen if a ministry is built on a person’s abilities alone?
- ? What does it mean to boast about our weaknesses? How can doing so allow the power of Christ to work through us?

Part 3—Do Everything for the Glory of God

□ Do Not Test Christ

1 Corinthians 10:1–13



Say: Paul warns the Corinthian believers not to end up like their ancestors who scorned God’s blessings and grumbled against Him in the wilderness (1 Corinthians 10:9–10). God has blessed us as well. The way we use all He has given us reflects our attitude toward Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul compares the Israelites’ journey in the wilderness with our Christian walk. We have been given great mercies and received miraculous gifts from God just as the Israelites did. But it is up to us whether we will repeat their mistakes and test God with habitual sin and selfishness. As Paul explained, “These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age” (verse 11, *NLT*).

Christians in this age have been given the remarkable gift of technology. Anyone with internet access can send a message across the world in the blink of an eye. Hundreds or even thousands of people might see a photo or video someone posts. Smartphone users can access any version of Scripture and dozens of commentaries whenever they want. These gifts don’t exist for our own promotion or indulgence but as effective tools for spreading the gospel.

When God told Moses to speak to the elders of Israel with the eventual goal of leading the people out of Egyptian enslavement, Moses argued, “What if they won’t believe me or listen to me?” . . . Then the LORD asked him, “What is that in your hand?” (Exodus 4:1–2, *NLT*). God would use the shepherd’s staff in Moses’ hand to perform miraculous wonders and convince the Israelite elders that the prophet’s message came from God himself.

What is in *our* hands? It is up to us to decide how we use the technology on our desks and in our pockets. Some people might see only evil potential in such

technology, but we can choose to use what is in our hands to lift up or tear down, to represent Christ well or give the Church a bad name. Technology is not our enemy. As Paul wrote, “We are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12, NLT).

Paul finishes this section of his letter to the Corinthians with a warning against pride: “If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12, NLT). But he goes on to share one of the Bible’s greatest promises concerning temptation: “The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure” (verse 13, NLT).

Discuss

- ? What specific gifts or tools has God placed in *your* hand? How can you best use them for His glory?
- ? Describe the ways God kept His promise to “show you a way out” during seasons of temptation.



□ All for His Glory

1 Corinthians 10:31

Say: “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31, NLT). These words from Paul are so simple and yet so instructive. They perfectly summarize how Christians should honor God with their lives. If actions as ordinary as eating and drinking present opportunities to glorify God, how else could we be bringing Him praise every day? (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Romans 12, Paul further explores the concept of glorifying God, calling for Christians to be living sacrifices—people who offer every part of themselves to God “because of all he has done for you” (verse 1, NLT). As simple as it may sound, Christians miss opportunities every day to have an impact for the sake of the gospel. Many believers post memes on Facebook, share opinions on Twitter, upload videos to TikTok, or even comment on their local news website without ever considering how they might reflect the glory of God. On the other hand, liking or sharing content that is hurtful or glorifies evil behavior detracts from our witness. Whether we are interacting with people online or face-to-face, we need God’s wisdom (see James 1:5).

Christians have a responsibility to use their many gifts to further the kingdom of God. Every post does not need to be a sermon, but we would do well to consider how we can best represent God in every aspect of our lives. When using the powerful tools of technology, Christians should use godly wisdom and speak life. In the words of Paul, “Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them” (Ephesians 4:29, NLT).

Discuss

- ? What digital tools can Christians use to help them continually focus on God’s Word?
- ? How could you change your online habits to bring greater glory to God?



Resource Packet Item 3: Israel's Wilderness Lessons

Distribute the worksheet and have students complete the matching exercise individually or in small groups. Then read aloud the verses at the bottom of the page and identify the truths they tell us about God.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Christians today enjoy blessings and conveniences that believers in the past could never have imagined. In 2021, 97 percent of Americans owned cell phones, indicating that—like it or not—technology is everywhere and it is here to stay.³ As Christians, we must take the blessings God gives us and use them for His glory. You could start with something as simple as posting a testimony or sharing a video of a sermon that impacted your life. What matters is that you are using technology wisely to further the kingdom of God. Our Heavenly Father will keep His promises and reward those who continually seek His glory and honor Him above all else (Romans 2:7).

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Recognize and thank God for the natural abilities and generous blessings He has given you.
- Examine your online activity to make certain you are not focused on glorifying yourself or your talents.
- Look for opportunities to use technology to share the message of Jesus Christ.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

New Package; Same Ideas.
Ecclesiastes 1:1–11

Tuesday:

Do Not Worship Human Ingenuity.
Isaiah 44:9–20

Wednesday:

A Prophecy about Knowledge.
Daniel 12:1–4

Thursday:

Reflecting Jesus.
Acts 4:8–13

Friday:

Foolishness and Wisdom.
1 Corinthians 1:18–25

Saturday:

Deceived by False Power.
Revelation 13:11–18

3. "Mobile Fact Sheet," Pew Research Center, accessed March 31, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/>.

November 26, 2023

LESSON 13

The Bible on the Environment

Study Text

Genesis 1:26–31; Psalm 8:1–9;
Proverbs 3:19–20; Isaiah 11:5–9;
Luke 12:22–31; Romans 8:18–25;
Colossians 1:15–17;
Revelation 22:1–5

Central Truth

Christians must be faithful stewards
of God's creation.



Key Verse Psalm 8:9

O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy
name in all the earth! (KJV)

O LORD, our Lord, your majestic
name fills the earth! (NLT)

Learning Objectives:

- Students will discover how they can learn about God from His creation.
- Students will see themselves as stewards of God's creation.
- Students will explore ways they can steward God's creation and represent Him to others.

Introducing the Study

Say: Like many other issues today, caring for our environment has become a political “hot button.” People often express opinions based on what they have read on social media or what their favorite political party says. But as believers, we have access to a higher Authority—the One who created our environment and has a plan for each of us and the earth on which we live.

Opening Activity—Protecting the Planet

Ask: What are some things people do with the intention of protecting the environment? Examples might include recycling, driving electric cars, purchasing repurposed or sustainable products, conserving water, planting trees, installing solar panels, and using less plastic.

Say: Whether or not we are active environmentalists, we should understand our earth and its resources are provided by God. He expects us to be good stewards of these and all the other gifts He has given us. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Where should we turn for answers regarding environmental issues like climate change, deforestation, pollution, and extinctions? Does one political party or nongovernmental organization have all the answers? Before we try to evaluate the many scientific and ideological viewpoints, let's explore what Scripture says about the environment. First, the Bible clearly teaches God is the Creator of the universe, including the earth and all living things. Second, the Bible tells us we should be good stewards of all God has made. Third, the Bible describes the redemptive future of God's creation.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

Proverbs 3:19. The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens.

20. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew.

Colossians 1:16. For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

17. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

Psalms 8:1. O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens.

2. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.

3. When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;

4. What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

5. For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor.

6. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet:

7. All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field;

8. The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.

Revelation 22:1. And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

2. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

3. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him:

4. And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.

5. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.

Proverbs 3:19. By wisdom the LORD founded the earth; by understanding he created the heavens.

20. By his knowledge the deep fountains of the earth burst forth, and the dew settles beneath the night sky.

Colossians 1:16. For through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him.

17. He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together.

Psalms 8:1. O LORD, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth! Your glory is higher than the heavens.

2. You have taught children and infants to tell of your strength, silencing your enemies and all who oppose you.

3. When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—the moon and the stars you set in place—

4. what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them?

5. Yet you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor.

6. You gave them charge of everything you made, putting all things under their authority—

7. the flocks and the herds and all the wild animals,

8. the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and everything that swims the ocean currents.

Revelation 22:1. Then the angel showed me a river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

2. It flowed down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations.

3. No longer will there be a curse upon anything. For the throne of God and of the Lamb will be there, and his servants will worship him.

4. And they will see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads.

5. And there will be no night there—no need for lamps or sun—for the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Part 1—God Is the Creator

□ God Created the Environment and Holds It Together Colossians 1:15–17

Say: The truth that God created the universe is as real for us as it was for the ancients. Scientific advances do not override this biblical truth, and our views about the environment need to be founded on this certainty. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Along with numerous other passages, Colossians 1:15–17 establishes with clarity the origin of the universe, the earth, and its inhabitants. This is in stark contrast to materialistic (as opposed to supernatural) theories which say that the matter making up the universe came into existence naturally from nothing. Mainstream science theorizes about the beginning of the universe by applying laws of mathematics, physics, matter, and energy. But science cannot explain the *source* of these natural laws. We know from this passage that God himself is the source.

Not only did God create the universe, but He “holds all creation together” (verse 17). This means He created and is the Sustainer behind the physical and biological processes studied by environmental scientists and ecologists. Because God is the Source, Paul was able to write in Romans 1:19–20 that we can learn about God’s eternal power and divine nature by studying His creation. Another way of saying this is that we can learn about God by studying His two books: His Word (the Scriptures) and His world (the environment). Studying God’s world provides an amazing supplement to His Word and enhances our understanding of Him.

Discuss

- ? How can scientific studies provide insights into our understanding of the Bible? How can our theological knowledge contribute to science?
- ? In what ways might Christ be holding all creation together?



□ God’s Creation Teaches about Him

Proverbs 3:19–20

Say: You can learn a lot about someone by the work they do. Their vocation can reveal their work ethic, the types of skills they have, and even some of their interests. Similarly, we can gain knowledge about God by studying His creation. The exercise of knowledge and understanding required to create everything from nothing teaches us a great deal about God’s nature. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Augustine is thought to be one of the first writers to express the idea that all truth is God’s truth. In other words, God as Creator is the source of every truth, whether it is discovered in Bible study, rational thinking, or scientific studies. Some Christians have taught that philosophy and science oppose God, but many Christ-following philosophers and scientists through the millennia speak against such a viewpoint. It was through God’s wisdom that He created the earth and the heavens (Proverbs 3:19–20). Therefore, we can learn a great deal about Him by studying His creation.

We can and should pursue God's truth wherever we can find it, even if it's through studying environmental science and ecology. God has equipped us with curiosity, logic, discipline, and common sense. He expects us to use these abilities in our Bible study and in discovering ways to relate biblical truths to all kinds of other knowledge.



Resource Packet Item 1: Lessons from Creation

Review the Scriptures and scientific facts listed on the worksheet. Answer the questions and discuss what we can learn about God from His creation.

Discuss

- ? How do God's wisdom and understanding differ from ours?
- ? What are some challenges we encounter when relating knowledge from the Bible to other disciplines like science?

Creation Is Designed to Thrive without Our Worries

Luke 12:22–31



Say: God designed His creation to thrive, and plants, animals, and humans grow and reproduce in miraculous ways. But He did not abandon His creation once He set everything in motion. God appointed us to be stewards of His creation, but He wants us to trust Him in this process, as in all things. While we shouldn't worry about the troubles of this world, we should do our best to follow God's instructions on how to care for it. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

God's creative works are ordered and elegant. For example, ecologists have discovered that most ecosystems flourish when they are left undisturbed. They were designed by the Creator to do so. As Jesus said, "Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Luke 12:27, KJV).

God planned and guided life to adapt without dying off. However, the system He put into place can be disrupted and damaged. Careless practices like pollution and overuse of natural resources can lead to trouble. As good stewards, we should be concerned and careful about our management practices, but we must not fear that God has abandoned us to a catastrophic fate!

Speaking to the concerns of His listeners, Jesus said, "These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers all over the world, but your Father already knows your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need" (verses 30–31, NLT). God cares for the earth with all its resources, and He cares for each of us.

Discuss

- ? What are some ways humans have disrupted or damaged God's creation?
- ? Based on what Jesus taught in Luke 12:22–31, how can Christians effectively battle worry?



Part 2—Christians Must Steward Creation

□ We Must Regard Creation as God Does

Genesis 1:26–31

Say: As we discussed in Lesson 8, being created in God’s image comes with benefits and responsibilities. The greatest benefit is our identity. We are of such value to Him that He made a way for us to be His sons and daughters—in spite of humanity’s disobedience. Our responsibility as image-bearers is to watch over and care for His creation. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

We are set apart from the rest of God’s living creation because we bear His image. “Then God said, ‘Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground’” (Genesis 1:26, *NLT*). As children of God, we are His representatives and ambassadors in the world. When people watch our lives, they should see the qualities of God reflected in us. Part of working in the world on God’s behalf includes faithfully fulfilling our responsibility to steward His creation. Remember, even in the sinlessness of the Garden in Genesis 2, God commanded Adam to tend to that garden (verse 15).

God placed great value on His creation, because He “saw that it was very good” (1:31, *NLT*). We must value God’s creation as well, being careful to strike the proper balance. While creation is indeed “very good,” we should not worship it. Paul warned against this kind of worship when he discussed the depravity of humanity: “They worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise” (Romans 1:25, *NLT*). By acting properly as His representatives in the world He created, we are worshiping our Creator.



Resource Packet Item 2: Creation Care

Distribute the information sheet and discuss ways to worship God by caring for His creation, either individually or as a group.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think God assigned humans to be stewards of His creation?
- ? What are some ways to avoid crossing the line between stewarding creation and worshiping creation?



□ We Have Been Instructed to Be Good Stewards

Psalms 8:1–9

Say: Taking care of God’s resources is a responsibility we should not take lightly. We must be faithful to every aspect of God’s call, whether it is taking care of the earth or representing Him well to others. As Paul said, “A person who is put in charge as a manager must be faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2, *NLT*). He was speaking specifically of explaining God’s mysteries to his listeners, but the same principle applies to our stewardship—both in caring for the earth and the spiritual needs of our fellow human beings. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalm 8 features an *inclusio*—parallel opening and closing lines that encapsulate the meaning of the psalm (see verses 1,9). In this case, the theme is God’s majesty filling the earth. The first “O LORD” in each verse is *Yahweh*, the holy name of God, while the second “Our Lord” is *Adonai* which indicates God’s position as sovereign master. In the intervening verses, the Psalmist extols the beauty of God’s creation and expresses wonder that God would even think about “mere mortals” (verse 4, NLT). Yet God has gone so far as to give human beings “charge of everything you made, putting all things under their authority” (verse 6, NLT).

As representatives of our majestic and sovereign God, we have been commanded to exercise thoughtful control over the environment. What an awesome responsibility! Jesus illustrated the seriousness of one’s responsibility in the Parable of the Three Servants in Matthew 25:14–30. May we one day hear the same praise from our Master as the good steward heard from his: “Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let’s celebrate together!” (verse 21, NLT).

Discuss

- ? What can we learn from Jesus’ parable about being good stewards of creation and the environment?
- ? What good or bad spiritual consequences might result from the quality of our environmental stewardship?
- ? The theory of intelligent design says we can see evidence of the Creator in nature (see Psalm 8:3–4). What are some examples that you find inspiring?

Part 3—God Will Redeem Creation

□ A Future Free from Death, Decay, Sin, and Suffering Romans 8:18–25



Say: Are you good at waiting with patience and confidence? God has promised a new creation, but that inevitability doesn’t mean we can disengage from this world. In the meantime, we have work to do! (Share your highlights from the following text.)

We do not know the timeline, but one day the effects of the Fall will be reversed. Paul writes, “The creation looks forward to the day when it will join God’s creation in glorious freedom from death and decay” (Romans 8:21, NLT). In the Book of Revelation, John describes his vision of this promise coming to pass: “I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared” (21:1, NLT). We can trust God’s promise with the highest level of confidence. As God’s image-bearers, it is likely we will have important roles to fulfill in that future kingdom. Until then, we would be foolish to think we have no responsibility to this version of God’s creation.

As God’s ambassadors, our job is to combat the effects of death, decay, sin, and suffering. That includes sharing the good news and showing compassion to those in need. One way to allocate more money for missions and other charitable giving is by reducing our consumption and recycling nonrenewable resources. Not only

does this kind of lifestyle allow us to provide for the work of the ministry, but it also improves the overall health of the environment.



Resource Packet Item 3: New Heaven, New Earth

Distribute the worksheet, read the Scriptures, and note what they teach us about the new heaven and new earth God will one day create.

Discuss

? Though we are promised a new earth, how important is it to consider future generations and choose to be wise stewards of the environment?



□ New Natural Laws

Isaiah 11:5–9

Say: One day, all living things will know the Lord and creation will experience harmony. Broken relationships will be healed, age-old enmities will cease, and the peace of God will fill all creation. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah prophesied that during the millennial reign of Christ, the natural order will be radically different from our current reality. The roles of predator and prey will be removed, as “nothing will hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain” (Isaiah 11:9, NLT). The focus will shift from the survival of the fittest to the universal worship of the King!

The peace Isaiah described can never happen in the world as we know it. Yet we can anticipate this miracle as we look forward to the time when Christ will reign on earth. Meanwhile, as God’s stewards, we must care for what He has entrusted to us and offer His hope of abundant, eternal life to others.

Discuss

? Read Isaiah 11 in its entirety. How does the context help you better understand and interpret verses 5–9?



□ The Curse Is Lifted

Revelation 22:1–5

Say: You may have heard someone say, “I read the end of the book, and we win!” The final chapter of the Bible does paint a beautiful picture of the ultimate victory, but it has nothing to do with our efforts or merit. Jesus alone provides victory. Because God still cares for humanity even in our rebellion and disobedience, the curse will be lifted. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The purpose behind the new creation is to free us from the turmoil of our present life, allowing us to experience unrestricted connection to God. (Compare Genesis 2:17–19 with Revelation 22:3.) Our new home will be vibrant, bountiful, and restorative. No death or disease will tarnish it. We will have a direct and intimate

relationship with God. We will see His face and bear His image in a new way—with His name written on our foreheads (verse 4). God himself will illuminate our universe, and we will reign alongside the Lamb for all eternity (verse 5). “He who is the faithful witness to all these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon!’ Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!” (verse 20, NLT).

Discuss

- ? How does this promise of a completely unrestricted connection to God motivate us to do everything He has called us to in the meantime?
- ? Which part of the new creation do you most look forward to experiencing?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: When God created the earth, He gave humanity dominion over it, intending that we would care for it and use its resources in a responsible manner. Because of Adam and Eve’s sin, followed by the continued sin and rebellion of all humans since then, the earth itself has suffered greatly. But rather than giving up on us, God loved us so much that He sent His Son to restore our relationship with Him. And He is preparing a place for us without the decay, death, and disease that accompanied the Fall. He calls us to faithfully carry out our responsibilities as stewards of creation until the time He reveals the new heavens and new earth and all barriers between God and us are removed.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Take at least one new action this week to be a good steward of God’s creation.
- Use your stewardship of the earth as a way to share the love of Jesus with someone in your circle of friends and neighbors.
- Ask God to help you be a better steward of all He has given you.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Human Stewardship over Creation.
Genesis 1:26–30

Tuesday:

The Earth Is the Lord’s.
Psalm 24:1–10

Wednesday:

God Knows His Creation.
Psalm 50:7–12

Thursday:

Jesus at Creation.
John 1:1–5

Friday:

People Set over God’s Works.
Hebrews 2:6–8

Saturday:

Destroying the Earth’s Destroyers.
Revelation 11:15–18

The Gospel by Matthew (Jesus the Teacher)

Whatever else people may believe about Jesus, it is universally acknowledged that He was a revolutionary Teacher. All kinds of people in His life—from faithful disciples to scheming Pharisees—referred to Him as “Rabbi” or “Teacher,” and Jesus himself said, “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you are right, because that’s what I am” (John 13:13, NLT). Even today, followers of other religions admit the astounding wisdom of His teachings, although sadly, they fail to grasp their eternal implications.

In his classic *Jesus, the Master Teacher*, Dr. Herman Harrell Horne explains that Jesus not only taught God’s living Word with unique authority, but He employed an incredibly effective teaching style while doing so. He called for attention, utilized posture, spoke in imaginative language, used the familiar to explain the unfamiliar, passed quickly from point to point, paid attention to His listeners, “and walked with his pupils in the open, carrying his good news to all.” Horne concludes, “The place of Jesus in educational history is central and greatest . . . There are multitudes who are ready and willing to say with one of His most learned pupils: ‘We know that thou art a teacher come from God,’ and with one of His most intimate followers: ‘Thou hast the words of eternal life.’”¹

For the next eight lessons, you and your class will dive into Matthew’s Gospel to examine some of Jesus’ most life-changing lessons (as well as the writer’s account of Jesus’ birth). Of the four Gospel writers, only Matthew and John were part of the original group of disciples. Add to that firsthand knowledge Matthew’s education and experience as a tax collector, and you begin to see how he was uniquely qualified to record and preserve the Lord’s teachings.

The unit begins by unpacking Jesus’ ministry manifesto: the Sermon on the Mount. Lesson 1 (Matthew 5) shows how internalizing and living out His teachings leads to a life marked by God’s blessings. Lesson 2 (Matthew 6) emphasizes the importance of loyalty to Christ as Lord. Lesson 3 (Matthew 7) focuses on the eternal significance of believing and building one’s life upon Jesus’ teachings.

After celebrating Jesus as newborn King in Lesson 4, Lesson 5 resumes the study of Jesus as Teacher as He sends out messengers of His gospel truth. Lessons 6 and 7 describe the results of that evangelism as the Kingdom grows through discipleship and operates in community fellowship. The unit concludes in Lesson 8 by examining Jesus’ teachings about the Second Coming and what it means to live in expectation of His return.

1. Herman Harrell Horne, *Jesus, the Master Teacher* (New York: Association Press, 1920), 12–13, 202–203.

December 3, 2023

LESSON

1

The God-Blessed Life

Study Text

Matthew 5:1–48

Central Truth

God blesses those who hear, believe, and obey Him.



Key Verse Matthew 5:6

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled (KJV).

“God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied” (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will identify the path to a blessed life.
- Students will learn how to apply the principles of the Law to their personal lives.
- Students will seek to be people of character.

Introducing the Study

Say: We are beginning a study of the teachings of Jesus as recorded by Matthew, a Jewish tax collector who wrote primarily for a Jewish audience. Although his readers were anxiously looking for the Messiah, many did not recognize Him because He did not fit their preconceived ideas. The teachings of Jesus were indeed revolutionary (especially to the religious leaders), but they focused on radical repentance and Kingdom living rather than rebellion against Rome.

Opening Activity—Blessings

Ask: *How do you define blessing?* After a few responses, follow up by asking, *What have been the greatest blessings in your life so far?* Examples may include salvation, a spouse or child, a job, etc. Then ask, *Did you do anything to earn these blessings?* Explain blessings are gifts from God, and His ultimate desire is to bless His children.

Say: For the next three lessons, we will be looking at Jesus’ most famous series of teachings, known as the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew describes Jesus delivering the message atop a hill in northern Israel, while Luke records many of the same teachings being delivered on a plain or level area (see Luke 6:17). These were such important Kingdom principles for Jesus’ followers that He likely taught them repeatedly in different settings. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The first portion of Jesus’ sermon, commonly known as the Beatitudes, describes how we experience God’s blessings. Believers who continue to grow more like Jesus gradually develop attitudes and spiritual fruit (see Galatians 5:22–23) that allow them to enjoy the blessings God freely gives.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Matthew 5:1. And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:

2. And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

3. Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

5. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

6. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

7. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

8. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

9. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

10. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

12. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

13. Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

14. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

15. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

16. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

18. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

20. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

New Living Translation

Matthew 5:1. One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him,

2. and he began to teach them.

3. "God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

4. God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5. God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth.

6. God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied.

7. God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

8. God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God.

9. God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God.

10. God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

11. God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers.

12. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.

13. You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.

14. You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden.

15. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house.

16. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."

18. "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God's law will disappear until its purpose is achieved."

20. "But I warn you—unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!"

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Say: The Old Testament declares curses and blessings based upon obedience to God, promising, “You will experience all these blessings if you obey the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 28:2, NLT). As the New Testament opens and Jesus’ ministry begins, He explains how His followers can receive God’s blessings by obeying His teachings and developing a Kingdom perspective. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Sermon on the Mount holds the same significance in the new covenant as the Law did in the old covenant. Specifically, the Beatitudes parallel the Ten Commandments—down to the detail of being delivered on a mountaintop. In Matthew 5:3–12, Jesus identified eight Kingdom principles that result in the blessings of God. Many of these principles run counter to the world’s philosophy, but God wants His people to be different—inside and out!

1. God blesses the “poor in spirit” (Matthew 5:3, KJV; “those who are poor and realize their need for him,” NLT). *Poor* does not refer to socioeconomic status here, but the realization that we are utterly destitute with no righteousness of our own. We can inherit the kingdom of heaven only because of God’s grace.

2. “God blesses those who mourn” (Matthew 5:4, NLT). While it is true God comforts us in our emotional grief, the kind of mourning Jesus describes comes from grief over sin in our own lives and in the fallen world.

3. God blesses the “meek” (Matthew 5:5, KJV; “humble,” NLT). Jesus quoted Psalm 37:11 here, and indeed the entire psalm provides a commentary on the concept of meekness. The only individuals in Scripture described as “meek” are Moses (Numbers 12:3) and Jesus himself (Matthew 11:29; 21:5, KJV), indicating that meekness in no way implies weakness, but rather, strength under control.

4. “God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice” (Matthew 5:6, NLT; “righteousness,” KJV). The Greek word for “righteousness” implies a divine justness that comes from God alone. Recognizing His holiness causes a deep longing in our souls for the kind of righteousness only available through Jesus (see 2 Corinthians 5:21).

5. “God blesses those who are merciful” (Matthew 5:7, NLT). When we recognize the mercy God has lavished on us, we in turn are to grant mercy to those who have wronged us and continue to receive God’s mercy ourselves. Jesus will expand on this cycle of forgiveness later in His sermon (see 6:14–15).

6. “God blesses those whose hearts are pure” (Matthew 5:8, NLT). The religious leaders of Jesus’ time placed heavy emphasis on outward purity and cleanliness, but Jesus wants our outward behavior to reflect the purity deep within us that results from His work in our lives. Following Him with that kind of integrity means we will one day enjoy the blessing of seeing God face-to-face.

7. “God blesses those who work for peace” (Matthew 5:9, NLT; “peacemakers,” KJV). As believers, we are called to help others find the peace with God that we have found: “God has given us the task of reconciling people to him” (2 Corinthians 5:18, NLT). When we fulfill this role, the world will recognize we are God’s children.

8. “God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right” (Matthew 5:10, NLT). Persecution and blessing may seem incompatible. However, living according to God’s principles puts us in direct conflict with those who live according to the standards of the world. Being persecuted for Jesus’ sake should not cause depression or anxiety. Instead we should rejoice when we remember God’s promised blessings here on earth and in heaven. Not only were the Old Testament prophets persecuted for righteous living, but so were the apostles. After being interrogated, flogged, and threatened, Peter and “the apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus” (Acts 5:41, NLT).



Resource Packet Item 1: Beatitudes in Action

Divide the class into pairs or small groups to discuss the questions about the fulfillment of Jesus’ Beatitude blessings both now and in eternity. Then allow students to share their reflections.

Jesus ended this section of the Beatitudes by warning His followers that they would be mocked, persecuted, and lied about (Matthew 5:11) because they chose to follow Him. And He added, “Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven” (verse 12, NLT). He reminded the audience that they would be in good company, as the ancient prophets were treated similarly.

Discuss

- ? How have you observed the principles of the Beatitudes played out in your life or someone else’s life?
- ? How should we prepare for persecution as Christians?



Salt and Light

Matthew 5:13–16

Say: People have historically turned to the Church for guidance when major catastrophes occurred, realizing Christians have special access to God. To fulfill our role as the body of Christ and reach the world, we must remain relevant to society without compromising biblical truth for the sake of culture. Jesus used two metaphors—salt and light—to help His listeners understand the importance of believers remaining relevant. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus declared His followers to be “the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13). In the first century, salt was a vital commodity used to flavor and preserve food. Salt was so important, in fact, that it was used as currency. Likewise, those who faithfully serve God are extremely valuable to society. Jesus contrasts the worth of salt when used correctly with its total worthlessness when it is not fulfilling its purpose. Depending on how we live our lives, we can be valuable or worthless—both to our society and God’s kingdom. The choice is ours.

Jesus then declared His followers to be “the light of the world” (verse 14). Not

only can light be clearly seen, but it illuminates other things as well. When believers’ “good deeds shine out for all to see” (verse 16, NLT), those living in darkness notice the contrast between their lives and the God-blessed lives of those who follow Him. Jesus says when people see His followers shine, they will praise God. We must never attempt to hide our light but instead hold it high for everyone to see.

Discuss

- ? In what practical ways can your church be both salt and light in your community?
- ? How can you personally be a light that glorifies God?

Part 2—Practice God-Pleasing Righteousness

□ The Law’s Relevance

Matthew 5:17–20



Say: Some people have relegated Old Testament Law to the past, arguing that the Ten Commandments are no longer meaningful. But Jesus said, “Don’t misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose” (Matthew 5:17, NLT). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives us a new perspective on the Ten Commandments, explaining that obedience is a matter of the heart, not just outward behavior. When we follow His example, we can properly interpret and live out the Law. (Share your highlights from the following text.)



Resource Packet Item 2: Motives for Obedience

Distribute the worksheet, and divide the class into small groups. Assign one or two of the commandments to each group, depending on the size of your class. After a few minutes, ask the groups to share their thoughts.

We could easily mistake Jesus’ disdain for the Pharisees’ behavior for a dismissal of the Law itself. But nothing could be farther from the truth. Jesus carefully distinguished between the law of Moses and the self-righteous practices of the Pharisees, valuing the Law so highly that He said if we “ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same” (Matthew 5:19, NLT), we would be the least in the kingdom of heaven. He was not saying that following the Law was the means by which we enter the kingdom of heaven, but that the Law reflects the kind of life we should live when we are part of His kingdom. The heart of the Law goes far beyond the outward behavior of rule-following.

Jesus’ goal was to bring each person into right relationship with God—which was the key ingredient the religious teachers of His day were missing. He would accomplish this better righteousness for us by becoming the ultimate Sacrifice and taking the penalty for our sins (see verse 20; see also John 16:10, NLT).

Discuss

- ? How should we value the Law as we live under the grace God has given us?
- ? In what ways do we sometimes allow legalism to creep into our expectations for ourselves and others?



Say: Many Christians can truthfully say they have never murdered, stolen, or committed adultery. Yet keeping the letter of the Law is not the way to please God. Jesus helps us understand what God truly desires from us by quoting the commandments and identifying the heart conditions behind them. His point is that when our hearts are pure, right behaviors will follow. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

It is not enough for us to simply avoid murder. Jesus went deeper. He said if we have anger in our hearts toward someone, we are “subject to judgment,” just as if we had committed the act of murder (Matthew 5:22, NLT). Anger is a gateway emotion and can lead to bitterness, character assassination, name-calling, hatred, or even murder itself.

Jesus instructed us to mend broken relationships before worshiping God. He told us to lay down our offering, resolve our conflict in person, and only then go back to our act of worship. We can only fulfill the intent of the original commandment by resolving conflicts and making peace with our brothers and sisters in Christ (verses 23–26).



Resource Packet Item 3: Conflict Resolution

Distribute the worksheet, and ask students to label each statement according to the instructions. As you discuss the results, tabulate the responses to find common areas of difficulty.

Jesus turned His attention next to the commandment forbidding adultery. He expands the concept beyond extramarital sex to include lustful looks and thoughts, going so far as to say people should gouge out their lustful eyes and cut off their sinful hands. Jesus' use of dramatic hyperbole illustrates the seriousness of the issue. After all, “it is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (verse 30, NLT).

Discuss

- ? What prevents Christians from confronting and resolving conflict?
- ? What does habitual lust reveal about a person's attitude toward God?



Part 3—Prove Your Fidelity to God

Say: One indication of a person's character is his or her ability to keep commitments to other people and God himself. Compromise can be tempting sometimes, but righteous people honor their promises. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Of all the earthly commitments people make, marriage is the most binding. Although the concept of divorce had entered the Israelite community because of sin, it was not part of God's plan (see Matthew 19:8). God has not changed His view on divorce. He is the God who "always stands by his covenant—the commitment he made to a thousand generations" (Psalm 105:8, NLT). Because of His love for each individual, He wants husbands and wives to keep their promises to each other and to Him.

Jesus then addressed other kinds of vows. While some vows recorded in the Old Testament were made because of absolute obedience and love for God, others were an attempt to bargain with God. The Pharisees distinguished between two types of oaths: those taken in the name of God (which were fully binding) and those sworn by created things (which could be withdrawn).

Jesus countered by asserting that every oath involves God, who created heaven and earth. Even today, people sometimes use God's name to add weight to their oaths, but Jesus said our word alone should be sufficient. Integrity matters, because our actions reflect on God and His character. We must honor our commitments because of our position as God's people.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think divorce is so prevalent today, even within the Church?
- ? Share about a time you kept a commitment or failed to do so. What were the results? What did you learn from the experience?

□ Love Matters

Matthew 5:43–48



Say: How we react when people mistreat us reveals a great deal about our relationship with God. When someone harms you, seeking revenge is natural. Forgiveness is supernatural. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

According to the Old Testament, if someone hurt another person, the offended party could retaliate with the same measure. This system may have deterred crime in the newly formed nation of Israel, but the kingdom of heaven is different. The time of "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" (verse 38) had passed. Instead of letting offenses control our actions, Jesus taught His followers to use those very offenses as means to show love and generosity to the offender.

Jesus also expanded the concept of love to include one's enemies. This was revolutionary teaching. In fact, it still is. Jesus' followers must still be willing to forgive those who hate us and see our "enemies" as God sees them. Jesus himself demonstrated this principle of ultimate love when He came to earth to live and die for rebellious humanity (see Romans 5:8). God extends His kindness to everyone, so it is natural for Him to expect His children to do the same.

Jesus challenged His followers to "be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48, NLT). The word "perfect" means "full-grown, mature, and complete." While sinless perfection is unattainable in this life, our single-minded goal should be to show the same kind of love God shows. The sacrificial, unconditional love that sent Jesus to the cross should compel His followers as well.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think it is difficult to “love your enemies” and “pray for those who persecute you” (verse 44, NLT)?
- ? How can you practice seeing all people—whether friends or foes—as God sees them?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Jesus’ first recorded sermon explains God’s desire to bless His people and establishes the standards for citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. Most if not all of these kingdom principles run counter to our modern culture. Often, what the world celebrates, Jesus corrects. But the kingdom of heaven is populated by people who are humble, loving, peaceful, and generous. They are people of integrity. They reflect God’s heart. They are willing to submit to God’s standards regardless of the world’s response.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Ask God to adjust your attitude so that it reflects the principles Jesus taught.
- Identify any interpersonal conflicts and work to resolve them.
- Ask God to reveal any ways you are being controlled by past hurts. Forgive the person who hurt you and pray for God to bless him or her.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Blessing of Righteous Living.
Psalm 1:1–6

Tuesday:

Blessing of Being Forgiven.
Psalm 32:1–11

Wednesday:

Blessing of Trusting the Lord.
Psalm 40:1–5

Thursday:

Blessing of Believing in Christ.
John 20:24–29

Friday:

Blessing of Giving.
Acts 20:32–35

Saturday:

Blessing of Spiritual Blessings.
Ephesians 1:3–8

December 10, 2023

LESSON 2

The Christ-Disciplined Life

Study Text

Matthew 6:1–34

Central Truth

A life governed by Christ requires undivided loyalty to Him.



Key Verse Matthew 6:24

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other (KJV).

“No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other” (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will pray, fast, and give from godly motives.
- Students will reject money as the lord of their lives.
- Students will discover how to live free from anxiety.

Introducing the Study

Say: Most people can tell the difference between an authentic person and someone who is trying to impress them. A phony person may look genuine at first, but the truth will come out before long. Unfortunately, some people can live a lie for so long, they even begin to deceive themselves.

Opening Activity—Living a Lie

Ask: What television or movie characters can you think of who lived a lie? Why might people hide behind a false image of themselves?

Say: The Pharisees of Jesus’ day had begun to believe the lie they were living. They thought they were serving God when truthfully they were just consumed with religious activity. They kept the Law but missed the point. Christians must avoid following the Pharisees down this dangerous path. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Christian life is an authentic life. People often reject God because they see the hollowness of some who claim to be Christians. Authentic Christians should be filled with joy even when life is difficult. They should be honest about their struggles, facing them without anxiety and fear.

Today we will continue to look at Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, specifically His teachings in Matthew 6 about serving God with the right motives, making God our true Master, and trusting God to meet all our needs.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

Matthew 6:1. Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

5. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

6. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

7. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

8. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

16. Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

17. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;

18. That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

19. Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

20. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

21. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

24. No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

25. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

33. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Matthew 6:1. “Watch out! Don’t do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven.”

5. “When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get.

6. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

7. When you pray, don’t babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again.

8. Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!”

16. “And when you fast, don’t make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get.

17. But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face.

18. Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

19. Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal.

20. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal.

21. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.”

24. “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money.

25. That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn’t life more than food, and your body more than clothing?”

33. “Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.”

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Say: It is possible to do good things from selfish motives. As believers, we must continually ask ourselves if our good deeds are an attempt to impress others or earn God’s favor. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Jesus’ day, a Pharisee’s identity was tied to his religious practices. These religious leaders wanted to ensure that people knew how devoted they were to God, so their so-called piety was on full display. When they gave money, they announced it publicly so everyone would admire their generosity (Matthew 6:2). When they prayed, they did it on the corner of the street so everyone could hear their lofty words (verse 5). When they fasted, they tried to “look miserable and disheveled” so everyone would know they were doing their religious duty (verse 16, *NLT*).

Although Jesus taught that giving, prayer, and fasting were important, He clarified they must be done with the right motive. He took the focus off the person giving, praying, or fasting, and He put the focus back on God himself. He should be the only One we are trying to please. If we do any good work to receive recognition from others, then the approval we receive from them is our full reward.

Another selfish motive might be doing a good deed to improve one’s own life. God-honoring giving does not ask, “What will I get in return for what I give?” God-honoring prayer should include others’ needs as we trust Him to care for us. And God-honoring fasting is never an attempt to manipulate God. Our good works should reflect our love for God and our love for others (see 22:34–40).

Jesus was not suggesting that we take our faith underground. In fact, He said His followers were “like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden” (5:14, *NLT*). But Jesus is focused on our intentions. If we obey God simply to receive people’s attention and applause, our motives are compromised and our rewards are temporary. God has promised eternal rewards to those who selflessly channel His love and do their good deeds in secret.

Discuss

- ? In what ways might the attitude of the Pharisees be manifested in the church world today?
- ? What practical steps can believers take to give, pray, and fast without putting on a show?



Say: In the middle of discussing the motivation for spiritual disciplines, Jesus took time to teach His disciples how to pray. He had already warned against “vain repetitions” (Matthew 6:7, *KJV*), so He next gave them a model prayer—a template, so to speak. The Lord’s Prayer helps us focus on what matters most when we converse with God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Christians' prayers often reveal a great deal about their contentment. Sometimes prayers are little more than a laundry list of wants and wishes. However, effective prayer focuses on kingdom expansion and God's will being accomplished on earth as it is in heaven. That includes praying for strength to live righteously and represent God well. Jesus did not say we should never pray for personal needs, but we must keep our priorities in order.



Resource Packet Item 1: The Lord's Prayer

Distribute the information sheet and refer to it while teaching. Encourage students to use it as a guide in their personal prayer times.

The opening words of the Lord's prayer—"Our Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:9, *NLT*)—establish our relationship with God, which lays the foundation for the conversation to come. The next phrase shows reverence to God: "May your name be kept holy" (verse 9, *NLT*). We often approach God as the Giver of gifts (which He is) or the Solver of problems (which He is), but first and foremost He is the one true God. He deserves our worship for that reason alone.

In verse 10, Jesus models submission to God, praying that His kingdom would come to earth and His will would be done on earth. The prayer then shifts into petitions. He expects us to ask Him to provide for our needs—and even our desires—but those needs and desires often change as we recognize who He is and submit to Him. That new house or car may seem less important when we begin to pray for the expansion of His kingdom. The example Jesus gives the disciples includes praying simply for sustenance before moving on to our deeper needs: receiving and extending mercy and accessing God's strength to withstand temptation.

Discuss

- ? How do your typical prayers compare to the model prayer Jesus gave?
- ? What are some specific things you can pray about that would expand the kingdom of God?

Part 2—Lay Up Treasures in Heaven



□ Wise Investments

Matthew 6:19–23

Say: The Broadway musical *Cabaret* includes a song that epitomizes the philosophy of much of our society: "Money Makes the World Go Around." It is true that many people's lives are dominated by greed, but Jesus teaches us a better way to live. By adopting His point of view, we can handle our finances in a way that honors God and furthers the Kingdom. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus warned, "Don't store up treasures here on earth" (Matthew 6:19, *NLT*). Christians should manage finances wisely, keeping in mind that earthly possessions never last. If our security is based on our wealth, we are only fooling ourselves. Possessions gradually depreciate and can even be stolen. And no matter how safe our investments seem to be, they can disappear in a moment.

However, Jesus offered an investment that always yields a return. When we use our finances to help bring people into the Kingdom, we accumulate a reward that will await us in eternity—the reward of seeing heaven populated.

The places people choose to invest their resources reveal the condition of their hearts (verse 21). Jesus illustrated His point by describing healthy and unhealthy eyes (verses 22–23). Those with healthy eyes are filled with light and see opportunities to expand the Kingdom and invest wisely. Those with unhealthy eyes are consumed by darkness and do not even see the needs around them. Sadly, some Christians are so busy accumulating personal wealth that their hearts are hardened and their eyes are blind to spiritual needs.

Discuss

- ? What do you think is the proper balance between caring for your family’s needs, planning for the future, meeting others’ needs, and investing in the kingdom of God?
- ? Some Christians are offended when a pastor talks about money the way Jesus spoke in Matthew 6. What does our attitude about money reveal about us?

□ Servant of God or Money?

Matthew 6:24



Say: We may not like the way it sounds, but we are all servants. As Bob Dylan put it, “It may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you’re gonna have to serve somebody.”¹ Whether we choose to serve God or bow to Satan and the influences of our culture, we can only have one master. Our priorities are the deciding factor. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Christians often refer to Jesus as “Lord and Savior,” but if Jesus is truly our Lord, we will choose to obey and serve Him alone. Claiming loyalty to Jesus means nothing if a person’s life choices reveal they serve a different master. Today’s consumer mentality stands in opposition to Kingdom values, and Christians are called to leave behind the pursuit of temporary treasures.

This involves asking ourselves if we make decisions based on financial ramifications or God’s direction. If we base our choices on “what we can afford,” we are likely allowing money to control us. When we give God complete control of our lives, our decisions look much different. He is not limited by our bank accounts, and He will faithfully show us the best path forward as we obey Him.

□ Resource Packet Item 2: Decisions, Decisions

Distribute the worksheet, and after students finish, ask a few to share one of their decisions with the class.

Jesus used the phrase “enslaved to money” (Matthew 6:24, NLT) to show the powerful draw of wealth. Christians may think they are in control of their finances, but if we don’t allow God to guide us in this area, we will soon find ourselves completely

1. Bob Dylan, “Gotta Serve Somebody,” *Slow Train Coming*, Columbia Records, 1979.

consumed with money. People bound by materialism never have enough, and anxiety is their constant companion. Jesus is clear: “You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money” (NLT). His use of the words *love* and *hate* shows the incompatibility between a Kingdom mindset and a materialistic mindset.

Discuss

- ? Is it possible for Jesus to be our Savior without also being our Lord? Explain.
- ? Why do you think many Christians carry financial debt? What does buying things we can’t afford reveal about our view of God?



Part 3—Trust God’s Providence

□ Faith in God

Matthew 6:25–32

Say: Faith is often misconstrued as believing hard enough to get whatever you want from God. People even attempt to camouflage their love of money and possessions with a prosperity theology. But this isn’t how the Bible defines *faith*. Instead, scriptural faith recognizes who God is and trusts Him to do the right thing all the time. Christians who embrace this kind of faith live with contentment and peace. They know deep down that God can be trusted. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus instructed us to not worry about food, drink, or clothing, asserting that worry is wasted energy. Part of the spiritual battle between desiring material things and eternal things is related to our view of God. If we believe God cares for us, knows what we need, and will supply those needs, there is no need to worry. The Father feeds the birds and clothes the lilies without ever being asked. If animals and plants are so well cared for, can we not trust the Father to provide for us too? Our answer to that question is linked to our faith. When we worry about God providing the things we need to survive, we reveal how little faith we truly have in Him.

To be clear, Jesus wasn’t saying His followers should not work hard or make plans. Instead, He was addressing the gnawing anxiety that comes from not fully trusting God. Worry shows we do not really believe our Heavenly Father will give us what we need. “These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers,” Jesus said, “but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs” (Matthew 6:32, NLT). Spending precious time and energy worrying about basic needs is the behavior of people who do not know God. Jesus called us to something higher. We can have complete confidence in our Heavenly Father. He knows what we need, He has the power to provide it, and He loves us enough to do so. Living with this kind of faith frees us up to focus on eternal things rather than being consumed by the here and now.



Resource Packet Item 3: Alternatives to Worry

Distribute the worksheet and suggest that students complete the activity during their personal devotions.

Discuss

- ? What is your definition of *faith*? How does that definition shape your prayer life and your perspective of God?
- ? How do we balance Jesus' teaching about worry with the wisdom of planning and preparing for the future?

□ Put God First

Matthew 6:33–34



Say: Jesus calls us to focus our attention on God instead of our circumstances.

As the hymn famously phrases it, “Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.”² When we seek God’s kingdom first, He will take care of the rest of our concerns. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

When we answer Jesus’ call to replace worry with faith, our focus changes completely. Our thoughts are no longer dominated by our own desires, but we start to notice the needs of others and pray about how we can expand God’s kingdom on earth—just as Jesus taught us to pray. This change in focus is spiritually freeing, and our commitment is rewarded. As God directs us to invest our time, energy, and resources and we respond in obedience, He keeps His promise and supplies everything we need.

Two points are critical here. Believers are to (1) “seek the Kingdom of God above all else” and (2) “live righteously” (Matthew 6:33, *NLT*). “Kingdom” points to God’s will being fulfilled, and “righteously” emphasizes an inner commitment to holiness that affects every thought, motive, and action. Jesus enunciated the principle that had been established way back in the Garden of Eden: If human beings seek God’s priorities and live in righteous obedience, He will faithfully provide for all of their needs.

Our lives are transformed when we follow these guidelines. Seeking God’s kingdom and righteousness draws our attention away from the endless worry Jesus warned against, and we are freed to serve people and serve God as we trust Him to supply our needs.

Matthew 6 closes with Jesus’ instruction to let go of the past and not worry about the future (verse 34). There is nothing wrong with planning for the future, but Jesus told us, “Don’t worry about tomorrow” (*NLT*). Our God created and sustains everything from galaxies to geraniums, and He is able to take care of those who humbly follow Him one day at a time.

Discuss

- ? How would you respond if your children spoke to you the same way you speak to God during prayer?
- ? How would the daily application of Matthew 6:33–34 change your priorities and your attitude toward life?

2. Helen H. Lemmel, “Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus,” London, England, 1918.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Faithfully following God means trusting Him and serving Him with the right motives. Spiritual disciplines like giving, praying, and fasting are not for impressing others, earning God's favor, or getting whatever we want. Instead, they equip us to serve God better and expand the kingdom of heaven. Taking our eyes off our own selfish desires and fully recognizing the greatness of God helps us learn to trust Him and submit to Him as Lord. As we follow Him more closely every day, we find contentment, and worry and anxiety fade away.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Evaluate your reasons for praying, fasting, and giving. If you discover selfish motivations, repent and seek to practice these spiritual disciplines out of a pure love for God.
- Assess the role of money in your life. If you discover money has become your lord, repent and ask God to realign your thinking.
- Determine the source of any anxiety in your life. Ask God to help you trust Him so you can truly live in spiritual freedom.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

A Learner Succeeds His Mentor.
Deuteronomy 31:1–8

Tuesday:

A Young Disciple Hears God.
1 Samuel 3:1–10

Wednesday:

A Determined Disciple Follows.
1 Kings 2:5–15

Thursday:

The Disciple and His Master.
Matthew 10:22–26

Friday:

The Disciple's Commitment.
Luke 14:25–33

Saturday:

The Secret Disciple.
John 19:38–42

December 17, 2023

LESSON 3

Life on a Firm Foundation

Study Text

Matthew 7:1–29

Central Truth

Hearing, believing, and obeying Christ is the solid foundation for living.



Key Verse Matthew 7:21

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven (KJV).

“Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter” (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will reject a judgmental attitude and embrace restoration of those who experience moral failure.
- Students will choose to enter the kingdom of God through the narrow gate.
- Students will evaluate the words spoken by prophets and teachers, comparing them to the truths found in Scripture.

Introducing the Study

Say: The Sermon on the Mount is one of the most famous speeches in history. But it carries far more weight than an address from any motivational speaker ever could. Jesus Christ, the Son of God himself, shared His divine wisdom with humankind. His revolutionary teachings recorded in Matthew 5–7 showed His followers how to align their everyday lives with the kingdom of God. Today’s lesson focuses on chapter 7, including His admonition to build our lives on the foundation of everything He taught.

Opening Activity—Foundations

Ask: What materials should be used to create a firm foundation for a new building? What shortcuts might builders be tempted to use if they were not required to meet certain standards?

Say: As important as it is to have a firm foundation for your home, the foundation you choose to build your life upon matters far more. That choice has eternal consequences. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount are more than platitudes leading to personal fulfillment. In fact, the blessed life we are promised as citizens of the kingdom of heaven comes at tremendous personal cost. Jesus clearly laid out the elements of kingdom citizenship, addressing the path to blessings, the proper motivation for keeping the Law, the steps to living without worry, and the requirement to remain steadfast and faithful. In today’s lesson, we will be challenged to renew our commitment to Kingdom living.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

Matthew 7:1. Judge not, that ye be not judged.

2. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

3. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

7. Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

8. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

9. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

10. Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

11. If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

12. Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

13. Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

14. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

15. Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

18. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

20. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

21. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

24. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

25. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

26. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

27. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

Matthew 7:1. “Do not judge others, and you will not be judged.

2. For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged.

3. And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own?”

7. “Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you.

8. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

9. You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead?

10. Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not!

11. So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.

12. Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.

13. You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way.

14. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it.

15. Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves.”

18. “A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit.”

20.” Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions.

21. Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter.”

24. “Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock.

25. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock.

26. But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand.

27. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash.”

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Say: A *legalist* is someone who believes they can achieve a right standing with God by keeping a set of rules. As the ultimate legalists, the Pharisees established a standard of behavior that even they could not meet. They were blind to their own faults, but they were quick to point out the faults of others. Jesus, on the other hand, instructed His followers to judge others the way they wanted to be judged. He alone is the ultimate Judge, and our job is to love people even when they don't live up to our standards. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Matthew 7:1—“Judge not, that ye be not judged” (KJV)—has been used in many contexts to admonish anyone who offers correction. However, this is not Jesus' intention. The word *judge* means “to form an opinion about after careful weighing of evidence; to form an estimate or evaluation of; to determine or pronounce after inquiry and deliberation.”¹ This kind of assessment is sometimes good and necessary, but practicing prejudgment, prejudice, unfair criticism, or unjust discrimination is ungodly. It is human nature to pridefully attempt to make ourselves look better by tearing others down. This is the heart condition Jesus was addressing.

God will judge us according to the “standard [we] use in judging” others (verse 2, NLT). Jesus contrasted having a prideful, condemning attitude with having a forgiving, merciful attitude. Some have taken Jesus' teaching in these verses to mean we should be tolerant of sin or immorality, but that is not the case. Instead, we must guard against having a scornful attitude, determining instead to be filled with love and forgiveness. We should pray for one another and humbly recognize God is the only Judge—and He “shows no favoritism” (Acts 10:34, NLT).

The Pharisees claimed to know every aspect of the Law, but they did not understand its essence. They refused to recognize their own sin. Jesus pointed out their hypocrisy by using an exaggerated example in which one person tries to remove a speck from another person's eye without even noticing the log in his own eye. Our spiritual condition often causes us to overlook our own shortcomings while noticing the issues someone else is dealing with. This puts us in the same category as the Pharisees of Jesus' day.

Jesus shows us a better way: “Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12, NLT). Instead of judging others harshly and reserving grace for ourselves, Christians must offer the same grace to others that we want to receive ourselves.

Only God has the authority to pronounce judgment. As people who have experienced His abundant mercy, our job is to show that mercy to others. To echo Jesus' earlier teaching, “God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy . . . If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins” (5:7; 6:14–15, NLT).

1. *Merriam-Webster*, “Judge,” accessed May 6, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/judge>.



Resource Packet Item 1: Judgment and Mercy

Distribute the worksheet, and ask someone to read each of the passages aloud. Then discuss the questions as a group.

Discuss

- ? What might motivate a Christian to be judgmental?
- ? What is the difference between judging someone and holding them accountable?



□ Don't Waste Good

Matthew 7:6

Say: In the television series *NCIS*, Agent Gibbs is known for his rules. Rule 5 is, “You don’t waste good.”² Jesus taught that His followers should not “waste what is holy on people who are unholy” (Matthew 7:6, NLT). There is no value in attempting to convince people to believe in God if they are unwilling to hear the truth. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Matthew 7:1–5 teaches us to show humility in our relationships because of our own sinful condition. But in verse 6, Jesus emphasizes the need for discernment when deciding whether to share Kingdom truth with someone. Jesus described those who reject the gospel using the Greek words for “dogs” (KJV) and “pigs.” Jews often used these terms to refer to Gentiles—those who were not part of God’s covenant people.

In Jewish culture, dogs were not household pets, but wild animals that roamed in packs and attacked animals or even people. Calling a person a “dog” implied he or she was immoral, vulgar, and ignorant. Calling someone a “pig” was even worse. Ceremonially unclean in Jewish culture, wild pigs were scavengers that became aggressive enough to attack people when hungry.

Jesus likely used these terms to refer to those who are unclean because of persistent, rebellious sin and unbelief—including the Jewish religious leaders who were so quick to criticize Him. Even today, people who reject Jesus may become hostile to believers who are spreading the good news about Him. While Jesus certainly did not intend for us to keep the gospel secret, we must be sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s leading when evangelizing in certain settings.

Discuss

- ? How could you apply Jesus’ teaching to not “throw your pearls to pigs” in your current setting?
- ? Who do you think would be most receptive to the gospel in your community?



Part 2—Find Life on the Narrow Way

□ Choose the Right Gate

Matthew 7:13–14

Say: In downhill skiing competitions, flags are set up to create “gates” the skiers must navigate. They are not allowed to create their own course but must go

² *NCIS*, Season 8, Episode 22, “Baltimore,” directed by Terrence O’Hara, aired May 3, 2011, on CBS, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1683263/characters/nm0001319>.

through the gates in order to cross the finish line and win. Jesus explained we can “enter God’s kingdom only through the narrow gate” (Matthew 7:13, NLT). There is no other way to experience the eternal life He offers. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount by teaching about the unique blessings of Kingdom living. He also explained that His followers would experience difficulty, a theme He continued in this passage. The gateway to heaven is narrow, and it is the only way to gain access to the Kingdom.

Entering by the narrow gate requires submitting to God’s will and obeying His commands—something few people are willing to do. The road of self-indulgence is wide open, but those who travel it discover it leads to emptiness, dissatisfaction, and ultimately, condemnation.

Jesus died on Calvary to provide a way of escape, but everyone who does not accept Him as Savior will face eternal judgment. Each person who hears His words must choose which gate to enter. The gate to eternal life is narrow, the road is not easy, and “only a few ever find it” (verse 14, NLT). Jesus said in John’s Gospel, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me” (John 14:6, NLT). Salvation through Jesus is the only way to access heaven. He *is* the narrow gate.

Discuss

- ? Many people think Jesus is just one of many ways to heaven. How can you most effectively share the truth that Jesus is the only way?
- ? Why do you think so few people find the narrow gate? What does this say about our responsibility to share the gospel?

□ Evaluate Prophets

Matthew 7:15–23



Say: Jesus warned His followers about false prophets, describing them as wolves in sheep’s clothing. There are eternal consequences when someone believes false teaching, and Jesus doesn’t want anyone to pay that price. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

□ Resource Packet Item 2: Decision-Making Time

Distribute the worksheet, and have students complete it individually or in groups. Encourage a few students to share their answers.

False prophets may have the appearance of goodness, but their messages are deadly. By describing the way they disguise themselves, Jesus was teaching His followers that false teachers are not always easy to identify. His listeners were to test prophets’ integrity based on what their lives produced. Ezekiel 13:16 describes God’s judgment against “lying prophets” (NLT) who were “inventing their own prophecies” and “following their own imaginations” (verses 2–3, NLT). Such prophets may seem harmless as sheep, but their words can destroy people’s souls.

How should we guard ourselves so we continue to faithfully follow Jesus without being drawn into error? We must carefully discern the fruit being produced in someone's life before we listen to their teachings (Matthew 7:16–18). Actions speak louder than words, and sooner or later, behavior betrays motives. A corrupt heart cannot be hidden for long, but a life lived out of pure love and sincere faith produces good fruit.

Generally, false prophets promise fulfillment by way of the wide gate. They use enough Christian language to make people believe their message and may even exhibit spiritual behaviors. But Jesus said, “Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father will enter” (verse 21, NLT). In the end, God will judge those who deceive others for their own selfish motives. Even some who say, “Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name” (verse 22, NLT) will hear those dreaded words: “I never knew you: depart from me” (verse 23, KJV).

True disciples obey the Father alone. Not only will God reject false prophets on that day, but He will also reject those who believed their lies instead of the truth of His Word.

Discuss

- ? How do you evaluate words spoken by modern-day prophets and teachers?
- ? How do you evaluate your own motivation when you speak or act in the name of Jesus?

Part 3—Choose to Build on Truth



□ Build Well

Matthew 7:24–27

Say: Everyone faces storms in their lives. But our spiritual foundation determines the way we respond to the torrential rain, rising floodwaters, and brutal winds Jesus describes (Matthew 7:25). If our foundation is built on someone else's faith, it will not survive. Instead, we must establish our faith on the immovable truths of God's Word—specifically Jesus' teaching (see verse 24). People who build their faith on that foundation will stand firm no matter the storm. (Share your highlights from the following text.) ▼ ***(Play Mark Grantham's testimony about overcoming a life-altering injury by God's grace. The video is available at RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult.)***



Resource Packet Item 3: Foundational Issues

Distribute the worksheet and read the case study. Have the students discuss the questions and prayerfully consider how to establish the kind of foundation that can withstand any tragedy.

Jesus contrasted His rock-solid words with the unstable words of false prophets. Building on their words leads to utter destruction and rejection by God, but building on His words leads to steadfast faith and eternal life.

Growing up in a carpenter's home, Jesus would have been well aware of the importance of a strong foundation when building a house. He used this knowledge and experience to illustrate the consequences of building one's life on solid rock or shifting sand.

Obedient people are wise, Jesus said—like a person who builds a house on a solid foundation. Such wise people will not experience catastrophic failure in the storms of life, because they have already put their faith to the test and obeyed God's Word.

On the other hand, those who hear Jesus' teachings but do not obey them are foolish. "When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash" (verse 27, NLT). The life the foolish person has built will be swept away in an instant.

What separates Muslims, Hindus, or Buddhists from Christians is not the sheer magnitude of faith. Adherents of those religions are often completely convinced they are on the path toward eternal reward. The difference is the foundation of each religion's faith. There is only one true God, and the only way to enter the kingdom of heaven is through faith in Jesus. A person can believe anything else and build an entire religious system upon it, but eventually—when Christ returns—that system will collapse. It is built on sand.

To faithfully follow Christ and build a life that lasts into eternity, we must embrace the truth, reject false teaching, do the Father's will, and obey Jesus' teachings.

Discuss

- ? What "sandy foundations" do you see people building their lives on today?
- ? Think back over Jesus' teachings from the Sermon on the Mount that we've studied in the past three lessons. What steps can you take to align your life with His words and construct a house "that won't collapse because it is built on bedrock" (verse 25, NLT)?



□ Embrace Truth

Matthew 7:28–29

Say: The crowd listening to Jesus' sermon knew it was unlike anything else they had ever heard. His words stirred them, demanding a response then as they do now. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

When Jesus finished talking, the people were in awe. They recognized He "taught with real authority" (Matthew 7:29, NLT). Although the Pharisees spoke many truths about God, they didn't personally obey them. Therefore, their teachings did not carry the authority Jesus' did. Rather than simply reading the rule book, Jesus explained the background and motivation behind it, helping people see and understand the value of humble obedience to God. Not only did Jesus teach the Word with unprecedented authority, but He *was* the Word. "The Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. . . . He has revealed God to us" (John 1:14,18, NLT).

Discuss

- ? Jesus said “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18, NLT). Is it possible for His followers today to teach the Word of God “with real authority” (7:29, NLT) as Jesus did? Why or why not?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: The authoritative teachings of Jesus are beautifully encapsulated in the Sermon on the Mount, and it’s up to each of us to decide whether we will hear and follow them. Are we calling ourselves Christians but living completely outside His will? Are we saying and doing the right things just to put on a show? Are we shuffling alongside everyone else on the wide, easy road instead of searching out the narrow gate? Are we making selfish, short-sighted decisions and building our lives on sand instead of Christ, our solid Rock? As long as there is breath in our bodies, it is never too late to search out the narrow way that leads to eternal life. When we repent and humbly submit to God, the gate to the Kingdom swings wide open.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Repent for judging other people and determine to reach out a helping hand and seek restoration instead.
- Compare a popular prophet or preacher’s words to the Bible and determine if his or her message is true or not. Ask a trusted Christian for guidance if needed, and listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit.
- Pray for God to reveal whether you are living according to your own desires or God’s purposes. Repent and make the necessary adjustments before it is too late.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Life Ordered by the Lord.
Psalm 37:23–31

Tuesday:

Be Immovable Like Mount Zion.
Psalm 125:1–5

Wednesday:

Live by Wisdom from God.
Proverbs 2:1–9

Thursday:

Build on Christ.
1 Corinthians 3:10–15

Friday:

Built on the Right Foundation.
Ephesians 2:19–22

Saturday:

Be Doers of the Word.
James 1:19–25

December 24, 2023

LESSON 4

The Birth of the King

Study Text

Matthew 1:18 through 2:23

Central Truth

Because He is the King, Jesus is worthy of our adoration and praise.



Key Verse Isaiah 7:14

Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (KJV).

“Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God is with us’)” (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Examine various responses to Christ’s coming, as seen in Joseph, Herod, and the Wise Men.
- Explore the prophetic significance of the Wise Men in the Christmas story.
- Worship Jesus as our Messiah, King, and Savior.

Introducing the Study

Say: The world is constantly changing. As the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, “All things move and nothing remains still . . . you cannot step twice into the same stream.”¹ Depending on our perspective, the inevitability of change can fill us with nostalgia, fear, or hopeful excitement.

Opening Activity—The World as We Know It

Ask: How would you compare the current state of the world with the world Jesus was born into? What advantages or disadvantages are unique to each time period?

Say: While we face many challenges that did not exist during Jesus’ earthly life, we also enjoy freedoms and benefit from medicine and technology that would have been foreign in that time and place. As we prepare to celebrate Christmas, let us remember Jesus was born at a difficult time in Jewish history, which created unique challenges for the central characters of the story. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus was likely born between 6 BC and 4 BC. Israel had endured dominion and oppression under foreign powers for centuries, beginning with the fall of the Northern Kingdom to the Assyrians in 722 BC and the fall of the Southern Kingdom to the Babylonians in 586 BC. After about a century of self-rule during the Hasmonean dynasty (ending in 37 BC), they now found themselves under Roman control and ruled by Herod, a “client king” who had been raised a Jew but was faithful to Rome. Because of this political instability and insecurity, it was a difficult time—and the perfect time—to welcome the King of kings.

1. Heraclitus, quoted in Plato, *Cratylus* 402a, The Loeb translation, H. N. Fowler, trans., accessed July 5, 2022, <https://www.informationphilosopher.com/solutions/philosophers/heraclitus/>

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Matthew 1:18. Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

19. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.

20. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

21. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

22. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

23. Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

2:1. Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

2. Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

4. And when he [Herod] had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

5. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet,

6. And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

9. When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

11. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.

New Living Translation

Matthew 1:18. This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit.

19. Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

20. As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

21. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

22. All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet:

23. "Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'"

2:1. Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking,

2. "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him."

4. He [Herod] called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?"

5. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they said, "for this is what the prophet wrote:

6. 'And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities of Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.'"

9. After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was.

11. They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Say: It can be easy to forget that the circumstances of Jesus’ birth were unique and difficult for Mary and Joseph. Yet His birth also brought great joy—to His family, nearby Jewish shepherds, Gentile travelers, and believers ever since. There’s a reason we still celebrate His birth. He is the fulfillment of God’s promise to bless the entire world through Abraham (see Genesis 12:3). He is the focus of the prophets’ hope for God’s people (see Isaiah 9:1–7). And He is our Savior, the answer to our prayers for redemption and everlasting life (see Isaiah 43:1–13; 53). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Like many other Jewish couples of their time, Mary and Joseph’s story began with their betrothal. Matthew 1:18 says they were “engaged to be married” (NLT) or “espoused” (KJV). This step in the courtship process is largely unfamiliar to most of us today. During betrothal, a couple’s union was not to be consummated, but it was a legally binding commitment that could only be severed by a decree of divorce.

Although their relationship began in typical fashion, the young couple soon found themselves in a situation no one else has ever experienced. In verses 18–25, we clearly see God’s plan—as foretold through the prophets—beginning to be realized. When Joseph learned Mary was pregnant, his initial response was compassion, not rage. Rather than expose her apparent infidelity and betrayal, he sought to divorce her quietly. This would protect his reputation from accusations of adultery and also shield Mary from public disgrace. His reaction demonstrates the kind of mercy and righteousness God would have looked for in the man who would care for His Son.

The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, bringing both explanation and instruction. Note that the angel specifically called him “Joseph, son of David” (verse 20, NLT). This detail flows naturally from the genealogy Matthew included at the beginning of his book and reveals that the words to come pertain to God’s covenant promise to David: “Your house and your kingdom will continue before me for all time, and your throne will be secure forever” (2 Samuel 7:16, NLT).

The angel revealed that “the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:20, NLT), clearly indicating Mary had not been unfaithful. Joseph was to marry his betrothed and name the child *Jesus*—from the Old Testament name *Joshua*, meaning “the Lord is salvation.” As the angel explained to Joseph, “He shall save his people from their sins” (verse 21, KJV).

Discuss

- ? What are some ways Joseph could have reacted to the news of Mary’s pregnancy? Why do you think he responded as he did?
- ? How might you respond if someone shared a seemingly impossible message they claimed was from God?
- ? God confirmed His message to Joseph by sending an angel to appear in his dream. Has God ever confirmed a word for you in a similar way? Share the story if you feel comfortable.



Say: When the unexpected happens, it is reassuring to know you are in God’s will and part of God’s plan. In Matthew 1:22–23, we see the angel’s explanation of Joseph and Mary’s place in the fulfillment of prophecy, and in verses 24–25, we see Joseph’s immediate obedience. While his situation was certainly unique, we are each part of God’s plan as well. In fact, our salvation and reconciliation were His plan “long before the world began” (1 Peter 1:20, *NLT*). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Verses 22–23 contain the first of Matthew’s many Old Testament quotes. Indeed, the phrase “that it might be fulfilled” (*KJV*) appears nine times in Matthew (1:22, 2:15,23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:35), once in John (19:24) and nowhere else in the New Testament.

The prospect of prophecy being fulfilled may have had special significance for Joseph, since his people lived under Roman rule. Matthew 1:23 quotes Isaiah 7:14, and in Isaiah’s context, the child was a sign that God would deliver His people from their enemies. He would be called “Immanuel (which means ‘God is with us’)” because God would not abandon His people or His plan for them.

The hope that God would dwell with His people can be seen throughout the Old Testament (see Isaiah 60:18–20; Ezekiel 48:35), and the desire to dwell with Him is our hope as well (see Revelation 21:22–23). This longing for His presence was fulfilled in the Old Testament through the temple. But that was just a shadow of what would come. “God with us” would find its full, final, and enduring fulfillment in the Savior and Messiah, Jesus Christ.

One can scarcely imagine how Joseph must have felt when he awoke from his dream. Surely he was relieved to know his bride remained pure and righteous. And surely he was overwhelmed to learn he would play a key role in the fulfillment of God’s prophecy in Isaiah—a prophecy he had studied all his life and was now beginning to understand more deeply.

So Joseph did as the angel commanded him (verses 24–25) and took Mary to be his wife, meaning they made their marriage vows in a formal ceremony. However, Scripture is careful to point out that Mary remained a virgin “until her son was born” (verse 25, *NLT*).

As we celebrate Christmas, we do well to remember how the circumstances of Jesus’ birth fulfill numerous Old Testament prophecies—starting as early as Genesis 3:15. Jesus is “God with us” from Genesis to Revelation. He is Creator (John 1:1–4). He is the hope of His people. He is Savior and Redeemer. He is the soon-coming King who will defeat sin once and for all. He is the Alpha and Omega with whom we will spend life everlasting.



Resource Packet Item 1: Prophecies Fulfilled by Christ

Distribute the worksheet and have students complete sections in groups. Note that these are only a few familiar examples of the more than three hundred Old Testament prophecies fulfilled by Christ.

Discuss

- ? How can studying the prophecies of Scripture enhance your spiritual growth and understanding of God and His Word?

Part 2—The King Is Sought

□ Sought by the Wise Men

Matthew 2:1–2



Say: You’ve likely heard the saying, “Wise men still seek Him.” While this is certainly true, we also need to keep in mind the larger prophetic significance of the Magi in Matthew 2. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Resource Packet Item 2: Wise Men from the East

Distribute the worksheet and complete it as an introduction to this section. Note that the important information the Bible gives us about the Wise Men tells us a lot about Jesus’ mission in the world.

Scripture includes relatively little information about the Wise Men. However, the details in Matthew 2:1–2 give important insight into the characters’ purpose and significance. We know they arrived well after Christ’s birth, in part because the Greek word used to describe Jesus in verse 9 (“child,” NLT; “young child,” KJV) refers to someone who is no longer an infant. In addition, the later actions of Herod indicate Jesus may have been up to two years old when they arrived (2:16). This also helps explain the time line of Jesus’ birth: Because Herod the Great died in 4 BC, Jesus is believed to have been born up to two years earlier—between 6 and 4 BC—with the Wise Men arriving by 4 BC.

We do not know who these men were or where they came from. The term *Magi* (from the Greek *magoi*) means “magician” or “astrologer.” Such men were greatly respected by pagan peoples in ancient times. The Magi likely came from Arabia or Babylonia where it was common to hear accounts of stars heralding great men’s births. In this case, God himself had sent a star. Some argue the star was naturally occurring, but only an anomaly—a miracle—would lead these powerful men and their entourage of up to a thousand people specifically to the area of Bethlehem.

They arrived in Jerusalem seeking to worship Jesus (verse 2)—that is, to recognize His status and acknowledge Him as “king of the Jews” (NLT). How enlightening and encouraging that God led pagan people to seek and worship Jesus even from the beginning of His earthly life. Already, God was fulfilling His promise to bless the earth through Abraham’s seed. Jesus came “to seek and save those who are lost” (Luke 19:10, NLT)—both Jews and Gentiles. Through His ministry, death, and resurrection, all who call upon His name can be saved. And that includes us.

Discuss

- ? The star served as a sign to the Wise Men, guiding them to Jesus. How does God guide people to Jesus today?
- ? Instead of playing the role of Herod and getting in the way when people are searching for Jesus, how can you help people find Him?



□ Sought for Destruction

Matthew 2:3–8

Say: While Matthew 2 shows us Jesus came to be worshiped by all, it also shows us evil people have always sought to destroy Him. Herod’s behavior reminds us that encountering Jesus produces the widest possible range of reactions. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

King Herod was one of the most consequential figures in Judea during the years leading up to and immediately following Christ’s birth. He was called “Herod the Great” to distinguish him from other rulers in his family. His Edomite Arab father had converted to Judaism, and Herod was appointed king of Judea by the Roman senate in 37 BC, a position he would hold for thirty-two years. He built many cities, fortresses, aqueducts, and a great palace while also overseeing a massive temple reconstruction project that took decades to complete.

Herod was a cruel figure, and his negative traits intensified as he aged. His manic instability eventually led him to murder numerous members of his own family, including his firstborn son and one of his nine wives. He eventually died in 4 BC after suffering from years-long physical and mental ailments and even attempting suicide. His response to the Wise Men in Matthew 2 is consistent with the rest of his behavior near the end of his life. Verse 3 tells us, “King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard” about the newborn King, “as was everyone in Jerusalem” (NLT). (Scholars note the residents of Jerusalem may have been upset due to the consequences of Herod’s anger and insecurity rather than being afraid because a new King had been born.)

Herod asked the religious leaders in Jerusalem to pinpoint the Messiah’s birthplace (verse 4). Perhaps he could head off a revolt if he acted quickly. Upon learning Bethlehem was the location according to Micah 5:2, “Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men” (Matthew 2:7, NLT) in hopes that they would have more information. This scene is an interesting paradox: Herod believed the prophecies of Scripture but hoped to work around them and destroy the King they foretold.

Herod asked the Magi when the star had first appeared, claiming he would like to worship the new King as well. He then sent them to Bethlehem to avoid taking his own royal entourage or sending a group of soldiers, either of which would have prompted fear among the residents and made it harder to find Jesus.

Discuss

- ? What does Herod’s behavior teach us about how evil people respond to Jesus?
- ? How do you see God’s hand at work in Jesus’ story thus far?



Part 3—The King Is Worshiped

□ The Star Led the Way

Matthew 2:9–10

Say: One of the most interesting takeaways from Matthew 2:9–11 is the change in tone from the previous verses. As we proceed, contrast the actions of the pagan Magi with those of Herod. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Matthew 2:9 can prompt some questions about the star. Many commentators believe it disappeared when the Wise Men arrived in Jerusalem, then reappeared as they continued their journey. It is clear the star didn't simply settle over Bethlehem, which is approximately six miles from Jerusalem. Instead, the star apparently moved with them and guided them. (Note that it "stopped over the place," NLT, or "came and stood over where the young child was," KJV). These are clear indications this was no natural phenomenon God chose to use for His purposes. Rather, this was a unique, supernatural, divine intervention into the celestial realm by the Creator of the universe.

The star led the Wise Men to Jesus' location. Maybe it led them to the town of Bethlehem, after which they discreetly searched for the house where Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were living. Whatever the specifics, this was undoubtedly a supernatural event. Some scholars note similarities between the star and the pillar that led the Israelites in the wilderness (see Exodus 13:21). Just as "the Lord went ahead of" the Israelites in the wilderness (NLT), His chosen sign settled over the newborn Messiah. It is no surprise, then, that the sight of the star filled the Wise Men with joy (Matthew 2:10). In Greek, that statement is full of emphasis—literally, "they rejoiced exceedingly with joy." They recognized they had found One uniquely above other earthly rulers, and the discovery filled their hearts with gladness. Men and women have been filled with gladness upon finding Jesus ever since.

Discuss

- ? What (or whom) did God use to help you find Jesus?
- ? In what ways does the thought of Jesus fill your heart with joy?

□ Gifts for the King of Kings

Matthew 2:11



Say: Have you ever received a particularly meaningful gift—something you cherished because it was valuable or came from a special person? As we dig into Matthew 2:11, we begin to understand the significance of the gifts given to Jesus by the Wise Men. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The first reaction of the Wise Men upon seeing Jesus was to bow down and worship Him. This scene is especially meaningful and prophetic when one notes the connection to Psalm 72:10–11 and Isaiah 60:6, which are prophecies that depict Gentiles responding in worship to the King of kings. Indeed, "all the families of the earth [would] be blessed" through the promised Messiah (Genesis 12:3, NLT).

Not only did the Magi worship Jesus, but they "opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts" (Matthew 2:11, NLT). In the Ancient Near East, gift giving was an important part of approaching a superior. The Wise Men's gifts carried additional symbolic significance. Not only were they valuable, but they also alluded to Christ's mission. *Frankincense*—a pungent, yellow gum resin—symbolizes Jesus' deity and His mission as Great High Priest. The word itself means "high quality incense" and is one of the ingredients mentioned in the recipe God gave Moses for mixing sacred incense for tabernacle worship (Exodus 30:34). *Myrrh*—a pleasant-smelling,

brown gum resin—symbolized Jesus’ death and burial. Used for embalming as well as perfume and incense, myrrh is referenced in Mark 15:23 when Jesus was offered “wine drugged with myrrh” to counter His pain (NLT). After His death, Nicodemus (the same Pharisee who had privately interviewed Jesus in John 3) “brought about seventy-five pounds of perfumed ointment made from myrrh and aloes” (John 19:39, NLT). *Gold* symbolizes royalty—a gift fit for the King of kings. In God’s providence, these costly gifts would have provided for the family’s trip to Egypt and their life as refugees there.



Resource Packet Item 3: Jesus Came for All the World

Distribute the worksheet and complete it together. Emphasize the elements of the Christmas story that remind us how Jesus came to reach *everyone*. Discuss ways your class could reach out to lost people in your community.

Discuss

? What gifts can *you* present to Jesus?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: The Christmas story causes us to ask ourselves, “What will I do with Jesus?” Herod rejected Him, but the Wise Men searched for Him, rejoiced to find Him, worshiped Him, and gave Him their very best. How will you respond?

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Seek out an opportunity to tell someone about Jesus—the real reason we celebrate Christmas.
- Take time at the end of class to worship Jesus together as the Wise Men did, giving thanks to Him for coming into the world.
- Ask God to help you display the joy of Christmas all through the year, so people can see the hope you have found in Jesus.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Prince of Peace.
Isaiah 9:2–7

Tuesday:

God Is Savior.
Isaiah 43:1–7

Wednesday:

Christ’s Birth Announced.
Luke 1:26–31

Thursday:

Sought by Shepherds.
Luke 2:8–18

Friday:

The Word Becomes Flesh.
John 1:1–14

Saturday:

Imitate Christ’s Humility.
Philippians 2:5–11

December 31, 2023

LESSON 5

The Christ-Sent Life

Study Text

Matthew 10:1–42

Central Truth

Being sent by Christ is a high privilege and serious responsibility.



Key Verse Matthew 10:16

Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves (KJV).

“Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves” (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will embrace their responsibility to represent Jesus on earth.
- Students will evaluate their level of commitment to Jesus.
- Students will boldly share the gospel with lost people.

Introducing the Study

Say: Jesus called twelve men to be His closest followers, who came to be called *apostles* (meaning “sent ones” or “delegates”). Matthew 10 records Jesus’ instructions to the Twelve for the mission He was sending them on. As we carry out the same mission and proclaim the gospel today, His teachings provide the guidance we need.

Opening Activity—A Story to Share

Ask: What person has had the greatest influence on your life? Share a thirty-second story about that person.

Say: It was probably easy to share a story about someone who greatly impacted your life. Sharing the gospel is as simple as telling the story of your relationship with Jesus. Our mission is to help people find the narrow gate that leads to life, and it often involves forming relationships that open doors to conversation. Telling others how blessed we are to be part of the Kingdom may cause them to be interested in following Jesus as well. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In today’s lesson, we will look at the missional plan Jesus handed down to the disciples. In addition to preparing the Twelve for their immediate mission to a limited audience, Jesus also gave clear instructions for the ongoing evangelistic task assigned to His followers throughout history and until He returns.

Like the disciples, we are sent by Jesus to announce, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 10:7, KJV). And like the disciples, we will encounter persecution and hardship as we obediently take up our crosses and follow Jesus (verse 38). But if we give up our lives for Him—going wherever He sends us—we are promised life eternal (verse 39).

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

Matthew 10:1. And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.

5. These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not:

6. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

7. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

8. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.

12. And when ye come into an house, salute it.

13. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you.

14. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.

16. Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

19. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.

20. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.

24. The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.

25. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?

28. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

29. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.

30. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

31. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.

38. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.

39. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

Matthew 10:1. Jesus called his twelve disciples together and gave them authority to cast out evil spirits and to heal every kind of disease and illness.

5. Jesus sent out the twelve apostles with these instructions: “Don’t go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans,

6. but only to the people of Israel—God’s lost sheep.

7. Go and announce to them that the Kingdom of Heaven is near.

8. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cure those with leprosy, and cast out demons. Give as freely as you have received!”

12. “When you enter the home, give it your blessing.

13. If it turns out to be a worthy home, let your blessing stand; if it is not, take back the blessing.

14. If any household or town refuses to welcome you or listen to your message, shake its dust from your feet as you leave.”

16. “Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves.”

19. “When you are arrested, don’t worry about how to respond or what to say. God will give you the right words at the right time.

20. For it is not you who will be speaking—it will be the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”

24. “Students are not greater than their teacher, and slaves are not greater than their master.

25. Students are to be like their teacher, and slaves are to be like their master. And since I, the master of the household, have been called the prince of demons, the members of my household will be called by even worse names!”

28. “Don’t be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

29. What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it.

30. And the very hairs on your head are all numbered.

31. So don’t be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.”

38. “If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine.

39. If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it.”

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Say: One of the most sought-after positions in any government is the role of international ambassador. Carrying the authority of their home government, ambassadors speak, advocate, and even negotiate on their nation's behalf. As Christians, we are Kingdom ambassadors and represent Jesus to the world. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

“Jesus sent out the twelve apostles” (Matthew 10:5, NLT) to take His message to the towns of Israel. Like them, we have been commissioned by Jesus and sent out to serve as His representatives, carrying the gospel to the world.

In His specific instructions when they were dispatched for the first time, Jesus told the Twelve to focus on the Jewish population. As God's chosen people, they were to be given the first opportunity to hear the good news “that the Kingdom of Heaven is near” (verse 7, NLT). Even throughout the Book of Acts, when the apostles visited a city, they went first to the Jews (usually in their synagogues) to give them the opportunity to turn to Jesus. Only then did they share the gospel with the Gentiles of the area.

The Jews should have been elated to hear the Kingdom was near. After all, they had been waiting centuries for the Messiah's arrival. However, they expected Him to establish an earthly kingdom much like King David's. They thought their deliverer would free Israel from Roman tyranny. But this expectation was a stumbling block to the Jews. Jesus' kingdom would not be established through rebellion or combat but through sacrifice. “Only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death” (Hebrews 2:14, NLT).

In addition to telling them to announce the coming of His kingdom, Jesus gave His disciples the power—and the command—to perform miracles. “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cure those with leprosy, and cast out demons. Give as freely as you have received!” (Matthew 10:8, NLT). Jesus warned the apostles to not take money from the people they ministered to. The benefits of the Kingdom were not for sale. On the other hand, Jesus did not prohibit them from accepting food and shelter. Jesus taught them that a worker is worthy of being compensated for his or her work. Neither the ministers nor the people to whom they ministered should exploit the other.



Resource Packet Item 1: The Worthy Worker

Distribute copies of the worksheet and assign small groups to answer each of the first three questions. Allow the groups to share their takeaways, and then discuss the reflection question as a class.

Discuss

- ? What role do miracles play in introducing God's kingdom to the world?
- ? What do you think is fair compensation for those who devote their life to kingdom ministry?



Say: Jesus sent the apostles to the Jews first, even though He knew some Jews would be resistant. He may also call us to be His witnesses to a tough audience. People must decide for themselves what they will do with their knowledge of the gospel—but our job is to share it. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus told His disciples to select “a worthy person” to stay with in each town they visited (Matthew 10:11, *NLT*)—someone with a good reputation who was receptive to the disciple and his message. They were to stay in the same place until the task in that location was finished. It was normal practice in that time and culture to offer hospitality to strangers; in fact, it was considered an honor. If the disciples had moved from house to house within one community, they would have brought shame to the household or even caused trouble among the community leaders seeking attention. So when they left a certain house, they were to leave the town as well.

To salute a family—as Jesus instructs the disciples to do in verse 12—was to show kindness and customary signs of respect. The usual salutation of the day was the blessing, “Peace be with you.” Much more than a casual blessing, it would have been made in the name of Jesus, who had the power to bring genuine peace to their home and lives. Jesus told the apostles that if the household accepted their message, the blessing of peace would remain. But if they rejected the message of the Kingdom, the blessing would be taken back, because the Prince of Peace was not welcome there.

Jesus knew His disciples would not always be received well by their fellow Jews. It was His priority to give the Jews the first chance to respond to the good news, but if they refused the message, they were to no longer be treated as the chosen people of God.

Verse 14 indicates that when a household or town refused to show hospitality to the disciples or receive their message, the disciples were to “shake its dust from your feet as you leave” (*NLT*). This reflected a common practice of the Jews at that time. After traveling in Gentile towns or regions, they would stop and shake off the dust from their sandals before reentering the Promised Land. This is how the disciples were to treat those who rejected their message—as unbelieving Gentiles. Jesus said a town that rejected the good news would be worse off than Sodom and Gomorrah on the Day of Judgment (verse 15). It is a serious thing to reject a message from God or a messenger He has sent.

Discuss

- ? What lessons can we learn from Jesus’ instructions to His disciples? How can we apply them to our lives?
- ? What is our responsibility as Jesus’ followers toward lost people?

Part 2—Hazards of Being Sent

□ Not *If*, But *When*

Matthew 10:16–20



Say: Jesus shifts His focus from sending the disciples on a specific mission to prophesying concerning the Great Commission. He knows the task of being His ambassador will be dangerous, and He wants His followers to be prepared. Jesus promises God will be with them in the midst of persecution, speaking through them to share the message of Jesus with governors and kings. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus wanted His disciples to know He was sending them into perilous situations—“as sheep among wolves” (Matthew 10:16, NLT). It was not a question of *if* they would be persecuted for His sake, but rather *when*. Today, much of the world is growing increasingly intolerant of the gospel, and many people violently and vocally oppose God, His people, and His message—just as they did in Jesus’ day.

Jesus explained how His followers should approach the dangers awaiting them: They were to be as “wise” (KJV) or “shrewd” (NLT) as snakes and as “harmless as doves.” The Greek word for *wise* or *shrewd* means “prudent.” Rather than being conniving or underhanded, they were to be straightforward and sincere.

Jesus’ warnings were not meant to frighten His disciples—or us. Instead, He was preparing them for the opportunities persecution would bring for advancing the kingdom of heaven. When they faced the persecution, the Holy Spirit would give them the correct words to speak so the effectiveness of their witness would be maximized (verses 19–20).

Discuss

- ? What kind of treatment rises to the level of religious persecution?
- ? Have you ever experienced a dangerous or unexpected situation that opened a door to share the gospel? If so, relate the story to the class.

□ The Kingdom Expands through Persecution

Matthew 10:21–25



Say: Persecution was common in the first century and continues today in many parts of the world. Where persecution of Christians exists, the kingdom of heaven grows. Often, this directly results from Christians fleeing and taking the gospel with them. Note that Jesus’ words in Acts 1:8—that His followers would be His witnesses everywhere, including Judea and Samaria—began to be fulfilled in Acts 8:1 because of “a great wave of persecution. . . ; and all the believers except the apostles were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria” and they “preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went” (verse 4, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus explained to His followers that the world would hate anyone who attempted to expand His kingdom. Satan is the source of this hatred. Jesus said that even family members would turn against one another because of Him. Sadly, parents have

disowned their children, siblings have shunned their believing brothers and sisters, and in some parts of the world, family members have indeed betrayed one another to the point of death for accepting Christ.

Jesus did not conceal the cost of discipleship. Instead, He encouraged His followers to remain faithful when persecuted, promising that “everyone who endures to the end will be saved” (Matthew 10:22, *NLT*).

Persecuted Christians are not always required to keep enduring mistreatment. Jesus instructed His apostles to flee to another town if they are persecuted. Arriving in a new place would allow them to share the gospel with a new audience.



Resource Packet Item 2: Christian Persecution through the Ages

Distribute copies of the information sheet, and review the material with the class. Note that this is merely an overview of persecution against Christians throughout history, not an exhaustive list. Pray together for Christians facing hardship and persecution around the world today.

Jesus said the Son of Man would return before all of the cities of Israel had been reached. There is debate as to His meaning, but the point is that the task of reaching lost people is still before us. We must continue sharing the gospel and inviting people into the Kingdom until Jesus returns.

Discuss

- ? What examples (biblical, historical, or modern) can you give that show how persecution causes the Church to grow?
- ? Read Acts 5:40–42. How can you see Jesus’ instructions from Matthew 10 being carried out in the apostles’ lives?

Part 3—Do Not Be Afraid



□ Boldly Acknowledge Jesus

Matthew 10:26–33

Say: On the Day of Judgment, those who have been faithful to God will be rewarded. No one on earth can take this reward away. Human beings may be able to destroy our bodies, but they cannot touch our eternal souls! When we face persecution to any degree, we must keep our eyes on Jesus, much like the first martyr, Stephen (see Acts 7:55). Let us never be afraid or ashamed to be counted as a follower of Christ. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus wants everyone to have the opportunity to enter His kingdom, and He expects His followers to confidently share the gospel message with those who need to hear. Although He warned His followers that the enemy would go to any lengths to stop them, He did not want to instill fear in their hearts. Three times in these verses, He told the disciples, “Don’t be afraid” (Matthew 10:26, 28, 31, *NLT*). Fear of persecution might tempt us to compromise our message, but people who prioritize safety over truth will suffer the consequences of opposing the Kingdom. Even in the midst of persecution, Christians can take comfort in knowing God sees our situation, and He will comfort and strengthen us.

Jesus promises, “Everyone who acknowledges me publicly here on earth, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven” (verse 32, *NLT*). On the other hand, anyone who denies Jesus on earth will be denied by Jesus in heaven. As He would tell His disciples near the end of His ministry, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me” (John 14:6, *NLT*).

Discuss

- ? How do you think you would respond if someone tried to force you to deny Jesus—even threatening your family?
- ? What prevents Christians from boldly proclaiming the gospel to the world?

□ Fully Committed

Matthew 10:34–42



Say: Jesus was fully aware that people who were committed to His kingdom would experience conflict with friends and even family members. But following Jesus requires complete allegiance. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The world stands in opposition to the Kingdom. Quoting the prophet in Micah 7:6, Jesus declared that He, as the Messiah, had come to set those who followed Him against those who did not, regardless of their relationship (Matthew 10:35–36).

Jesus confronted His followers’ concerns about the cost of being His disciples. They would likely lose family relationships—and even their lives—because of their shift in allegiance from family religious tradition to the message of Christ. Following Jesus is not easy, and He wanted His followers to weigh the cost. He also wanted them to understand that paying this price would lead to fulfillment and purpose on earth and eternal life in heaven.

Opposition is often the cross believers must bear to obediently follow Christ (verse 38). It means death to self, family relationships, and a familiar lifestyle. Yet whatever a person sacrifices to follow Christ is worth it, even their own life (verse 39).

Resource Packet Item 3: Facing Opposition

Distribute the worksheet, and have the class complete it. Then discuss the examples of opposition they share.

In verses 40–42, Jesus picks up the practical travel instructions of verses 11–14. He explains how valuable the disciples are to God. The Father cares about their physical welfare as they do the work of spreading the gospel. Those who receive them with hospitality and generosity—accepting their message and acknowledging the One who sent them—will take part in their reward.

Discuss

- ? In what ways does a believer take up their cross and follow Jesus?
- ? How can our response to opposition contribute to Kingdom growth?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: As followers of Jesus, our primary purpose is to accurately represent Him to the world. Historically, religion has been used to control people, and many resist the gospel because they don't truly understand the freedom it brings. Satan uses the world system to trap people in all kinds of sin, but Jesus offers the only way out. Sharing this message of hope is our mission. It is why Jesus sends us out "as sheep among wolves" (Matthew 10:16, NLT). And when we obey—going wherever He sends us—He promises His strength and presence in this life and eternal rewards in the next.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Spend additional time in prayer, asking Jesus to help you know Him better so you can accurately represent Him with your words and actions.
- Assess your willingness to stand firm when facing persecution. Determine to proclaim the gospel no matter the cost.
- Accept the responsibility of being a "sent one" and share the gospel with at least one person this week.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Sent to Preserve Life.
Genesis 45:1–8

Tuesday:

Prayer to Be Sent.
Isaiah 6:1–8

Wednesday:

Sent to Rebellious People.
Ezekiel 2:1–7

Thursday:

The Twelve Sent.
Luke 9:1–6

Friday:

The Seventy Sent.
Luke 10:1–9

Saturday:

Missionaries Sent.
Acts 13:1–5

January 7, 2024

LESSON 6

Growth of the Kingdom

Study Text

Matthew 13:1–43

Central Truth

God's kingdom grows as the Word of God is planted in people's hearts.



Key Verse Matthew 13:23

He that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty (KJV).

“The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God's word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!” (NLT)

Learning Objectives:

- Students will prepare their hearts to be fertile ground for the gospel to grow.
- Students will be confident that the kingdom of heaven will triumph over evil, regardless of how dire the situation looks.
- Students will understand the growth process of the kingdom of God and become aware of the influence it is having in the world.

Introducing the Study

Say: Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a lot of things—including the process of farming. If a farmer's seed is good and the soil is ready, growth should be a natural process. As Paul would later explain, people plant and water seeds, but only God can make them grow (1 Corinthians 3:6).

Opening Activity—How Does Your Garden Grow?

Ask: What successes or failures have you experienced in growing a garden? If you have a “green thumb,” what tips help you get the greatest return from your seeds?

Say: Some people seem to be able to take a plant that's nearly dead and make it flourish. Then there are others who find the hardiest, healthiest plants—only to watch them die in a matter of weeks. In gardening, there's a lot going on beneath the surface, and the quality of the seed and preparation of the soil can mean the difference between success or failure. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Today's lesson emphasizes a series of illustrations Jesus used to explain the growth dynamics of the kingdom of heaven. The enemy's goal is to keep the kingdom of heaven as small and ineffective as possible. He is not satisfied to coexist with the Kingdom; he wants to snuff it out. That's why people who make steps toward the Kingdom are often targeted by his deceptive strategies. But the good news is that the Kingdom will continue to grow despite the resistance of the world and hindrance of the enemy. At the right time, judgment will come, and the victorious kingdom of God will be fully realized.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

Matthew 13:18. Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.

19. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

20. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;

21. Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

22. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

23. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

36. Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.

37. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;

38. The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one;

39. The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

40. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.

41. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;

31. Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field:

32. Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

33. Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

Matthew 13:18. “Now listen to the explanation of the parable about the farmer planting seeds:

19. The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message about the Kingdom and don’t understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts.

20. The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy.

21. But since they don’t have deep roots, they don’t last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God’s word.

22. The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who hear God’s word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is produced.

23. The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God’s word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!”

36. Then, leaving the crowds outside, Jesus went into the house. His disciples said, “Please explain to us the story of the weeds in the field.”

37. Jesus replied, “The Son of Man is the farmer who plants the good seed.

38. The field is the world, and the good seed represents the people of the Kingdom. The weeds are the people who belong to the evil one.

39. The enemy who planted the weeds among the wheat is the devil. The harvest is the end of the world, and the harvesters are the angels.

40. Just as the weeds are sorted out and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the world.

41. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will remove from his Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.”

31. Here is another illustration Jesus used: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field.

32. It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants; it grows into a tree, and birds come and make nests in its branches.”

33. Jesus also used this illustration: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman used in making bread. Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough.”

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Say: Matthew wrote that “Jesus always used stories and illustrations . . . when speaking to the crowds. In fact, he never spoke to them without using such parables. This fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet: ‘I will speak to you in parables. I will explain things hidden since the creation of the world’” (13:34–35, *NLT*). Jesus’ disciples and the crowds following Him were not the only ones who would benefit from the wisdom and insights in His parables; they are for us as well. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Greek word for *parable* means “comparison” and is related to another Greek word meaning “to throw alongside.” In other words, Jesus would tell a parable to throw a relatable story alongside the truth He was about to teach. To interpret parables correctly, it’s important to understand that each parable teaches one main point or principle. All the extra details are not as important as the overall meaning.

Matthew 13 includes a sample of parables Jesus told in one afternoon. He exited the house in Capernaum where He had been staying and “sat beside the lake” (verse 1, *NLT*) or Sea of Galilee. It is clear from 12:38–50 that Jesus had been teaching earlier that same day. Not only was He confronted by religious teachers asking for proof of His authority, but His family came to see Him, likely intending to interrupt His ministry (see Mark 3:21).

A large crowd gathered around Jesus by the Sea of Galilee, and He got into a boat to continue teaching the people who stood along the shore. He had often taught in the synagogues, but because He was facing opposition from the religious leaders, perhaps an outdoor venue removed Him from their “territory” or simply allowed more space for the crowd to gather. It is also possible people simply recognized Jesus resting by the lake and gathered to hear what He might say.

At this point in His ministry, Jesus was differentiating between the way He spoke to large crowds and the way He taught His close disciples. Soon, the disciples would carry on His work, and He was preparing them by explaining the Kingdom more thoroughly. Also, the opposition He was facing might have made it prudent for Him to be a bit more ambiguous when speaking publicly. Had He spoken plainly, His enemies could have more easily used His words against Him.

Matthew first records a story Jesus told about a farmer who scattered seed in his field. The same story is told in Luke 8:4–15. While there are some differences in the way the two authors relate the parable, its message is the same. Many people in the crowd probably did not understand the parable’s meaning at the time, though it may have become clear later. Even the disciples—who had followed Jesus for some time—needed Him to explain it.

People could relate to this parable because Jesus referred to common agricultural practices of the day. A farmer would break up the soil and scatter seed in his field. Then, holding the container of seed with one hand and tossing handfuls with the other, he would often be followed by a plow to cover the seed. The farmer was not being careless or wasteful when some of his seed landed in thorny, rocky, or hard-packed areas; he was simply making sure the seed reached every available

inch of soil. Any seed that fell on the footpaths separating the individual fields would be exposed to hungry birds and never have a chance to take root and grow (Matthew 13:4). The “stony places” (verse 5, *KJV*) where some of the seed fell did not refer to soil full of rocks but to a larger “underlying rock” (*NLT*) covered with a thin layer of soil. Seeds in this area would sprout quickly and then die quickly. Still more seeds would fall among thorns, which would grow faster and thicker than the tender plants, eventually choking them out (verse 7). But all was not lost. The farmer had not sown his seed in vain, because some fell on fertile soil and produced a good crop. Jesus did not explain the parable to the crowd, instead waiting until later to interpret its spiritual meaning for His disciples.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think Jesus used farming imagery in this case (instead of fishing imagery, household imagery, etc.)?
- ? How do you think you would have responded if you had been in the crowd?

□ The Meaning Revealed

Matthew 13:18–23



Say: Not everyone in the crowd that day was ready for the deep truths Jesus taught. Some may have been hard-hearted. Some may have been listening just because they enjoyed Jesus’ stories. While we don’t know how individuals in the crowd responded, we do know Jesus took time to explain the parable in detail to His disciples. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus told the disciples that they were “blessed” (Matthew 13:16, *NLT*)—not because they were superior to anyone else, but because they were eager to learn from Him. This blessing is also available to us. Jesus’ teachings can have an ever-expanding influence in our lives as we meditate on them and rely on the illumination of the Holy Spirit—who Jesus promised would “guide you into all truth” (John 16:13).

Many believe this parable—which the King James Version renders “the parable of the sower” (verse 18)—should be titled “The Parable of the Soils.” One of the differences between Matthew and Luke’s accounts of this story is their explanation of the seed. In both Gospels, the farmer scatters seed in four distinct soils, but Matthew groups the seed and soil together when describing the four levels of receptivity, while Luke clearly states, “The seed is God’s word” (Luke 8:11, *NLT*).

Some people—represented by the footpath—hear the message of the Kingdom but don’t understand it. The Word does not take root in their hearts. Others—like the shallow, rocky soil—are initially receptive to the message, but when persecution comes, they quickly fall away and return to their life of sin. Still others—like the soil filled with thornbushes—accept the message of the Kingdom, but their competing loyalties choke out their commitment to God. The last group—represented by the good soil—have tender hearts that understand and receive the Kingdom message. The Holy Spirit multiplies their fruitfulness, causing them grow and reach others for the Kingdom.



Resource Packet Item 1: Discipleship Strategies

Distribute the worksheet, divide your class into small groups, and give them a few minutes to strategize. Then have the groups share their ideas.

Discuss

- ? In your own experiences of sharing the gospel, have you encountered people who were hard-packed soil, rocky soil, thorny soil, or good soil? What was their response?
- ? How have you seen God multiply the harvest of the Kingdom?

Part 2—Wheat and Tares Growing Together

□ The Deceptive Enemy

Matthew 13:24–30



Say: The next parable Matthew records also relates to agriculture, but this time the focus is on the enemy of the Kingdom. We know Jesus defeated Satan once and for all—triumphing over death and the grave (Revelation 1:18). But we also know the enemy of our souls is actively working to discourage and distract believers, intending to keep as many people as possible from coming to Jesus. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As He had with the previous parable, Jesus told the story of the wheat and the “weeds” (Matthew 13:25, NLT; “tares,” KJV) to the crowd and then interpreted it for His disciples later. He began the story: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a farmer who planted good seed in his field” (verse 24, NLT). That night, while his workers were sleeping, the owner’s enemy attempted to destroy the freshly planted crop. It would not be feasible to remove the wheat seeds, so the enemy sowed weeds on top of the wheat instead. The kind of weed Jesus referred to is the bearded darnel, which is still commonly found among fields of grain in the Middle East. It resembles wheat in its early stages, so it could have grown enough before it was discovered to be well established in the field.

When the owner heard about the weeds in his wheat field, he immediately knew what had happened. He told the workers not to try to salvage the crop by pulling up the weeds, understanding that would cause even more damage to the wheat. The owner’s solution was to let the weeds and the wheat grow up together. At harvesttime, the weeds would be bundled up and burned. Despite his enemy’s evil intentions, the crop would be saved.

Jesus’ disciples sometimes behaved like the workers in His parable who suggested pulling up the weeds as soon as they appeared among the wheat. James and John, for example, wanted to call down fire from heaven to consume a Samaritan village that refused to welcome Jesus on His way to Jerusalem (see Luke 9:51–55). Peter was later reprimanded by Jesus for cutting off the ear of the high priest’s servant Malchus in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested (see John 18:10–11). While we may be eager to get rid of the evil growing around us, we must submit to God’s direction and timing. Paul addresses this issue further in Romans 12:14–21: “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. . . . Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (verses 19, 21, KJV; see Deuteronomy 32:35).

Discuss

- ? What deceptive tactics does Satan use to reduce our effectiveness in expanding the Kingdom?
- ? Has the Holy Spirit ever stopped you when you were about to uproot a perceived evil on your own? If so, share the experience with the class.



□ The Victorious Kingdom

Matthew 13:36–43

Say: When the disciples did not fully grasp this parable, Jesus did not reprimand them for their lack of understanding. Instead, He patiently explained the story’s significance, assuring them His Kingdom would endure regardless of the enemy’s attempts to destroy it. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus used the term “Son of Man” (Matthew 13:37, *NLT*) to identify himself as the farmer in the story. The field represents the world, while the good seed being sown stands for the people who have become part of the Kingdom (verse 38). Jesus plants His followers in the world to establish and advance God’s work on earth. The weeds in the story are “people who belong to the evil one” (*NLT*). Satan is the one who sows the weeds among the wheat, and they serve him, living according to his standards. They do not want to give up their authority in the world and will do anything to thwart the advancement of God’s kingdom. Satan often attacks believers directly, but when that doesn’t work, he uses more subtle methods.

Jesus tolerates this evil infiltration for a while, but there will come a day when He will “send his angels, and they will remove from his Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil” (verse 41, *NLT*). Those who have served Satan will be uprooted and thrown “into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (verse 42, *NLT*). Just as the wheat grew alongside the weeds in Jesus’ parable, He calls us to live and grow in this world and make a positive difference. In the end, we will receive the reward He has promised: to “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of [our] Father” (verse 43, *KJV*).



Resource Packet Item 2: Deceptive Tactics of Satan

Distribute the worksheet, and have students list their ideas for withstanding the enemy’s attacks. Then invite them to share with the class.

Discuss

- ? In what ways could this parable help you avoid judging others?
- ? Elsewhere in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus compared His followers to salt, light, sheep, wedding guests, wineskins, and fish—just to name a few. Why do you think He chose to add this comparison to wheat in a field?

Part 3—The Growing Kingdom

□ From Smallest to Greatest

Matthew 13:31–32



Say: Jesus used two short parables to describe the increasing size and influence of His kingdom. In each case, the beginnings seem quite insignificant, but the expectations are remarkable. Looking back over the last two thousand years, we can see that Jesus' words proved true. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus first compares the Kingdom to a mustard seed, which is one of the smallest seeds many of His listeners would have recognized. Jewish rabbis of that time commonly used the mustard seed as a symbol of anything extremely small. When planted and tended to, mustard seeds would grow into plants more than ten feet tall in just a few short weeks. The same birds that could have consumed the seeds were supported on its branches. Jesus understandably calls the full-grown plant a “tree” (verse 32), which was a symbol for a flourishing kingdom that protected its subjects (see Ezekiel 17:22–24; 31:2–6; Daniel 4:10–12, 20–22).

The Kingdom that Jesus came to establish started with only a handful of people. From twelve disciples to 120 meeting together after Jesus' ascension to three thousand new believers on the Day of Pentecost, the Church multiplied quickly, eventually expanding into all parts of the known world. The kingdom of heaven could not be thwarted. As Jesus himself had said, “I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it” (Matthew 16:18, NLT). There will always be opposition to Christianity, likely increasing in frequency and severity, but the Church will continue to grow and lives will continue to be transformed until Jesus' return.



Resource Packet Item 3: Small Beginnings

Distribute the worksheet, and discuss the exponential growth of the Kingdom up until now and going forward.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think Jesus included this parable among the others He told that day?
- ? How can you contribute to kingdom growth in your local community—either individually or as a class?

□ Ever-Increasing Influence

Matthew 13:33



Say: Jesus' second short parable described the influence of the small group of disciples Jesus left to spread His kingdom. Once again it begins small and grows exponentially. Jesus encouraged His followers that even though they began as a only a few people, they would make a great difference in their world. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus introduced a new perspective on the word *yeast*. Everywhere else in Scripture, yeast was used to represent some form of wickedness, but here Jesus used it in a good sense, equating the effects of yeast with the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus highlights the smallness of yeast compared to the lump of dough. The yeast permeates the entire lump of dough changing its composition. This is a slow and gradual process. The Jews expected the kingdom of heaven to come quickly and powerfully, overturning the Roman government, but the Kingdom does not stand in opposition to Rome. The kingdom of heaven is interested in overcoming a much greater enemy. It has expanded greatly over time and its influence can be seen by anyone willing to observe.

Discuss

- ? What are some specific ways the yeast has impacted the world today?
- ? How has the illustration of the yeast been a reality in your life?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: As followers of Jesus, we have reason for hope. The kingdom of heaven is gaining citizens every day as those who are a part of it accept their assignments and actively live out the gospel and share the good news with others. We must not stay huddled together with fellow Christians in our local church buildings fearing the world. We must actively engage with the others and show them the power of our Lord and Savior.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Evaluate the condition of your soil by asking yourself how the kingdom of heaven has expanded as a result of your citizenship.
- Share the hope we have that the kingdom of heaven will triumph over evil with those experiencing anxiety about the current state of society.
- Look for ways to be an active agent of positive influence in the world infusing the principles of the kingdom of heaven wherever possible.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

God's Growing Nation.
Exodus 1:7–12

Tuesday:

The Lord's Growing Prophet.
1 Samuel 3:16–21

Wednesday:

The Righteous Keep On Growing.
Psalm 92:12–15

Thursday:

The Growing Church.
Acts 2:41–47

Friday:

Grow Up Into Christ.
Ephesians 4:11–16

Saturday:

Grow in Christlike Character.
2 Peter 1:1–10

January 14, 2024

LESSON 7

Community in the Kingdom

Study Text

Matthew 18:1–35

Central Truth

Church fellowship is Kingdom fellowship.



Key Verse Matthew 18:15

If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother (KJV).

“If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back” (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand Jesus’ definition of *greatness*.
- Students will practice biblical principles when the need for discipline in the church arises.
- Students will forgive those who offend them and embrace unity.

Introducing the Study

Say: In the classic television program, *Gilligan’s Island*, seven people were shipwrecked and stranded on a deserted island. The individuals came from various segments of society, and the show depicted their struggles to live and work together so they could survive. The groups needed to swiftly deal with any problems that arose to keep peace and prevent disaster.

Opening Activity—Communities

Ask: *What communities are you part of?* Examples include family, workplace, church, friend group, or sports team. Then ask: *What factors make these communities work well or poorly together?*

Say: By using the term *kingdom*, Jesus was describing His followers as a community. A kingdom is made up of different kinds of people working together to serve one sovereign. Likewise, the Christian life is not a solo activity. As we serve God *together*, we enjoy the benefits and encounter the challenges of living in *community*. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In today’s lesson, we will consider the community aspects of the kingdom of God. There are tensions in any community, and even with God’s grace, people come to the Kingdom with issues. Some seek to be in control. Others refuse to submit to the standards of the Kingdom. Sometimes the conflict goes beyond hurt feelings and involves physical or financial damage. However, local Christian communities must learn to use God’s wisdom to resolve issues before they thwart their Kingdom impact.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

Matthew 18:1. At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

2. And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,

3. And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

4. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

15. Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

16. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

23. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

24. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.

27. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

28. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

29. And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

30. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

32. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:

33. Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?

34. And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

35. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

Matthew 18:1. About that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?"

2. Jesus called a little child to him and put the child among them.

3. Then he said, "I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven.

4. So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven."

15. "If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back.

16. But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses."

23. "Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him.

24. In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars."

27. "Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt.

28. But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment.

29. His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it,' he pleaded.

30. But his creditor wouldn't wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full."

32. "Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me.

33. Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?'

34. Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt.

35. That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart."

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)

Part 1—Greatness in the Kingdom

□ Be Humble

Matthew 18:1–5



Say: Sometimes a person asks a question without realizing its significance.

This was the case when the disciples asked Jesus who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. They may have been asking about their ranking as disciples or their importance compared to His other followers. But instead of praising those who had worked great miracles or made great sacrifices, Jesus explained that the greatest in the Kingdom were those with humble, childlike faith. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus' disciples often misunderstood the values of the Kingdom, and He patiently worked to correct them. It is unclear what their motivation could have been for asking, "Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" (Matthew 18:1, NLT). The Greek term translated "greater" indicates rank or power, and by this point, the disciples had heard enough of Jesus' teaching to know that worldly power has no value in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus intentionally reached out to those who were considered unimportant by society's standards. The disciples must have also seen how Jesus regarded people who promoted themselves and valued status and rank. Yet it appears the disciples had missed the point. Their prideful question revealed they were thinking more like Pharisees than Kingdom citizens. Jesus ignored their request for ranking and chose to address the heart of the matter instead.

Using a readily available example, Jesus called a little child to His side. The fact a child was close by at the time tells us that women and children were among Jesus' followers—another indication that He cared for those whom society deemed as outcast or of little importance. Jesus explained, "Unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven" (verse 3, NLT). Children often exemplify faith, honesty, and humility—all of which are required for the Kingdom.

Jesus added, "Anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven" (verse 4, NLT). Humility is the foundation upon which all other spiritual virtues are built and reflects a sense of dependence on God.

Discuss

- ? In what ways do we sometimes miss the difference between what is valued in the world and what is valued in the kingdom of God?
- ? How have you witnessed childlike faith in someone else's life?

□ Seek the Lost

Matthew 18:6–14



Say: God is concerned with the salvation of every person—not just the people we like—and He notices when His children are wounded. Jesus had strong words for people who tempt others to sin or stand in the way of anyone coming to Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus warned more mature believers to avoid causing His “little ones” to stumble (Matthew 18:6). He was referring not just to children, but to everyone who believes in Him. Anyone who hinders the faith of a humble follower of Jesus will face severe punishment. In fact, Jesus said such a person would be better off having a millstone placed around their neck and being cast into the sea. The crowd listening to Jesus would have been familiar with the Syrian, Greek, and Egyptian practice of capital punishment by drowning, although the Jews never practiced it themselves. Jesus’ point was clear: Leading others into sin has serious consequences. Instead, our respectful treatment of each other should reflect the value God places on every person.

Although believers must be careful not to tempt others, we will each face inevitable temptations because of our own physical and mental desires. Jesus uses strong imagery when He says it would be better to cut off a hand or foot or gouge out an eye than to be subject to the sin they cause (verses 8–9). Jesus was not advocating self-harm; instead, He was using hyperbole (or exaggeration) to make a point. He wanted His listeners to understand the extreme danger of sin.



Resource Packet Item 1: Hyperbole of Jesus

Distribute the worksheet describing Jesus’ use of hyperbole in His teaching. Ask students to complete it in class or at home.

Jesus next tells the Parable of the Lost Sheep, a more complete version of which appears in Luke 15:3–7. Like sheep, the little ones Jesus described need to be with the flock where they can be cared for and continue to grow. If one sheep wanders beyond the flock or even chooses to run away, a good shepherd will leave his or her belongings and seek out the lost one. The shepherd in the story is our example, and Jesus is teaching His followers to pursue those who wander from the faith. His parable doesn’t belittle the ninety-nine who remained faithful but elevates the importance of every individual in the kingdom of heaven. It is not the Father’s will for anyone to be lost, and He delights when people return to Him. The apostle Peter, who probably heard this parable from Jesus himself, later echoed His words by describing the Father as “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9, KJV).

Discuss

- ? In what ways do believers sometimes hinder other people’s faith?
- ? What steps can Christians take to show that everyone is valuable to God?



Part 2—Corrective Discipline in the Church

□ Address Conflict

Matthew 18:15–17

Say: President Ronald Reagan once said, “Peace is not the absence of conflict, but the ability to cope with conflict by peaceful means.”¹ Any time people

1. Ronald Reagan, “Commencement Address” (Eureka College, Eureka, IL, May 9, 1982), www.reaganfoundation.org/ronald-reagan/reagan-quotes-speeches/commencement-address-eureka-college/.

form a community, conflict is inevitable. Jesus knew there would be conflict within the family of God, and He detailed a plan for resolving it in a way that benefits each individual and maintains unity and peace in the local church. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus describes a four-step method for resolving church conflict. (1) If one believer sins against another, the offended person should go privately to the offender and “tell him his fault” (Matthew 18:15, *KJV*). This gives the offender an opportunity to repent and restore the relationship. (2) If the offending party refuses to listen and pursue reconciliation, then the offended party should take one or two others along with them and repeat the process (verse 16). (3) If the individual still refuses to repent and be reconciled, the situation should be brought before the church (verse 17). (4) If the person who has sinned still refuses to respond, he or she should be treated like an unbeliever. If believers follow these steps, the church experiences unity and the Kingdom will expand. If the instructions are ignored, the church will be unhealthy and its mission will be hindered.

Discretion is a key ingredient when following these steps. Most situations can be successfully resolved using just the first step, keeping the issue between the two people who are directly involved. In this way, the little ones Jesus refers to can be gently disciplined and learn to participate in the church community in a healthy, meaningful way. People who make minor errors in judgment as they are growing spiritually should be treated with grace and sometimes these offenses may not even need to be pointed out. As Proverbs 19:11 says, “Sensible people . . . earn respect by overlooking wrongs” (*NLT*). And 1 Corinthians 13:5 (*TLB*) says, “[Love] does not hold grudges and will hardly notice when others do it wrong.”



Resource Packet Item 2: A Christian Response to Wrongdoing

Distribute the worksheet, and divide the class into small groups to discuss the process for restoring Christian fellowship and answer the questions provided. Then ask representatives from each group to share their insights with the class.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think Jesus placed a high value on conflict resolution?
- ? If the process Jesus provided for dealing with conflict has been followed without a successful resolution, what is the redemptive value of removing an unrepentant person from the church?

□ Church Unity

Matthew 18:18–20



Say: At this point in His teaching, Jesus’ language shifted to indicate He was now directly addressing the twelve disciples. Jesus had already given Peter the power to bind and loosen (Matthew 16:19), and that authority was now extended to all of the apostles, who functioned as the church (or “called out ones”) at that time. Eventually this authority would be passed to the Church at large (although it functions differently from the way some have taught and believed). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus continued His teaching about church discipline by stating, “Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 18:18, *KJV*). When a local church recognizes that the one who sinned has listened and repented, the church acknowledges and acts because their brother or sister has already been loosed or set free in heaven. However, if the person refuses to repent, the church has the authority to declare and act on the fact that the sinful one has already been bound in heaven and must be considered as outside the body of Christ.

In verse 19, Jesus extended the authority of believers to the issue of prayer. Within the context of His teaching on church discipline, Jesus was emphasizing that such matters must be covered in prayer and that prayers offered by His followers would be answered. The requirement in this verse was that the believers be unified, while in John 14:13, Jesus specified that the requests be made “in my name . . . so that the Son can bring glory to the Father” (*NLT*). Jesus was not providing a formula or blanket statement that guaranteed self-centered requests would be granted. Rather, He was explaining the limitless power of prayer offered by unified believers focused on the Kingdom.

Jesus concluded this portion of His message with a promise that He would be present when “two or three gather together as my followers” (Matthew 18:20, *NLT*). Not only did this indicate His deity—only God is omnipresent—but it also demonstrated the value of believers regularly gathering in His name. Anytime Jesus’ followers unite to worship and serve Him, together they become a temple where the Holy Spirit dwells (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Discuss

- ? In what ways have you heard Matthew 18:18–20 used out of context?
- ? How have you seen the power of a unified church impact their world?



Part 3—Forgiveness in the Kingdom

□ The Mercy of God Displayed

Matthew 18:21–28

Say: After Jesus’ discussion of conflict resolution and corrective discipline, Peter asked about the limits of forgiveness. Jesus responded with another parable describing the way radical forgiveness reflects the heart of God. Before we can freely forgive others as God requires, we must recognize how freely He has forgiven us. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Peter asked a logical follow-up question to Jesus’ teaching about correction and reconciliation. “Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?” (Matthew 18:21, *NLT*). The Pharisees taught that people should only be required to forgive someone three times, so Peter was being generous by offering sevenfold forgiveness. However, Jesus was far more generous. His figure of speech—“seventy times seven” (verse 22, *NLT*)—implies there is no limit to the number of times we should forgive fellow believers. If we expect the Father to exercise unlimited forgiveness toward us, how could we offer anything less to others?

The setting of Jesus' Parable of the Unforgiving Debtor was a royal court to which a king would call his subjects to account for what they had borrowed from him. One individual owed the king ten thousand talents—equivalent to 340 tons of silver, worth millions of dollars today. The man would never have been able to repay such an enormous debt. When the king realized he would never get full payment, he decided to cut his losses by selling the debtor, his family, and all his possessions. This was well within his rights as king.

Hearing his sentence, the debtor fell before the king and desperately begged him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all" (verse 26, *KJV*). This was a promise everyone in the room knew he couldn't keep, even if he worked toward it for the rest of his life.

The king seemed to dismiss the man's promise, instead showing mercy in three ways: setting him free, forgiving the debt in full, and returning him to his place of responsibility. Essentially, the king restored his life and his hope. One would think such an act of mercy would cause the debtor to learn his lesson and serve the king with loyalty and gratitude.



Resource Packet Item 3: Forgiveness Isn't Easy!

Distribute the case study, and ask someone to read it aloud. Then discuss the questions together.

Discuss

- ? If you were one of the followers in the crowd who heard Jesus tell this parable, how would you have felt at this point in the story?
- ? How has God restored your life and your hope? How can you use that testimony to reach others?

□ The Effects of Unforgiveness

Matthew 18:29–35



Say: When someone hurts us, we are often tempted to harden our hearts or even seek retribution, forgetting the magnitude of God's forgiveness and grace toward us. Unwillingness to forgive demonstrates selfishness and a rebellious attitude, and it carries severe spiritual consequences. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In the next scene in Jesus' parable, the forgiven debtor searched out another servant who owed him one hundred denarii—equivalent to one hundred days' wages, worth a few thousand dollars today. Although the debt was a fraction of what had been canceled for him, the forgiven man grabbed the other servant by the throat and "demanded instant payment" (verse 28, *NLT*).

The second servant made the same request that the first servant had made: "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all" (verse 29, *KJV*). Yet the forgiven man refused to extend the same mercy he had so willingly received from the king. Instead, "he had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full" (verse 30, *NLT*). The other servants noticed his hypocrisy and reported the event

to the king, who retracted his mercy. The once-forgiven servant was sent to prison to be tortured until the debt was paid in full. No doubt, it was a lifetime sentence.

Jesus concluded the parable with a stern warning to His followers—both then and now. We have been forgiven an insurmountable debt of sin, and we must extend the same mercy to others. If we withhold forgiveness, Jesus says we will suffer the same punishment as the unforgiving debtor in His parable. Put simply, “if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins” (6:15, NLT).

Discuss

- ? Why do you think Jesus taught about forgiveness so intently?
- ? What does a Christian’s unwillingness to forgive reveal about his or her heart?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Church fellowship is Kingdom fellowship. Believers must live by kingdom principles in order to thrive in community. Humility is one of God’s requirements for His children. Instead of seeking positions of honor, we are to submit ourselves and willingly serve the King. When others inevitably violate kingdom standards, we must resist the temptation to stir up strife, choosing instead to use the process Jesus described to maintain unity. Those who have caused hurt should seek forgiveness, and those who have been hurt should show mercy. This kind of community life will increase our effectiveness, allowing us to reach new people and bring them into the Kingdom.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Evaluate your desire for power and position in the local church and resolve to show humility.
- Avoid gossip and follow the process of biblical church discipline when someone in the fellowship violates kingdom principles.
- Consider those close to you who have hurt you and choose to forgive them just as God has forgiven you.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Convocations for God’s People.
Leviticus 23:1–8

Tuesday:

God’s People Celebrating.
Esther 9:20–28

Wednesday:

Worship in the Great Congregation.
Psalm 22:22–28

Thursday:

Laborers Together with God.
1 Corinthians 3:1–9

Friday:

Share Burdens and Do Good.
Galatians 6:1–10

Saturday:

Rules for Right Living.
Ephesians 4:25–32

January 21, 2024

LESSON 8

The King Is Coming

Study Text

Matthew 24:1 through 25:46

Central Truth

Jesus Christ came, and He will come again.



Key Verse Matthew 24:3

Tell us, when shall these things be?
and what shall be the sign of thy coming,
and of the end of the world (KJV)?

“Tell us, when will all this happen?
What sign will signal your return and
the end of the world” (NLT)?

Learning Objectives:

- Students will examine Jesus’ teachings about His second coming and the end of the world.
- Students will commit or recommit to be ready for Jesus’ return at any time.
- Students will rejoice in the glorious inheritance awaiting every believer.

Introducing the Study

Say: Over the past several weeks, we have considered Jesus as newborn Messiah, kingdom Teacher, faithful Master, evangelistic Sender, and Head of the Church. Our study of Matthew’s Gospel concludes today as we celebrate Jesus, our soon-coming King.

Opening Activity—Company Is Coming!

Ask: If you could invite your favorite actor, author, or musician to your house for dinner, whom would you choose? How would you prepare? Would you make extra effort because of their VIP status?

Say: Jesus promised He would one day return to earth in physical form. We don’t know when He will arrive, but thankfully, He told us how to get ready for His coming. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

After triumphantly entering Jerusalem on Sunday and clearing the temple of money changers on Monday, Jesus spent the Tuesday before His crucifixion teaching in the temple. When the Pharisees and Sadducees questioned Him, “Jesus knew their evil motives” (Matthew 22:18, NLT). He denounced their hypocrisy in front of the crowds (23:1–36) and then left the temple for the last time with the words, “Do you see all these buildings? I tell you the truth, they will be completely demolished. Not one stone will be left on top of another” (24:2, NLT).

Jesus and His followers then went to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples asked Him to explain the meaning of His comments at the temple. “Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” (verse 3, KJV). His answer is recorded in Matthew 24 and 25—also known as the Olivet Discourse.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

Matthew 24:27. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

31. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

36. But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

37. But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

38. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,

39. And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

44. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.

25:31. When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.

33. And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

34. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

35. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

36. Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

37. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

38. When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

39. Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

40. And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Matthew 24:27. “For as the lightning flashes in the east and shines to the west, so it will be when the Son of Man comes.”

31. “And he will send out his angels with the mighty blast of a trumpet, and they will gather his chosen ones from all over the world—from the farthest ends of the earth and heaven.”

36. “However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows.

37. “When the Son of Man returns, it will be like it was in Noah’s day.

38. In those days before the flood, the people were enjoying banquets and parties and weddings right up to the time Noah entered his boat.

39. People didn’t realize what was going to happen until the flood came and swept them all away. That is the way it will be when the Son of Man comes.”

44. “You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected.”

25:31. “But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne.”

33. “He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left.

34. “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world.

35. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home.

36. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.’

37. “Then these righteous ones will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink?

38. Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing?’

39. When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?’

40. “And the King will say, ‘I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!’”

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Say: Have you ever tried to take a picture of lightning? No matter how powerful the thunderstorm or how fast your reflexes, it's difficult to catch a bolt of lightning in a single frame. Jesus said His coming will be just as sudden and visible, and He explained how to anticipate His return by observing the signs of the times. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Matthew 12, the religious teachers and Pharisees asked Jesus for “signs to prove [His] authority. But Jesus replied, ‘Only an evil, adulterous generation would demand a miraculous sign’” (verses 38–39, *NLT*). Notice how differently He responded to His disciples’ request for another kind of sign—the sign of His coming (24:3). Rather than asking Jesus to prove His power, the disciples were asking for landmarks to signal His return, and Jesus provided a lengthy, detailed answer. He wanted His followers—including us—to be prepared, promising “the one who endures to the end will be saved” (verse 13, *NLT*).

Although His arrival will be lightning fast, Jesus told the disciples there would be clear indications “the end is near” (verse 28, *NLT*). Just as people usually spot vultures flying high overhead before noticing the carcass they are circling, we will observe certain signs taking place before we see Jesus return to earth. There will be great disruption in the heavens (see Isaiah 13:9–10; 34:4) and “great earthquakes, and there will be famines and plagues in many lands, and there will be terrifying things and great miraculous signs from heaven” (Luke 21:11, *NLT*).

Then Jesus will fulfill His promise with one final sign: “The Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30, *NLT*; see Daniel 7:13). This sign will be visible to everyone on earth, even those who are not looking for His appearing, and it will indicate the time of human decision has passed. Those who are not prepared will mourn when Jesus returns, but there will be rejoicing when the angels “gather his chosen ones from all over the world” (Matthew 24:31, *NLT*). Many believe Jesus was moving backward in His prophetic comments in verse 31, speaking about the Rapture, or gathering of true believers which will precede the Great Tribulation and Christ’s second coming in glory. It is important to note that Jesus’ aim in this passage was not to give an exact progression of events, times, or seasons. He frequently followed the pattern of Old Testament prophets, speaking of one aspect of His coming and then another, not always in order.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think Jesus waited to describe the signs of His return until He had left the temple and was alone with His disciples on the Mount of Olives?
- ? Paul refers to the Second Coming as our “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13, *KJV*). How does the promise of Jesus’ return give you hope?



□ Like the Days of Noah

Matthew 24:36–39

Say: Some days start out normal and end up being life-changing. Maybe you meet your future spouse, get a big promotion, or receive news of a family member's death. For many people, the day Jesus returns will start like any other. By the time they realize what has happened, it will be too late to surrender their lives to Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

At this point in His explanation, Jesus provided a straight answer to the disciples' original question: "When will all this happen?" (verse 3, NLT). He responded, "No one knows the day or hour when these things will happen" (verse 36, NLT). Luke adds, "The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know" (Acts 1:7, NLT). While scholars have debated the exact meaning of Matthew 24:36 (particularly the nature of the Son's knowledge), we can be sure of Jesus' point: Humans do not—and *cannot*—know the exact timing of His return.

However, in God's mercy, we *can* sense the nearness of Jesus' coming—if, and only if, we observe the signs. Jesus compared the time of His return with the days of Noah, when "the LORD observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil" (Genesis 6:5, NLT). Although wickedness on earth is indeed rampant in these last days, the purpose of Jesus' comparison to the days of Noah was to illustrate the way people would continue to ignore the signs of what was coming. Despite Noah's witness to the unbelievers around him during his ark-building project (see Hebrews 11:7), life on earth continued as normal in the days leading up to the Flood. There were weddings and dinner parties "right up to the time Noah entered his boat. People didn't realize what was going to happen until the flood came and swept them all away. That is the way it will be when the Son of Man comes" (Matthew 24:38–39, NLT).



Resource Packet Item 1: Living in the End Times

Distribute the worksheet for students to take home. Encourage them to prayerfully reflect on Peter's end-time instructions and think of ways they can put them into practice as they wait for Jesus' return.

Discuss

- ? How is the attitude described in James 4:13–16 similar to Jesus' depiction of life in the days of Noah?
- ? How can believers stay vigilant and live with an expectancy of the Second Coming while still taking care of the business of daily life?



Part 2—Be Prepared for Christ's Coming

□ Reward for Readiness

Matthew 24:44–47

Say: Jesus used another illustration to show how important it is to get ready and stay ready for His return—which will happen "when least expected" (Matthew 24:44, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The limitations and uncertainty of travel in New Testament times meant it would have been impossible to give an exact return date when leaving on a long journey. Wealthy property owners would often entrust household affairs to diligent, reliable servants during their absence. In verse 45, Jesus describes such a servant as “faithful and wise” (KJV). This servant would be responsible for managing fellow servants and serving meals at the proper times. By conscientiously fulfilling these regular, everyday tasks, the servant would demonstrate his faithfulness. Such a person could be trusted.

Jesus promised this kind of servant would receive a reward for a job well done when the master returned. In fact, he would be put in charge of all the master owned. Jesus describes a similar reward in the Parable of the Talents toward the end of His discourse in Matthew 25: “Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let’s celebrate together!” (verse 23, NLT). Although the two parables’ messages are different—constant readiness in chapter 24 vs. faithful investment in chapter 25—the wise servant’s reward is comparable in each. As followers of Jesus, we are also promised a reward if we endure: “They will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him” (James 1:12, NLT).



Resource Packet Item 2: Heavenly Crowns

Distribute the information sheet, and review the heavenly crowns promised in Scripture to faithful followers of Jesus.

Discuss

- ? What “household affairs” has God entrusted to you? How can you show yourself to be faithful and wise in these areas?
- ? How does the promise of eternal reward motivate you to serve Jesus faithfully here and now?

□ Punishment for Wickedness

Matthew 24:48–51



Say: Are you familiar with the childhood panic of hearing your parents come home before you finished the list of chores they’d given you? There’s an instant feeling of regret that comes from being caught unprepared—with a job poorly done, halfway done, or barely even started. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus contrasted the faithful servant in His parable with another worker who was basically worthless—drawing a clear line between reward and punishment. The evil servant said “in his heart” (Matthew 24:48, KJV) that the master was not coming back after all, and soon his actions followed his thoughts. Peter warned against this kind of faithless thinking: “In the last days scoffers will come, mocking the truth and following their own desires. They will say, ‘What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again?’” (2 Peter 3:3–4, NLT).

Instead of caring for his fellow workers, this evil servant misused his authority,

“beating the other servants, partying, and getting drunk” (Matthew 24:49, NLT). Not only was he taking advantage of his master’s perceived delay, but he was engaging in a lifestyle that dulled his ability to remain alert and ready. When the master returned with no warning, the servant was utterly unprepared.

Jesus said part of the servant’s punishment was being assigned a “place with the hypocrites” (verse 51, NLT). The word *hypocrite* (from the Greek word for “actor” or “stage-player”) indicates the servant had the outward appearance of being a business manager, but he was using the position for his own gain. So instead of enjoying the master’s blessings like the faithful servant, this evil servant would be judged. Jesus’ message is clear: When He returns, He expects to find us serving Him out of genuine love and faithfully carrying out His work.

Discuss

- ? Name some lifestyle choices that dull our readiness and lull us into complacency rather than keeping us alert for Jesus’ return.
- ? How do you respond when people question the promise of Jesus’ return?



Part 3—Inherit the Kingdom

□ The Final Judgment

Matthew 25:31–32

Say: When Jesus came to earth the first time, “he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being . . . he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross” (Philippians 2:7–8, NLT). But when Jesus comes to earth again, He will come with triumph and majesty. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

After describing the faithful servant’s reward and the evil servant’s punishment, Jesus told two parables to underline the importance of preparing for His arrival. In the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids (Matthew 25:1–13), five women were ready when the bridegroom arrived, and five were left outside the door, begging for it to be opened. In the Parable of the Three Servants (verses 14–30), another master left his servants in charge during his travels, entrusting each with a certain amount of money. Two invested wisely, one fearfully buried his portion in the ground, and all were judged accordingly. Again and again, Jesus emphasized the suddenness of His return and the eternal consequences at stake.

As His discourse came to an end, Jesus brought everything together with a picture of the final judgment. In verse 31, He shifted from telling parables for the sake of illustration to describing a literal future event: the Great White Throne Judgment (see Revelation 20:11–15). On that day, Jesus will sit on a throne fit for His divine glory, and the angels escorting Him will bring before Him both believers and unbelievers. At this same event, Jesus will destroy the Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:8), cast both him and the false prophet into the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20), and order Satan to be bound and cast into the abyss for a thousand years (20:1–3). Jesus will then set up His glorious kingdom.

Jesus did not describe every detail of the Second Coming during the Olivet

Discourse. His intent was not to establish an exact time line for the disciples (or us) but to explain the destiny of the human race and the standards by which we will be judged. When all humanity has been gathered at His throne, He will “separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” (Matthew 25:32, NLT). Only Jesus can see the state of each person’s heart, so only He is qualified to say who is righteous and who is wicked and then administer perfect justice.



Resource Packet Item 3: Sorting Things Out

Distribute the worksheet and divide the class in half, assigning one parable to each group. After the groups have read the parables and noted their symbolism, ask them to share their insights, and then discuss the questions as a class.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think Jesus used parables and metaphors to describe real end-time events?
- ? Does the thought of the Final Judgment fill you with joy or dread? How might your reaction indicate your readiness?

□ A Glorious Inheritance

Matthew 25:33–46



Say: When a parent leaves an inheritance to his or her child, it’s based on the relationship they share—not whether the child has earned it. Likewise, our glorious inheritance in heaven isn’t a *payment* for good deeds done; it’s a *gift* from Father to child. As Paul wrote, “Since we are his children, we are . . . heirs of God’s glory” (Romans 8:17, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The sheep at Jesus’ right hand will be the ones who belong to the Father apart from any good deeds they may have done. The works Jesus mentions in Matthew 25:35–36 are outward evidence of the salvation they had already received (see James 3:14–17). Each action He lists reflects the compassionate character of His own ministry. His faithful followers have reached out to “the least of these” (Matthew 25:40)—feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, showing hospitality to strangers, clothing the poor, caring for the sick, and visiting prisoners.

The goats at His left hand have not done these things, signifying their estrangement from the Father and the curse already upon them (see also John 3:18). They did not realize their indifference to the needs of other people was the same as neglecting Jesus himself.

Jesus clearly describes the destiny of each group. The unrighteous will receive punishment in “the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons” (verse 41, NLT). But the righteous will receive eternal life and “inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world” (verse 34, NLT). We have been given fair warning of what awaits us at the Final Judgment, and we each must choose our eternal destiny.

Discuss

- ? Why are compassion and kindness signs of Kingdom living?
- ? How can you find ways to serve others—and thereby serve Jesus—this week?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: On one of the last days of His earthly ministry, Jesus devoted a great deal of time to answering His disciples' questions about His return and the end of the world. Why? Because the stakes could not be higher. Those of us who are ready—eagerly anticipating His arrival at any moment—will receive an eternal reward. Those of us who doubt His promises or ignore the signs—failing to surrender our lives to Christ—will receive eternal punishment and be separated from Him forever.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Examine your heart and ask God to reveal whether you are ready for Jesus' return.
- Demonstrate your love for Jesus by meeting someone's physical needs this week.
- Make a list of friends, family members, and coworkers who are unbelievers, and regularly pray for the Holy Spirit to draw them to Jesus so they are prepared for His return.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

The King's First Coming.
Isaiah 7:13–14; 9:6–7

Tuesday:

The King's Kingdom Foretold.
Daniel 7:9–14

Wednesday:

The King's Second Coming.
Zechariah 14:4–9

Thursday:

The King's Kingdom Is Now.
Luke 17:20–21; Romans 14:17

Friday:

The King's Kingdom Will Come.
Luke 22:14–20, 28–30

Saturday:

The King's Kingdom Is Forever.
Revelation 11:15–19

The Church

Jesus promised, “I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it” (Matthew 16:18, NLT). As we begin this unit of study, let’s remember it is not *our* Church. It is *God’s* Church—the body of Christ. He instituted the Church. He commissioned the Church. He empowered the Church. He expanded the Church. He sustains the Church. And one day, He will return for the Church.

In Ephesians 5, Paul attempted to explain the “profound mystery” of the relationship between Christ and the Church. He chose the closest human relationship for his analogy, but even the example of marriage didn’t capture the depth of Christ’s love for the Church. He “gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word . . . to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (verses 25–27, NLT).

So as we spend the next several weeks studying the Church from multiple angles, we would do well to remember how much Christ loves the Church. Yes, the Church faces unique challenges. Yes, the Church makes mistakes and sometimes fails. But it is God’s best plan for reaching this world with the gospel.

The unit opens in lesson 9 with the origins of the Church, beginning with its Old Testament roots. We then move to Acts 1, where the believers await the empowerment of the Spirit and conduct the earliest church business, including the election of a replacement apostle.

Lesson 10 focuses on the Spirit-empowered Church with an up-close look at Acts 2 and the Day of Pentecost. Not only was the Church filled with power to spread the gospel, but also power to serve God’s people.

Life in the Christian community is the focus of lesson 11. By prioritizing fellowship, unity, and mutual respect, we grow in the faith together.

Lesson 12 centers on some of the ongoing challenges facing the Church. Along with trials from the outside, like persecution and opposition, the Church faces challenges from the inside as well, like false teaching and idleness. The material in this lesson will help students navigate these issues.

The unit concludes with practical guidance on working through church problems—specifically, legalism, prejudice, worldliness, pride, carnality, and immaturity. The key is pursuing God *together* and building relationships through fellowship, prayer, love, and mutual respect.

January 28, 2024

LESSON 9

Origins of the Church

Study Text

Deuteronomy 4:9–14; Psalm 22:22–25;
Acts 1:1–5, 12–26; Acts 7:37–38

Central Truth

The Church has always been part of God's plan.



Key Verse Acts 1:4

Being assembled together with them, [Jesus] commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father (KJV).

Once when he was eating with them, [Jesus] commanded them, “Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised” (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will discover the Church's Old Testament roots to better understand the purpose and ministry of the Church.
- Students will explore and appreciate the value of waiting in prayer, just as the apostles did in Acts 1.
- Students will commit to regular prayer for their own church as it carries out the Great Commission.

Introducing the Study

Say: Abraham Lincoln famously said, “All I am or can be I owe to my angel-mother.”¹ Almost all of us can point to someone like a parent or teacher and say, “They made me who I am today.”

Opening Activity—They Made a Difference

Ask: *Who has made a real difference in your life?* There is a wide array of possible answers, because we can be impacted positively in many ways by the people in our lives. We are each a product of our emotional, relational, social, or spiritual surroundings.

Say: Each of us is shaped by our history. As we begin our study of the Church, we will focus on its origin—specifically how both the Old and New Testaments record God's plans for the Church. From those beginnings, God formed a community in which His people could learn, grow, and thrive. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

When we talk about the beginnings of the Church,² our minds quickly move to the Great Commission in Matthew 28 and the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. These are certainly milestones, but God's plan for the Church began long before the New Testament. Throughout Scripture, He revealed how His people would come together and live in community. By the time we arrive at Acts 2 (which we'll cover in Lesson 10), we will better understand what God intended the Church to be.

1. George Alfred Townsend, *The Real Life of Abraham Lincoln: a talk with Mr. Herndon, His Late Law Partner*, Lincoln Miscellany, Vol. 8 (New York: Publication Office, Bible House, 1867), 6.

2. We use “Church” (capital C) when referring to the universal, worldwide body of Christ and “church” (lowercase c) when referring to a local body of believers or the building where they meet.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Deuteronomy 4:10. Specially the day that thou stoodest before the LORD thy God in Horeb, when the LORD said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children.

Psalm 22:22. I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.

25. My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him.

Acts 7:37. This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear.

38. This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:

Acts 1:4. And, being assembled together with them, [Jesus] commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.

5. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

14. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.

21. Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

22. Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

23. And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

24. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen,

25. That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.

26. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

New Living Translation

Deuteronomy 4:10. “Never forget the day when you stood before the LORD your God at Mount Sinai, where he told me, ‘Summon the people before me, and I will personally instruct them. Then they will learn to fear me as long as they live, and they will teach their children to fear me also.’”

Psalm 22:22. I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters. I will praise you among your assembled people.

25. I will praise you in the great assembly. I will fulfill my vows in the presence of those who worship you.

Acts 7:37. “Moses himself told the people of Israel, ‘God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your own people.’”

38. Moses was with our ancestors, the assembly of God’s people in the wilderness, when the angel spoke to him at Mount Sinai. And there Moses received life-giving words to pass on to us.”

Acts 1:4. Once when he was eating with them, [Jesus] commanded them, “Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before.

5. John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

14. They all met together and were constantly united in prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus.

21. “So now we must choose a replacement for Judas from among the men who were with us the entire time we were traveling with the Lord Jesus—

22. from the time he was baptized by John until the day he was taken from us. Whoever is chosen will join us as a witness of Jesus’ resurrection.”

23. So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias.

24. Then they all prayed, “O Lord, you know every heart. Show us which of these men you have chosen

25. as an apostle to replace Judas in this ministry, for he has deserted us and gone where he belongs.”

26. Then they cast lots, and Matthias was selected to become an apostle with the other eleven.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Part 1—Old Testament Roots

□ People of Knowledge and Worship Deuteronomy 4:9–14; Psalm 22:22–25

Say: The Church is meant to be a place of training, mentoring, growth, and fellowship in the two complementary areas of Christian life: right *belief* and right *practice*. Throughout the New Testament, we find a lot of instruction on both. Yet God’s desire that His people believe the right things and behave the right way actually began much earlier. As the nation of Israel was taking shape, God called His people throughout the Old Testament to know His Word and live accordingly. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Christian faith is intended to be experienced. It is personal and life-changing. But genuine faith must be accompanied by knowledge, including who God is, what He is like, what He is not like, what He has done, what He will do, and what He expects of His people.

Moses’ instructions in Deuteronomy 4:9–14 begin with a strong warning that the people should not forget what they have seen—that is, what they have experienced as they followed God’s leading in the desert. This was important because unlike every other religion around them, Israel did not have idols to hold, look at, or trust. Instead, they trusted in a God they had never seen. The supernatural, life-altering acts of God they had witnessed were to be passed down through the generations.

But in verse 10, Moses abruptly changed his focus. The people also were not to forget God’s instructions received at Mt. Sinai. Moses described these events in vivid terms (verses 11–12). God manifested himself in fire that shone brilliantly against the dark mountain and then spoke to them “from the heart of the fire” (verse 12, NLT). This unique encounter with God was not to be forgotten, in large part because of what He said. He gave them the Law through Moses, enabling future generations to know what it means to fear the Lord. (That is, they would understand who He is and what He can do.) It would also teach them to obey the Lord, following His decrees and regulations as they entered a land that was hostile to anyone who would follow the one true and invisible God.

This idea of fearing the Lord—a product of knowing His Law—is repeated throughout the Old Testament. One example is a familiar messianic psalm. After a long expression of grief mingled with thanksgiving to the Lord for provision and expressions of trust, David announced in Psalm 22: “I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters. I will praise you among your assembled people” (verse 22, NLT). Proclamation and praise are fundamental to the right practice of any community dedicated to serving God.

This way of living—both proclaiming the Lord’s name and praising Him together—is demonstrated by other actions like fearing the Lord (verse 23) and compassionately caring for those in need (verse 24). Reminders of God’s faithfulness, as described in the first portion of the psalm, prompted David to emulate that faithfulness and fulfill his promises to God (verse 25).

While we know from the New Testament that this psalm is ultimately about Christ, its words also directly applied to David and the rest of God’s people at the

time of its writing. Following the Lord is a lifestyle of real-time obedience and faithfulness, but it is also rooted in God’s enduring commands that guide the way. With Old Testament foundation, we are able to better understand the identity and function of the Church in the New Testament.



Resource Packet Item 1: A Christian View of Deuteronomy

Distribute the worksheet and have students complete it in groups or individually. Then discuss the questions as a class.

Discuss

- ? What happens when a Christian lacks adequate knowledge of God’s Word?
- ? How does a Christian go from simply knowing God’s Word to living it out?

Life-Giving Words to Pass Down

Acts 7:37–38



Say: In John 6:63, Jesus said: “The very words I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (NLT). God’s words are transformational and life-giving, leading to abundant life here on earth and eternal life one day in heaven. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Acts 7:38, Stephen made an interesting statement about the Law: “Moses received life-giving words to pass on to us” (NLT). God’s commands to His people were intended to carry them through their challenges and preserve them as His chosen people. This pattern continued for centuries, preparing the way for Christ, whom Stephen identified as the Prophet Moses had foretold in Deuteronomy 18:15. By not listening to Jesus, the Sanhedrin were rejecting the teachings of Moses.

The Old Testament Israelite community foreshadows the New Testament Church. God established a community of people to coexist with—but in many ways be separate from—the world around them. The community was to live according to the Lord’s instructions. Deviating from His commands would bring consequences to individuals and the community, but following His commands would bring God’s abiding presence and blessings. As we study the development of the Church, we will see how this model provides its framework.

Discuss

- ? How is today’s Church like the Old Testament nation of Israel? How is it different?
- ? Why do you think God chose the pattern of community (not solitary) worship for both Old Testament Israelites and New Testament followers of Christ?

Part 2—Prayerfully Awaiting the Father’s Promise

Instructed through the Spirit

Acts 1:1–3



Say: If we say that the Book of Acts records the beginnings of the Church, it stands to reason that the opening verses of Acts have much to say about the

Church's priorities. The Church is to be founded on the instructions of Jesus given through the Holy Spirit. Already we can see that Christians are intended to be people of the Word and people of the Spirit. The Word instructs us while the Spirit empowers us. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The message of Acts 1:1–3 regarding the Church is twofold. The first message emphasizes the Holy Spirit's work among His people. Jesus' final charge to His apostles was given "through the Holy Spirit" (verse 2, *NLT*). Many scholars note that this verse sets the tone for the entire Book of Acts, emphasizing the cooperative relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit. At the beginning of His earthly ministry, Jesus was anointed by the Spirit (see Luke 3:22; Acts 10:38). And at the end of His earthly ministry, He commissioned His disciples by breathing on them and saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22, *NLT*).

In the next phase of the Spirit's anointing, the apostles will act on Jesus' behalf. The Book of Acts records in detail all that was accomplished through the Holy Spirit's power during this time. It has been said that the book might be more accurately called *The Acts of the Holy Spirit* rather than *The Acts of the Apostles*. Both then and now, God's people function properly only by the power of the Holy Spirit—both outwardly in terms of mission and inwardly in terms of personal spiritual growth and community discipleship.

The second message from this passage regarding the Church emphasizes its Kingdom message. Jesus spent forty days after the Resurrection teaching His apostles about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). From the beginning, God had been the true King over Israel and all His people throughout the earth (see Psalm 103:19). It is no coincidence that the Book of Acts begins and ends with the Kingdom being taught and proclaimed (Acts 1:3; 28:30–31). That is the central work of the Church. Sharing the good news of the Kingdom is sharing the good news of Jesus—who He is, what He taught, and why He came to earth. As we live out His teachings in community and take the gospel beyond the four walls of our church buildings, everything we do is held together by the inspired Word of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.



Resource Packet Item 2: Jesus' Teachings on the Holy Spirit

Distribute the worksheet and review its content as a class. Encourage students to complete the Personal Reflection section on their own during the week.

Discuss

- ? What are some examples of "things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3, *KJV*) that Jesus may have talked about during the forty days between His resurrection and ascension?
- ? What should be the Holy Spirit's role in a Christian's life? In a church community? Is that the role He currently holds in your personal life? In your church?



Say: Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He told His followers to wait in Jerusalem until they received the gift of the Spirit as He had promised. Clearly, this was more than a general promise of the Holy Spirit's abiding presence and help. A specific event was about to happen that would bring about a unique outpouring of the Spirit's power. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The gift Jesus spoke of in Acts 1:4 (see also Luke 24:49) was not a new promise but had been foretold in Joel 2:28–32. As the Church took shape, the Spirit's power would be integral to believers' function and identity as the people of God. With miraculous continuity, the Old Testament community of faith would transform into the Church as more and more Jews came to believe in Christ and the Kingdom expanded to include Gentiles as well. All the while, the community would be unified and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

In verse 5, Jesus compared the baptism of the Holy Spirit to the kind of baptism His followers were already familiar with: water baptism. It's worth noting that John the Baptist had said Jesus would "baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11; NLT), but Jesus did not mention a baptism of fire in Acts 1. Fire refers not to blessing, but to the judgment awaiting those who reject Christ; therefore, the time of that baptism has not yet come.

What are we to make of Jesus' contrast between water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism? And what does this tell us about the Holy Spirit baptism that was about to take place? The answer lies in the spiritual condition of those to whom the promise was given. Although the disciples had not yet been empowered by the Spirit, they had already been born of the Spirit (John 3:5). They had been taught by Jesus and accepted Him as Messiah (Matthew 16:13–17). They had been pruned and purified by His message (John 15:3). They had partaken of Communion with Him (Luke 22:19–20). He had breathed upon them with the promise they would receive the Holy Spirit (John 20:22). And they were gathering together in community (Acts 2:1). All of these criteria signify throughout the New Testament that someone is part of the Church, and it was upon this unified body of believers that the Holy Spirit was about to descend.

Discuss

- ? How is the prophecy of Joel 2:28–32 still being fulfilled in the Church today?
- ? Discuss the similarities and differences between water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism.

Part 3—The Twelve Apostles



Say: Many of the most memorable times of fellowship and worship the people of God experience together are marked by a sense of supernatural unity.

This was certainly the case in Acts 1:12–14. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Acts 1:12 the apostles made the half-mile journey west to Jerusalem after Jesus' ascension on the Mount of Olives. They "went up into an upper room" (verse 13, *KJV*) of the house where they were staying. The Book of Acts includes instances where upstairs rooms were places of prayer (10:9) and preaching (20:7–8). Because the room in Acts 1:12 was larger than most upper rooms of that day (able to hold over a dozen people), it is possible this was the room where Jesus and the disciples had shared the Last Supper (Luke 22:12). If so, it is fitting that some of the earliest business of the Church was conducted there.

Acts 1:13 lists the eleven apostles who remained after Judas Iscariot's death. They were joined in the room by Jesus' mother, several other women, and notably, Jesus' brothers (verse 14)—named in Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 as James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. Although they had earlier rejected Jesus' ministry (see John 7:3–5), they began to believe in Him at some point. Now they joined the apostles and His other followers in constant, united prayer.

Discuss

- ? Imagine taking that half-mile walk from the Mount of Olives to the upstairs room in Jerusalem after Jesus' ascension. What do you think the conversation and mood was like among Jesus' followers?
- ? Why do you think Jesus' brothers didn't believe in Him at first? What may have changed their minds?



□ Matthias Is Chosen

Acts 1:15–26

Say: Have you ever struggled to make an important, life-altering decision? The apostles faced such a decision in Acts 1:15–26 and their immediate response was to pray for God's will and then trust His guidance. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Acts 1:15–26 offers several vital details about the Early Church as they searched for Judas's replacement. The group of eleven had grown to 120, all of whom had obeyed the command to wait in Jerusalem for the baptism of the Holy Spirit (verse 15). Peter identified the Holy Spirit as the source of inspiration of Scripture (verse 16). Judas, the disciple who had betrayed Christ, was dead (verses 18–19). David's words in Psalms 69:25 and 109:8 had been prophetic and would lead them to choose a replacement for Judas from the other followers who met a certain set of criteria (Acts 1:20–22).

The apostles then prayed for God's will to be done and cast lots to decide between Barsabbas and Matthias. The lot settled on Matthias (verse 26). This was the first and last time the Early Church cast lots to make a decision. After the baptism of the Holy Spirit took place and His guidance and power became accessible in an unprecedented way, church leaders sought direct divine guidance through prayer.



Resource Packet Item 3: The Twelve Apostles

Distribute the information sheet and review what Church tradition holds regarding the ministries and deaths of the twelve apostles.

Discuss

- ? What process (if any) do you follow when you are seeking God's guidance?
- ? What happens if we try to operate as the Church without prayer or the presence and power of the Holy Spirit?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: From these beginnings, God's people took hold of the Great Commission and the Church began to spread. They focused on prayer and depended on the Holy Spirit's guidance and empowerment. As part of the Church today, we would be wise to follow their example.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Ask your pastor about new ways you can bless or serve your church.
- Think of someone who has been seeking God's help or answer for a long time. Commit to pray for their need and offer regular encouragement.
- Pray daily for the Holy Spirit to guide and empower you.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

God's Glory Fills the Tabernacle.
Exodus 40:34–38

Tuesday:

God's Glory Fills the Temple.
2 Chronicles 7:1–6

Wednesday:

Corporate Worship Restored in Jerusalem. Ezra 3:1–7

Thursday:

Jesus Builds the Church.
Matthew 16:13–18

Friday:

Jesus Loves the Church.
Ephesians 5:25–27

Saturday:

Jesus Directs the Church.
Colossians 1:15–18

February 4, 2024

LESSON 10

The Spirit-Empowered Church

Study Text

Luke 24:46–49; Acts 2:1–4; 6:1–7; 8:58; 13:2–3; 1 Timothy 3:8–13; 2 Timothy 4:5

Central Truth

The Holy Spirit empowers the Church for effective ministry.



Key Verse Luke 24:49

I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high (KJV).

“Now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven” (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will explore the work of the Holy Spirit in the beginning days and years of the Church.
- Students will identify and appreciate the diverse work of the Spirit in the Church as He empowers believers.
- Students will believe God for an expansion of the work of the Spirit in their own church.

Introducing the Study

Say: What would you say if someone asked you, “What is the Church?” Truth is, you might hear a variety of answers to that question—some are correct, and others are misconceptions.

Opening Activity—What Is the Church?

Ask: *How do people define the word church?* Some people say it’s the building where Christians meet. Others say it’s Christians out in the community. Still others say it includes everyone on earth who follows Christ.

Say: All of these answers have some truth. But the full definition of *Church* is this: the living, active body of Christ in the world; a community of faith following Him together. The term *Church* must include an element of activity and a sense of purpose being fulfilled. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As we continue to move through this unit, we will see many examples of the Church in action. We are people of worship, service, faithfulness, holiness, love . . . the list of descriptors goes on and on. But none of these things happen because of our own strength. The Church can only accomplish its purpose through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. In this lesson, we will explore what it means to operate in this power.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

Luke 24:49. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.

Acts 2:1. And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

2. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

3. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

4. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Acts 6:2. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

3. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

4. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

1 Timothy 3:13. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

2 Timothy 4:5. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

Acts 8:5. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

6. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

7. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.

8. And there was great joy in that city.

Acts 13:2. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

3. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Luke 24:49. “And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven.”

Acts 2:1. On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place.

2. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting.

3. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them.

4. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

Acts 6:2. So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. They said, “We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program.

3. And so, brothers, select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility.

4. Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word.”

1 Timothy 3:13. Those who do well as deacons will be rewarded with respect from others and will have increased confidence in their faith in Christ Jesus.

2 Timothy 4:5. But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you.

Acts 8:5. Philip, for example, went to the city of Samaria and told the people there about the Messiah.

6. Crowds listened intently to Philip because they were eager to hear his message and see the miraculous signs he did.

7. Many evil spirits were cast out, screaming as they left their victims. And many who had been paralyzed or lame were healed.

8. So there was great joy in that city.

Acts 13:2. One day as these men were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Appoint Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called them.”

3. So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Part 1—Filled with the Spirit

□ Filled for a Mission

Luke 24:46–49

Say: As Jesus prepared His followers to lead the Church, He clearly described the Spirit’s role in the work they were about to begin. (Share your highlights from the following text.)



Resource Packet Item 1: The World of the First Century (Map)

Distribute the map. Encourage students to refer to it as you come across place names in this lesson and the rest of the unit.

Luke 24:46 picks up the story of Jesus when He appeared to His disciples after the Resurrection. As He had done many times before, Jesus reminded them His mission had been foretold by the prophets. “It was written long ago” that the Messiah would die and then rise from the dead (NLT).

But their words would not just be fulfilled by His death and resurrection. Additional Old Testament prophecies would come to pass as the gospel message was preached to all nations or peoples (verse 47). The apostles would play a central role since they were witnesses of His life, death, and resurrection (verse 48).

This gospel mission could not happen through human effort. Yes, people preach the message, but salvation from sin is only possible through the authority of the name of the Lord (verse 47). Human words cannot carry such authority on their own. Effective preaching must be accompanied by “power from heaven” (verse 49, NLT).

Jesus instructed His apostles to stay in Jerusalem, where He would “send the promise of my Father upon you” (verse 49, KJV). Scholars note that this is a unique way to refer to the Holy Spirit. In fact, the Holy Spirit is not mentioned directly in the Greek here. (Some versions, including the NLT, supply “Holy Spirit” for clarity.) The phrasing used instead serves to emphasize the idea of divine promise, ensuring the disciples would not be required to undertake this mission on their own. Instead, they would be “clothed with power from on high” (literal translation). The mission was vital to God’s plan, central to the work of God’s people, and only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit.

God’s plan continues through us. Like those apostles, we must rely on the Holy Spirit to preach salvation. We might be tempted to make the Spirit our assistant in pursuing our goals and vision for ministry. But the opposite is true. We cannot be effective in this mission without the Holy Spirit empowering us and engaging with those who hear.

Discuss

- ? What do you think it means to do the work of proclaiming salvation and forgiveness through the power of the Holy Spirit?
- ? What will happen if a person proclaims Christ without the Spirit’s power?



Say: Acts 2:1–4 is a turning point in the formation of the Church, marking the moment God’s people received the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise in order to effectively proclaim the kingdom of God to the world. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

It is significant that the event described in Acts 2 occurred on the Day of Pentecost, one of three major Jewish feasts (“the feast of weeks”; see Deuteronomy 16:16). The Feast of Pentecost took place seven weeks after Passover, and the word *Pentecost* comes from the Greek word for “fifty” for the fifty days between Passover and Pentecost. Because Pentecost celebrated the beginning of the harvest, it is also called the Feast of First Fruits. A portion of these first fruits would then be presented to God as an offering in the temple.

By the time of Christ, many Jews also used Pentecost to celebrate the giving of the Law. They based this on an understanding from Exodus 19:1 that the Law was given on Mount Sinai around harvesttime. As a result, the Feast of Pentecost was seen as a time for covenant renewal.

Against the backdrop of God’s covenant promises, we can look even more deeply into what was happening in Acts 2:1–4. Those gathered were “all with one accord in one place” (verse 1, *KJV*). This wording emphasizes the unity that marked the Early Church. Such unity was the answer to Jesus’ prayer in John 17 (see verses 20–21).

Acts 2:2–3 record clear, dramatic symbols of the Spirit and the very presence of God as we see it manifested in the Old Testament. In both Greek and Hebrew, the word for “wind” is also used of the Spirit (see Genesis 1:2; John 3:8). In the first century, Jews often used the word *heaven* in reference to God to avoid saying “God.” So the emphasis here is that the wind or Spirit filling the gathering place is coming directly from God.

Then what looked like flames settled upon each person. In the Old Testament, fire symbolized both God’s judgment and God’s refining work. Specifically, scholars point to 1 Kings 18:36–39, where fire demonstrated both God’s presence and His endorsement of Elijah as a prophet of the true God. Here in Acts, the fire of God signifies His approval of Jesus’ followers as His sanctioned prophetic witnesses, fit to bear His message.

Acts 2:4 records that every person in attendance “was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability” (*NLT*). This supernatural speech would be a sign and a witness to the crowds gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost. Jews came from throughout the ancient world for this celebration, and hearing these people praising God in the native tongues of many nations would be irrefutable proof that God was doing something special. The gospel would indeed be preached to all people.

Discuss

? Why is it meaningful to see the connections between God’s Old Testament covenant promise and the events of the Day of Pentecost?



Part 2—Empowered to Serve God’s People

□ Serve Those in Need

Acts 6:1–7

Say: Pentecostals often focus on the role of the Spirit in equipping us for evangelism and missions. But the Spirit equipped the Early Church for a wide array of ministries, and the same is true today. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Every local church has needy people among the congregation. As we focus on the outward reach of the church, we must not forget the inward ministry as well. The Early Church provides a good example of serving the needs of our church family.

The Early Church experienced amazing growth. But this growth brought certain problems. Tension developed between Greek-speaking and Hebrew-speaking believers (Acts 6:1). The Greek speakers were Jews who were from nations outside the Holy Land. They were likely part of the *Diaspora*, Jews who had moved outside their native land. Evidently, the Early Church had developed a food distribution program to help the widows among them, and these Greek-speaking Jews complained that their widows were being overlooked.

This problem was rooted in language and culture. For a number of religious reasons, native Jews already tended to avoid anything linked to the Gentiles. The language division probably intensified these divisions, threatening the unity of the Body.

The apostles called a meeting of the church to address the issue (verse 2). They recognized the need to care for widows fairly, but they also needed to spend their time teaching and proclaiming God’s Word. So they asked the congregation to select seven men from among them who could administer the food program (verses 3–4). This suggestion pleased the people. Following the apostles’ guidelines, they chose seven administrators and commissioned them in prayer.

Notably, one of these men—Stephen—is described as “a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit” (verse 5, NLT). This is a good reminder that the early Christians valued the Spirit’s involvement in every aspect of ministry—not just preaching and teaching. In this case, the Holy Spirit provided wisdom for administrating outreach and restoring equity and unity to the Body.

After the believers’ meeting, the Word of God spread and the number of believers increased rapidly (verse 7). This validates the decision made by the apostles and the congregation. Through the work of the Spirit, the Church flourished.



Resource Packet Item 2: Compassion Ministries

Distribute the worksheet and complete it as a class. Identify ways students can be involved in reaching out to the needy in your church.

Discuss

- ? In what ways can the empowerment and wisdom of the Holy Spirit help a church meet the needs of its congregation?
- ? What are some specific needs in your church, and how can your class help meet these needs?



Say: What qualities do you look for in a godly leader? We might be tempted to answer that question with a list of characteristics that make an effective speaker or preacher, but 1 Timothy 3:8–13 reminds us that Christian leadership must include spiritual virtues. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The word *deacon*, as described in 1 Timothy 3:8–13, comes from the Greek word for “servant.” Deacons operate in a position of servant leadership within the church, often in areas associated with the congregation’s tangible needs. Their role is first observed in Acts 6.

However, the New Testament also regards deacons as leaders whose lives are characterized by the power and work of the Holy Spirit. Note how the qualifications for deacons resemble the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23. A deacon should be self-controlled in personal behavior and in spiritual practice. Faithfulness will be evident in matters of family and Christian faith. 1 Timothy 3:9 states that the deacon should be “committed to the mystery of the faith” (NLT). Salvation is a “mystery” in that it is only known through the revelation of the Holy Spirit—both in God’s Word and in the human heart. The deacon is to be wholly committed to salvation in belief and behavior alike.

The qualifications for deacon teach us that the Holy Spirit intends to empower every aspect of the Church—not just evangelism and preaching. Spiritual leaders’ work must be enabled by the Spirit, whether they are preaching a sermon, leading a Sunday School class, resolving disputes, stewarding finances, or discipling young believers.

Discuss

- ? Why is servanthood so closely related to spiritual leadership?
- ? What are some ways the Holy Spirit empowers people as they serve and minister to one another?

Part 3—Empowered to Spread God’s Word



Say: Just as the Holy Spirit empowers us to thrive in community as the Church, He also empowers us to proclaim Christ to the world. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Acts 8:5–8 illustrates how the Holy Spirit empowered the spread of the gospel. In this chapter we find the apostle Philip in Samaria sharing the message of Christ. The location is key. The Jews often rejected the Samaritans because their ancestry was both Jewish and Gentile. (They descended from Jews who were left in the north of Israel after the Assyrian exile and then intermarried with non-Jews.) However, the Samaritans are the first group mentioned outside of Judea in Acts 1:8. The

reach of the gospel would spread both geographically and culturally, and preaching to the Samaritans was a key step as the message of the risen Christ moved beyond its Jewish beginnings.

In Acts 8, the Samaritans were eager to hear Philip's message and were drawn in by miraculous signs, including deliverance from evil spirits and healing from paralysis (verse 7). Once again, the Spirit was meeting people's spiritual and physical needs.

This account reminds us to maintain a proper perspective when it comes to the supernatural. God delivers and heals because of His compassion for people. It is consistent with His nature. But the fundamental purpose of miracles is to testify to the reality of the kingdom of God. Miracles point people to Jesus. Then He ushers them from spiritual darkness into the light.

As Pentecostals, we pray and believe for healing (James 5:13–15). When the Holy Spirit performs the miraculous, we must make sure God receives all the glory. Not only will our own faith grow, but we will point lost people toward the new life available in Christ.

Discuss

- ? How would you describe the purpose of miracles in the Church today?
- ? Describe a miracle you've heard about, seen, or experienced. How did it impact you? How might it impact an unbeliever who saw it happen?



□ Empowered with Wisdom and Guidance Acts 13:1–3; 2 Timothy 4:5

Say: When we think about the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we often focus on the supernatural. But the Spirit also works among Christians to bring divine wisdom and guidance when we need it most. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Acts 13:1–3 records the beginnings of Paul's first missionary journey. It is important to look at the setting described here: A very diverse group of Jewish converts to Christianity had gathered in prayer and fasting. (Those listed were from as far away as Libya.) Clearly, the gospel was spreading far and wide, and the church in Antioch reflected the diversity of that expansion. The leaders' prayers for guidance were answered in a prophetic word from the Spirit. They were to commission Barnabas and Saul (Paul) for a missionary journey.

The Church today must rely upon the Spirit as well. In 2 Timothy 4:5, Paul exhorts Timothy to "keep a clear mind" (NLT). This is a call to remain sober and strong in the faith regardless of the situation. Although fears can arise from outside threats or our own uncertainty or insecurity, we need not be afraid as we carry out God's plan. The Holy Spirit is with us wherever we go.

Discuss

- ? What are some ways the Holy Spirit has granted you wisdom?
- ? What kinds of fears might we experience today as we share the gospel?

What Is God Saying to Us?



Resource Packet Item 3: The Spirit (Cinquain Poem)

Distribute the worksheet and have students create their own cinquain poems about the Holy Spirit. Invite them to share their writing with the class.

Say: Without the Holy Spirit, the Church would be little more than an organization of people doing religious work. We must check ourselves daily to ensure that our priorities and passion come from the Spirit and not our own desires.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Find new ways you can serve someone in need this week.
- Offer to pray with someone in need of a miracle.
- Pray each day that the Lord will help you be more attuned to the voice of the Spirit as you fulfill your role in the body of Christ.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

The Spirit's Revelation to Joseph.
Genesis 41:33–40

Tuesday:

The Spirit's Work in the
Wilderness. Isaiah 63:7–14

Wednesday:

The Spirit's Ministry through
Daniel. Daniel 4:1–9

Thursday:

Baptism in the Spirit Prophesied.
John 1:29–34

Friday:

Rivers of Living Water Promised.
John 7:37–39

Saturday:

Breath of God Exhaled.
John 20:19–23

February 11, 2024

LESSON 11

Life in Christian Community

Study Text

Acts 2:42–47; Ephesians 2:19–22;
Colossians 1:3–14

Central Truth

God wills for His followers to live in close fellowship.



Key Verse Acts 4:32

The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common (KJV).

All the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will examine what it means to say that Christians live in a state of community.
- Students will identify the dangers and realities of divisions in the Church and commit to unity.
- Students will pray that God will help them live in a way that reflects the hope and transformation they have received through Christ.

Introducing the Study

Say: *Responsibilities.* This word can sometimes make people cringe. We all have responsibilities that we deal with every day, and they aren't always fun. But responsibilities don't have to be seen as a burden.

Opening Activity—Responsibilities

Ask: What are some ongoing responsibilities in your life that feel like a burden? What are some that you enjoy?

Say: A personal responsibility is anything that needs to be done—and *you're* the one who needs to do it! But not all responsibilities are equally important or demanding. Some tasks in your career and personal life just have to get done—like catching up on paperwork or sorting the mail every day. Others are enjoyable and enriching. They are necessary and pleasant at the same time. When we think of the good that comes from completing these tasks, we can find joy in doing them well. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Today's lesson explores what it means to live in Christian community. As we will see, the Scripture gives each of us responsibilities—to God and to each other—that benefit the church community as a whole. As we mature in the faith and keep in mind the good that comes from working wholeheartedly together, we find that these responsibilities can be enriching and enjoyable.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

Acts 2:42. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

43. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

44. And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

45. And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

46. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

47. Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Ephesians 2:19. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

20. And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

21. In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:

22. In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Colossians 1:9. For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

10. That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

11. Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;

12. Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:

13. Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:

14. In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:

Acts 2:42. All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.

43. A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders.

44. And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had.

45. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need.

46. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—

47. all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

Ephesians 2:19. So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family.

20. Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself.

21. We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord.

22. Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

Colossians 1:9. So we have not stopped praying for you since we first heard about you. We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding.

10. Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better.

11. We also pray that you will be strengthened with all his glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need. May you be filled with joy,

12. always thanking the Father. He has enabled you to share in the inheritance that belongs to his people, who live in the light.

13. For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son,

14. who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Say: What does “church fellowship” mean to you? Maybe you think of a church potluck or visiting in the foyer after service. But Acts 2 reminds us that fellowship in the body of Christ includes much more. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter addressed the huge crowd gathered in Jerusalem and explained the miracle they were seeing. “Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all” (Acts 2:41, NLT). This verse tells us the gospel was spreading quickly in the early days of the Church, and it also tells us the fellowship pattern we see in verses 42–46 was part of this dramatic growth. From the Church’s beginning, God has always intended that deep, compassionate, personal fellowship would be part of the life of His Church.

Luke (the writer of Acts) described what church life was like amid this dramatic growth. First, believers “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (verse 42, NLT). The doctrines the apostles taught are available to us in the inspired Scripture. A major focus of the New Testament is ensuring believers have a proper understanding of Jesus’ commands as described and applied by the apostles (see Ephesians 4:11–15). While the apostles’ evangelistic preaching told unbelievers about the gospel, their teaching instructed believers about the Christian life.

Next, Luke noted that the believers “devoted themselves . . . to fellowship” (Acts 2:42, NLT). This kind of fellowship goes beyond faithful church attendance and includes partnership. Together, believers fulfilled the Church’s purpose and shared in its message and work. They leaned on each other, realizing that life in Christ includes life in the body of Christ.

The believers were also devoted to sharing meals, which referred both to table fellowship (like modern-day church meals) as well as the Lord’s Supper (see verse 46). We know the Lord’s Supper took place in homes rather than the temple, which means early believers shared relationship with each other beyond their congregational worship meetings.

Finally, the believers were devoted to corporate prayer. Life in the body of Christ was not an individual pursuit. The community valued prayer, recognizing that believers grow together when they pray together.

In a sense, verse 43 describes the impact of verse 42. Because of the apostles’ teaching and the work of the Holy Spirit in their community, “fear came over every soul” (KJV). Scholars note that this reaction emphasized the apostles’ unique authority. This would have been an important designation for that original Jewish audience, who held the authority of Old Testament prophets and patriarchs in high regard. But it is important for us, as well, since it reinforces the authority of the apostles’ inspired writings.

The apostles’ teaching was also accompanied by amazing miracles, which confirmed the Word they taught and proclaimed (see Mark 16:20). Miracles continually accompanied the preaching of the gospel once the apostles set the

pattern. Only a few chapters later, the ministry of Stephen (who had been chosen as a deacon) was accompanied by “great wonders and miracles” (Acts 6:8, KJV).

Discuss

- ? What are some ways Christians today can devote themselves to the teaching of the Word?
- ? Why is corporate prayer important in addition to private prayer?

□ Devoted to Each Other

Acts 2:44–47



Say: God has always had special concern for vulnerable people. That kind of compassion at work in His people plays a vital role in the Church. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Acts 2:44–47 forms one of the most beautiful pictures of mutual devotion in all of Scripture. The phrase “met together” in verse 44 (NLT) demonstrates having one mind. The believers’ unity was emotional and spiritual, and they “shared everything they had” (NLT), including the proceeds from the property and possessions they sold. The purpose was to show compassion and love for those in need, not pursue an ideal of economic uniformity. People gave out of their own generosity rather than being coerced.

There was a family dynamic among the believers. Everyone cared for each other and made sure no one lacked what they needed. They gathered for worship at the temple and for the Lord’s Supper at one another’s homes. They lived in community, and the result was both joy and generosity. Such a lifestyle ultimately bore witness to those around them (verse 47). Amid the miracles, joy, and generosity, many were being saved and joining the Church.

These circumstances were unique and not intended to set a pattern for communal living as we would define it. In fact, later New Testament teachings on unity and compassion contrast with the situation in Acts 2. In the earliest days of the Church, travelers to Jerusalem who remained after their conversion would have needed help during their extended stay. The Church’s priority was to show generosity to those in need. Their care for one another and the meaningful relationships that developed serve as an example for us today. Those among us who have plenty should give generously to those in need.



Resource Packet Item 1: Church Checkup

Distribute the worksheet and have students complete it on their own at home. Emphasize that this is intended to be a guide for personal prayer. If you choose to discuss the content generally as a class, keep the conversation positive and constructive.

Discuss

- ? How would you define the word *fellowship* based on Acts 2:42–47?
- ? What are Christians’ responsibilities toward one another?



Part 2—A God-Built Household

□ No Longer Strangers

Ephesians 2:19–20

Say: It's human nature to notice the differences between us and sometimes allow them to become barriers. But Paul's letter to the Ephesians reminds us the Church should erase the lines that divide us so God's people can live together in unity. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Unlike Paul's other epistles, his letter to the Ephesians doesn't focus on correcting doctrinal errors or confronting false teaching. Instead, Paul wrote extensively about God's plan to bring forth the Church—a community of both Jewish and Gentile believers. Paul clearly explains the gospel's purpose: It offered reconciliation with God to the entire world. From that perspective, everyone stands on equal footing. This teaching reaches a crescendo in 2:11–18, which describes how God made peace between otherwise hostile groups of people, unifying them through Christ.

The church at Ephesus was largely made up of Greek converts to Christianity. Verse 19 says these converts were “no longer strangers and aliens” (NLT; “strangers and foreigners,” KJV). “Strangers” refers to short-term visitors, while “aliens” refers to residents without full citizenship rights. Before Jesus came, Gentile converts to Judaism were considered outsiders, but now they were “fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (KJV). All hostility and division had disappeared. The two groups were made one in Christ (verse 14).

Paul illustrated his point with building imagery (verse 20). The moment these Gentiles became Christians, they were set upon the same foundation as the Jewish Christians (see 1 Corinthians 3:11). Not only is Jesus the foundation, but He is the cornerstone. This stone literally joined two walls at the corner, holding the entire building together.

Most of us don't face divisions in our churches as severe as the one between first-century Jews and Gentiles. But any chasms that still exist between people groups must be bridged in the body of Christ. The answer is not ignoring our differences, whether they are related to culture, ethnicity, class, race, or religious background. Instead, unity means we don't allow our differences to determine the value we place on one another. The Church is made up of people who are first and foremost our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Discuss

- ? What does it mean to say that Jesus is the “cornerstone” of the Church?
- ? What are some common sources of division in the Church today? How can we counter them?



□ A Holy Temple for the Lord

Ephesians 2:21–22

Say: With Christ as our cornerstone, we are all joined together to become a temple where the presence of God dwells. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Ephesians 2:21–22 gives insight into why this figurative building, the Church, is so important. In it, all believers are being joined together into a sound and steady structure without cracks or divisions. We are “becoming a holy temple for the Lord” (verse 21, NLT). As His temple, the Church is a “dwelling where God lives by his Spirit” (verse 22, NLT). We serve the same purpose that the temple in Jerusalem once served: We are God’s dwelling place in this world (see 2 Corinthians 6:16).

Not only are we His temple, but Ephesians 2:21 says we are His *holy* temple. The Church is set apart and consecrated for God’s presence. This puts us in contrast with the world around us. The Church’s holiness is both a gift from God and a response to God. We are sanctified or made holy through Christ alone (see Hebrews 10:10) and cannot attain holiness without Him. Having been made holy, we are called to live in a way that reflects His holiness (see Ephesians 1:4).

The ongoing process of being joined together takes place through the power of the Holy Spirit. Christians are people of the Spirit, and He must play a central role in our churches and our lives.



Resource Packet Item 2: Brought In and Built Up

Distribute the worksheet and discuss the questions as a class. Think about how your church can help heal divisions in your community.

Discuss

- ? What are some ways churches can demonstrate the unity we see in Ephesians 2:19–22?
- ? Practically speaking, what is the evidence that the Church is a “holy temple for the Lord”?

Part 3—Faithful and Holy Community

□ Growing in the Faith

Colossians 1:3–8



Say: One common accusation against Christians is that we don’t practice what we preach. Whether our critics have a point or not, this comment reminds us the world is watching. And they expect us to be different. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Colossians 1:1–14 introduces Paul’s letter to a group of mostly Greek converts in the church in Colossae. They were enduring many challenges to their faith—facing false teaching from within while striving to serve Christ in a hostile environment.

Paul thanked God for these Christians and commended them for actions and attitudes that expressed genuine, growing faith in Christ. They were people of hope, and their lives reflected their assurance of the world to come. This kind of faith in the promise of eternal life naturally impacts the way we live here and now.

The Colossian Christians had heard the Word of truth and cultivated it within their lives and their church. Paul mentions their faith in Christ and love for one another (verse 4). These two qualities provide fertile ground for spiritual growth. They had placed a strong priority on both their relationships with God and other believers.

Paul closed this section with an interesting phrase. His fellow worker, Epaphras, had been discipling the Colossians, and he told Paul “about the love for others that the Holy Spirit has given” the Colossians (verse 8, *NLT*). Their love for others had been awakened by the Holy Spirit, testifying to their genuine faith. As Paul wrote to the believers in Rome, God “has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love” (Romans 5:5, *NLT*). This kind of love is more than mere human concern and compassion. Instead, it is the kind of sacrificial love that only comes from God. The bonds of unity are supernaturally strengthened when we rely on the Spirit to put His love in our hearts.

Discuss

- ? What are some ways the Holy Spirit’s presence and guidance can impact our relationships with each another?
- ? How does your hope of eternal life shape the way you live each day?



□ Living Worthy of Christ

Colossians 1:9–14

Say: Paul then tells the Colossians exactly how he prays for them. We would do well to follow his example and pray the same things for ourselves and our church. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul prayed the believers in Colossae would be filled with the knowledge of God’s will (Colossians 1:9). In its broadest sense, God’s will is that we would imitate Jesus’ life, ministry, sacrifice, and teachings by the power of the Spirit. The spiritual wisdom and understanding Paul mentions don’t come naturally. They come from the Word of God.

From this foundation of knowledge and wisdom, “the way you live will always honor and please the Lord” (verse 10, *NLT*). God gives knowledge and wisdom with a practical intent. He doesn’t demand that we somehow make ourselves worthy. Instead, He intends that our lives reflect the blessings of God’s mercy and His grace at work in us. As we “learn to know God better and better,” we continue to grow and “produce every kind of good fruit” (*NLT*).

Not only does Paul pray for the believers’ external fruitfulness, but he prays for their internal spiritual growth as well. His vision is that the Spirit would empower them to patiently endure trouble and be filled with joy and gratitude. He concludes his prayer with a reminder of their new identity. Christ “hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (*KJV*).

As we endeavor to honor Christ in our community life, may Paul’s prayer become our own. We grow closer to God and each other as we seek Him together.

Discuss

- ? How does the Spirit help us grow in spiritual wisdom and understanding?
- ? What does it mean to live in a way that’s worthy of the Lord?



Resource Packet Item 3: A Body, a Building, a Bride

Distribute the worksheet and complete it as a class. Challenge students to think about how they fit into the life of the Church.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: The Church is a community of transformed people. We have been changed by Christ and now live by the Spirit. That kind of community life is naturally different from what the world is used to. It is a shining example of unity, love, and holiness.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Find ways your class can help encourage a sense of community within your church.
- Ask God to examine your heart and show you any attitudes that would bring division or disunity into the church.
- Pray daily for God to help you live a life that is worthy of the incredible blessings and gifts He has given you.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

A Covenant Assembly.
Joshua 8:30–35

Tuesday:

The Feast of Tabernacles.
Nehemiah 8:13–18

Wednesday:

The Assembly of the Upright.
Psalm 111:1–10

Thursday:

Fellowship of Ministry.
2 Corinthians 8:1–7

Friday:

The Right Hand of Fellowship.
Galatians 2:6–10

Saturday:

Fellowship with Christ and Christians. 1 John 1:1–7

February 18, 2024

LESSON 12

Ongoing Challenges for the Church

Study Text

Acts 7:51 through 8:1; 2 Thessa-
lonians 3:6–14; Hebrews 6:9–12;
2 Peter 2:1,18–22; Revelation 2:8–17

Central Truth

Through Jesus Christ, the Church
will stand strong.



Key Verse Matthew 16:18

Upon this rock I will build my
church; and the gates of hell shall
not prevail against it (KJV).

“Upon this rock I will build my
church, and all the powers of hell
will not conquer it” (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will acknowledge that persecution and opposition are a natural part of the Christian life and commit to responding with the attitude of Christ.
- Students will examine the characteristics of false teachers and recognize ways false teaching might spread today.
- Students will develop a deeper sense of responsibility to care for others' needs by contributing to the well-being of the church through faithful labor and encouraging words and actions.

Introducing the Study

Say: The challenges we continually face come from a variety of sources—even from within ourselves. In today’s lesson, we will see that the same can be said of the Church.

Opening Activity—Challenges

Ask: What are the biggest challenges you have faced? Note that many of our challenges come from other people and the circumstances they create, while other challenges come from ourselves. These can include physical challenges, personality traits, or sinful inclinations.

Say: Just as we face ongoing personal challenges, the Church faces ongoing challenges as well. The Bible has plenty to say about overcoming any kind of challenge. When we read and apply the truth of God’s Word, we can be victorious by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

If someone asked you to name the Church’s biggest challenges today, what would you say? The range of answers would likely focus on oppression from without as well as struggles from within. This lesson covers both. Many of the Early Church’s challenges came from persecution, while others came from false teaching and the people’s struggles to live according to God’s commands. As we explore the Scriptures and see how the apostles addressed these difficulties, we will become better equipped to face challenges in the Church today.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Acts 7:59. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

60. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

8:1. And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Revelation 2:10. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

2 Peter 2:18. For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error.

19. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

Revelation 2:14. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

15. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate.

2 Thessalonians 3:11. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.

12. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.

Hebrews 6:10. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

11. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end:

12. That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

New Living Translation

Acts 7:59. As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

60. He fell to his knees, shouting, "Lord, don't charge them with this sin!" And with that, he died.

8:1. Saul was one of the witnesses, and he agreed completely with the killing of Stephen. A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem; and all the believers except the apostles were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria.

Revelation 2:10. "Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you. You will suffer for ten days. But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life."

2 Peter 2:18. They brag about themselves with empty, foolish boasting. With an appeal to twisted sexual desires, they lure back into sin those who have barely escaped from a lifestyle of deception.

19. They promise freedom, but they themselves are slaves of sin and corruption. For you are a slave to whatever controls you.

Revelation 2:14. "But I have a few complaints against you. You tolerate some among you whose teaching is like that of Balaam, who showed Balak how to trip up the people of Israel. He taught them to sin by eating food offered to idols and by committing sexual sin.

15. In a similar way, you have some Nicolaitans among you who follow the same teaching."

2 Thessalonians 3:11. Yet we hear that some of you are living idle lives, refusing to work and meddling in other people's business.

12. We command such people and urge them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and work to earn their own living.

Hebrews 6:10. For God is not unjust. He will not forget how hard you have worked for him and how you have shown your love to him by caring for other believers, as you still do.

11. Our great desire is that you will keep on loving others as long as life lasts, in order to make certain that what you hope for will come true.

12. Then you will not become spiritually dull and indifferent. Instead, you will follow the example of those who are going to inherit God's promises because of their faith and endurance.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Part 1—Persecution of Believers

□ The First Christian Martyr

Acts 7:51 through 8:1

Say: How much would you be willing to sacrifice for Christ? Many of His followers would say they are willing to die for Him. And Christians through the ages have done exactly that, beginning with Stephen in Acts 7. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Stephen served as a deacon in the Jerusalem church, and Luke describes him as “a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5, NLT). He “performed amazing miracles and signs among the people” (verse 8, NLT), but as is often the case, anointed ministry brought opposition. He was brought before the Sanhedrin or high council of Jewish leaders (verse 12) and falsely accused of speaking blasphemously against the temple and the Law. Stephen had said no such things, and God’s favor was clearly upon him. Amid the accusations, “everyone in the high council stared at Stephen, because his face became as bright as an angel’s” (verse 15, NLT). Yet these charges carried a penalty of death by stoning (see Leviticus 24:13–14).

In the face of these allegations, Stephen gave one of the longest and most interesting speeches in all of Scripture (Acts 7:2–53). His address was not so much a personal legal defense as a defense of Christianity. It served as a rebuke to his fellow Jews, confronting them with truth much like the prophetic messages of the Old Testament had done. Stephen highlighted the way God’s people had repeatedly rejected messengers of truth, which makes his words extremely relevant for us today.

Stephen’s speech culminated with a summary of his arguments against the Jewish leaders. They were stubborn and sinful, refused to listen to the truth, and continually resisted the Holy Spirit (verse 51). And when the long-awaited Messiah had arrived, they rejected, betrayed, and murdered Him (verse 52).

This enraged the Jewish leaders, and they dragged Stephen out of the city to stone him. But Stephen was steadfast despite their rage. “Full of the Holy Spirit,” he saw a vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of God (verse 55, NLT). These verses draw a sharp contrast between the leaders’ murderous rage and Stephen’s godly serenity. He is a shining example of someone enduring persecution through the power of the Holy Spirit.

As the leaders began to stone Stephen, his prayer no doubt infuriated them all the more. In Judaism, prayer was only to be directed at God. By addressing his prayer to Jesus, Stephen was asserting again that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah. The Sanhedrin’s attempt to convince Stephen otherwise had failed. His final words were a prayer of submission and forgiveness, similar to Jesus’ prayer at His crucifixion (verses 59–60; see Luke 23:34,46).

Acts 8:1 is one of the most significant verses in the New Testament, marking the beginning of the fulfillment of Acts 1:8. The Church was expanding and the gospel was being preached amid an explosion of persecution. As Christians were targeted and fled from Jerusalem, they carried the gospel with them. As they

faced injustice and false accusations, the Holy Spirit empowered them to share the message of Christ.

This pattern of persecution has been repeated countless times throughout Christian history. The life-changing message of Christ inevitably brings opposition. In such times, believers can imitate Stephen by standing firm in the faith, responding in truth, and keeping their focus on Jesus.



Resource Packet Item 1: Responding to Opposition

Distribute the worksheet and complete it in groups or as a class. Discuss the scenarios, and as time permits, talk about other examples of opposition or persecution. How should Christians respond?

Discuss

- ? What do Stephen's actions in Acts 7 teach us about responding to persecution?
- ? What are some right and wrong ways to respond to persecution? Explain.

Focus on the Reward

Revelation 2:8–11



Say: Revelation 2 offers a new perspective on the story of Stephen and anyone else who is persecuted for Jesus' sake. As the church in Smyrna learned, faithfully enduring opposition on earth ensures a great reward in heaven. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Smyrna was the second of the seven churches addressed in Revelation 2 through 3. The letter is both sobering and hopeful—sobering because they had suffered greatly for their faith and hopeful because Jesus was well aware of their situation.

The city of Smyrna was particularly devoted to Rome. As such, its antagonism toward Christianity was strong. Christians had a hard time making a living there, leaving them impoverished (2:9). They were also being slandered by the Jews, which was a common persecution in the first century (see Acts 13:50; 14:2; 17:5). Scholars have identified six common accusations that were leveled against Christians of that time: cannibalism, lust, breaking up homes, atheism, disloyalty to Rome, and inciting trouble.

The letter to the church in Smyrna warned that persecution would get worse, landing believers in prison (Revelation 2:10). Scholars note that prison was often a place to await execution in the ancient world. The phrase “ten days” most likely symbolized an extended period that would eventually end.

Along with this sobering message came a hopeful promise. The crown of victory awaited those who remained faithful. They would not be “harmed by the second death” (verse 11, NLT). Verse 8 also alludes to this hope, describing Jesus as “the First and the Last, who was dead but is now alive” (NLT). Even if persecution led to death, it has been conquered by the One who lives forever.

This is great news for believers today. We will likely never face the level of persecution Smyrna experienced. But as Paul wrote, “Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12, NLT). Any persecution we face in this life can be endured because of our hope in Christ.

Discuss

- ? What are some ways Christians are slandered by unbelievers today?
How should we respond to such slander?
- ? How is your everyday life impacted by your hope in Christ?



Part 2—False Teaching

False Teaching Is Deceptive

2 Peter 2:1, 18–22

Say: When you think of a false teacher, what do you imagine? Maybe you picture a person who looks a bit suspicious, acts a little strange, and says things that are clearly wrong. But Scripture warns that the most dangerous false teachers are subtle and even appealing. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As we shift from studying persecution to taking a look at false teaching, our focus moves from external to internal challenges facing the Church. The New Testament often warns Christians to beware of false teaching, and Peter devoted a great deal of his second epistle to describing its dangers. He explained that just as false prophets existed in Old Testament times, they would continue to spread “destructive heresies” in the Church and “even deny the Master” (2 Peter 2:1, NLT).

He makes an especially important point: False teachers are clever—so clever that they threaten to mislead growing believers. “Cleverly” (NLT; “privily,” KJV) conveys the sense that they secretly infiltrate the congregation with their lies. Maybe they make a statement or argument about Scripture that seems correct and appealing but is discovered to be wrong upon further examination. Maybe they appeal to human logic or emotion to support arguments Scripture does not address. False teachings often seem appealing at first. But over time, they end up denying the basic truths of Scripture along with Christ himself.

Peter went on to describe the methods false teachers were using in the Early Church (verses 18–19). Their speech was boastful, and they invited their hearers to indulge their sinful desires. They asserted a kind of confidence that drew people in. Specifically, they appealed “to twisted sexual desires” (NLT) to trap people in sin. Scholars believe these false teachers may have been telling believers that there would be no judgment for sexual sins.

Today’s false teachings may have different specifics, but the deceivers’ methods will be similar. They will come across as appealing, conveying a confidence that can seem genuine. They will deliver a compelling message that seems good on the surface but twists the truth. Their deception will lead people back into the grip of sin and subject them to judgment.

The word translated “tangled up” (verse 20, NLT) or “entangled” (KJV) was also used to describe braiding hair, implying a deliberate process and intentional choice to return to sin. Peter makes a strong assertion in verse 21: People who reject the holiness of God and listen to false teaching would have been better off “if they had never known the way to righteousness” (NLT). When a person rejects the truth of Christ, they become almost immune to its power (see Hebrews 10:26–27). By illustrating his point using dogs and pigs (2 Peter 2:22)—both of which were repulsive

to his readers—Peter showed his utter contempt for false teachers and the destructive messages they bring.


Discuss

- ? What are some ways false teachers might deceive people today?
- ? What kinds of teachings might be most effective at misleading people?

□ Don't Tolerate False Teaching

Revelation 2:12–17



Say: Before delivering His message to the Pergamum church in Revelation 2:12–17, Jesus described himself as “the one with the sharp two-edged sword” (verse 12, *NLT*). Sometimes we need a two-edged message like the one He gives: a word of encouragement plus a word of correction. (Share your highlights from the following text.)  **(Play the video highlighting the site of the Pergamum church—available at [RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult](https://www.RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult).)**

The city of Pergamum was a center of Roman worship in the province of Asia (modern-day Turkey). It included multiple temples to Roman gods and a huge altar, probably dedicated to Zeus, that may have been “Satan’s seat” (*KJV*) referred to in Revelation 2:13. Amid the opposition and influence of this idolatrous culture, the church had remained true to Christ.

But the Pergamum church also had a problem: They were tolerating false teaching (verses 14–15). Jesus’ message refers to Balaam (see Numbers 22–25), who played a role in the rebellion of God’s people by leading some of the men of Israel to indulge in immorality and idolatry (see Numbers 31:16). By New Testament times, Balaam had become synonymous with all kinds of corrupt teachers who led believers into spiritual compromise with the world.

In Pergamum, this compromise involved the deception of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:15). Scripture does not appear to be clear on the specifics of the Nicolaitans’ heresy. However, Irenaeus, one of the Early Church fathers, described them as followers of Nicolas of Antioch (see Acts 6:5), a church leader who had forsaken sound doctrine. Specifically, he is believed to have modeled self-indulgence and taught that it doesn’t matter how Christians behave. Interestingly, the two names *Balaam* (contracted from two Hebrew words meaning “destroyer of” or “to conquer” and “people”) and *Nicolas* (from two Greek words meaning “victory” or “to conquer” and “people”) are synonymous. In Revelation 2:14–15, each refers to a teacher who used his influence to lead people into heresy.

The Pergamum believers who followed the Nicolaitans’ false teaching were like the Israelites who followed Balaam’s advice: Rather than completely abandoning their faith, they assimilated the religious and social values of their culture into their beliefs about God. Unless they repented, they would face judgment (verse 16). However, Christ ended His message to Pergamum with a wonderful promise. Those who turned from their sinful ways and returned to Him could look forward to receiving a “white stone, and on the stone will be engraved a new name that no one understands except the one who receives it” (verse 17, *NLT*). This stone may

have referred to any number of things, perhaps even the Roman procedure by which a juror declared a prisoner's innocence by casting a white stone into an urn. Regardless of the specifics, Jesus' message is clear. Those who turn from sin and remain faithful to Him will experience the joys of heaven.



Resource Packet Item 2: Identifying False Teachings

Distribute the worksheet and divide the class into four groups. Have each group discuss their assigned Scriptures, and then talk about their responses in class.

Discuss

- ? Why might an individual Christian or a church tolerate false teaching?
- ? What worldly values and beliefs might be appealing to believers today?
How can we identify and combat these teachings?



Part 3—Careless Living

Avoid the Dangers of Idle Living

2 Thessalonians 3:10–13

Say: To effectively confront the challenges facing the Church from within and without, we must reject ungodly values and choose to live by the Word of God. Such a lifestyle includes working hard to care for ourselves and one another. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

To fully understand the command in 2 Thessalonians 3:10—“Those unwilling to work will not get to eat” (NLT)—we must examine its context. The word “idle” in verse 6 carries the sense of being out of line with how Christians should behave. In verse 7, it refers to laziness or an unwillingness to care for one's own responsibilities. In verse 11, idleness had led to “meddling” (NLT) in the business of others in the congregation. These issues are interrelated. Idleness leaves a person unoccupied, which gives way to an array of problems like gossip and a critical spirit. Idle people place a double burden on the local church: They consume resources intended to care for people who cannot work. They also create additional problems that break down the fellowship of believers. Whether they are working or resting, Christians must be careful to use their time for the glory of God.

Discuss

- ? How does idleness impact the church today?
- ? How should Christians and church leaders respond when an idle person engages in the behaviors described in these verses?



Make Caring for One Another a Top Priority

Hebrews 6:9–12

Say: Hebrews 6:8 gives a rather harsh warning to the readers. But then the writer moves to an encouraging exhortation to love one another. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

After describing the apostasy of certain former believers, the writer of Hebrews expressed confidence that these readers were meant for better things (6:9). The fruit of righteousness could be seen in their lives, especially in the way they served God and helped the needy among them (verse 10). They would be wise to continually guard against indifference and instead “follow the example of those who are going to inherit God’s promises because of their faith and endurance” (verse 12, NLT).

As we work hard to care for one another, we also have examples to follow—in Scripture, in church history, and in our own congregations. By growing closer to God and our fellow believers, we become living examples others can follow as well.



Resource Packet Item 3: Be an Example

Distribute the worksheet and discuss our powerful influence as believers.

Discuss

? In what ways should Christian community values differ from the world’s?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: The body of Christ is made up of active participants, not spectators. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can endure outside opposition, pursue biblical and doctrinal truth, and exemplify the love of God.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Pray that God will help you stay committed to Him when you face difficulty or trouble because of your faith.
- Commit to study the Scriptures more deeply so you are prepared to counter false teaching and correct those who have been misled.
- Look for opportunities to bless your church family this week with your words and actions.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Murderous Pursuer.

1 Samuel 23:7–14

Tuesday:

Lying Prophets and Deceitful

Priests. Jeremiah 14:13–18

Wednesday:

Dangerously Comfortable.

Amos 6:1–7

Thursday:

Warning about False Prophets.

Matthew 7:15–23

Friday:

Promise to the Persecuted.

Mark 13:9–13

Saturday:

Rebuke of Idle Talkers and

Deceivers. Titus 1:10–16

February 25, 2024

LESSON 13

Working through Church Problems

Study Text

Acts 15:1–29; 1 Corinthians 3:1–8;
1 Peter 5:5–7; Revelation 3:14–22

Central Truth

Church problems can be solved by listening to the Holy Spirit and applying biblical principles.

Key Verse



1 Corinthians 12:13

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit (KJV).

Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Identify the common sources of problems within the local church and the worldwide Church as described in Scripture.
- Recognize that Scripture is the primary source for finding solutions to church problems.
- Commit to guarding against worldly values by growing in your relationship with God.

Introducing the Study

Say: The global Church's health (or lack of it) is most visible in the health of local churches. A major factor in church health is the ability to overcome challenges that naturally arise as God's people represent Christ in their communities.

Opening Activity—What's the Problem?

Ask: What would you say is the biggest challenge facing local churches today? There are many valid answers to this question, including topics covered in this unit. Yet the most destructive challenges can often be subtle issues that divide us from one another and distract us from our mission and our love for Christ.

Say: This lesson focuses on present-day church issues that also confronted the Early Church. You've probably heard the saying, "The more things change, the more they stay the same." That is often true—even in the church. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

This lesson deals with six problems that seemed to plague the Early Church throughout the first century: legalism, prejudice, worldliness, pride, carnality, and spiritual immaturity. These problems have shown themselves to be timeless, reflecting the basic temptations common to everyone in this fallen world. But with the Holy Spirit's guidance and empowerment, we can identify ways to overcome them.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

Acts 15:1. And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

2. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

28. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;

29. That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

Revelation 3:16. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

17. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

1 Peter 5:5. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

6. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.

1 Corinthians 3:1. And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.

3. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

4. For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?

5. Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?

6. I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.

7. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.

Acts 15:1. While Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch of Syria, some men from Judea arrived and began to teach the believers: "Unless you are circumcised as required by the law of Moses, you cannot be saved."

2. Paul and Barnabas disagreed with them, arguing vehemently. Finally, the church decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, accompanied by some local believers, to talk to the apostles and elders about this question.

28. "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay no greater burden on you than these few requirements:

29. You must abstain from eating food offered to idols, from consuming blood or the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. If you do this, you will do well. Farewell."

Revelation 3:16. "But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!

17. You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked."

1 Peter 5:5. In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you, dress yourselves in humility as you relate to one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

6. So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor.

1 Corinthians 3:1. Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in Christ.

3. for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren't you living like people of the world?

4. When one of you says, "I am a follower of Paul," and another says, "I follow Apollos," aren't you acting just like people of the world?

5. After all, who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God's servants through whom you believed the Good News. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us.

6. I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow.

7. It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Part 1—Legalism and Prejudice

□ “We Are All Saved the Same Way”

Acts 15:1–11

Say: History is filled with pivotal moments—events that are still being studied and celebrated centuries later. The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 is a great example of this. In many ways, it set the Church’s course for the next two thousand years and beyond. People would no longer ask, “Can Gentiles be saved?” but rather “*How* can Gentiles be saved?” This question prompted many more questions about the Law and legalism that believers are still asking today. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In many ways, the central issue facing the Jerusalem Council was the larger question of what role the Law should have in a Christian’s life. In Acts 15, the specific matter under discussion was circumcision. When a group of Jewish believers taught that circumcision was necessary for salvation, Paul and Barnabas led a delegation to Jerusalem to discuss the issue with the church leaders and apostles there (verses 1–3).

Verse 5 indicates that the church in Jerusalem included a group of Pharisees who had become Christians. They already believed in the doctrine of resurrection, so in many ways their faith in Christ did not contradict their existing beliefs as Pharisees. They were greatly admired and revered in the first century for their expertise in Scripture. This posed a problem, though, when it came to the Law, and especially as it related to Gentiles. The Pharisees argued: “The Gentile converts must be circumcised and required to follow the law of Moses” (verse 5, NLT).

As one of the apostles in Jerusalem, Peter addressed the Jerusalem church and the visiting delegates. He began by reminding them that God intended for the gospel to be preached to the Gentiles so that they could believe. This was confirmed by the gift of the Holy Spirit being given to them (verses 6–9; see Acts 10:44–48). Peter explained that God himself did not distinguish between Jewish and Gentile believers and that those demanding circumcision were tempting (15:10, KJV) or “challenging” (NLT) God with their demand. In essence, they were casting doubt on the validity of what God was doing among the Gentiles.

The mention of a yoke is key. This term was commonly used in Judaism to refer to the Law or, more specifically, the acceptance of the entire Law. Peter pointed out that even their ancestors could not bear such a burden. Salvation only came through Christ—the One who said, “My yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light” (Matthew 11:30, NLT). As Paul stated later, the problem was not with the Law (Romans 7:11–16). Rather, the problem was that humans cannot keep the Law, which makes the Law insufficient.



Resource Packet Item 1: Christians and the Law

Distribute the information sheet and discuss its contents. How do we avoid legalism? How do we determine which rules in Scripture apply to us today? How should we read and understand Old Testament law?

Discuss

- ? Why do you think some Jews thought the Gentiles should follow the Law?
- ? What are some ways legalism exists in the Church today?
- ? In what ways do people put extra requirements on how others become Christians?

□ The Burden Has Been Made Light

Acts 15:22–29



Say: People have countless perspectives and personal prejudices that affect the way they view others. Prejudice was part of what the Jerusalem Council was dealing with as Jewish Christians gradually came to accept Gentile Christians as spiritual equals. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Peter's strong words to the Jerusalem Council were immediately reinforced by James and received by the delegates (Acts 15:12–21). Two leaders from the Jerusalem church, Judas and Silas, were appointed to join Paul and Barnabas in journeying back to Antioch. They would carry a letter (verses 23–29) that explained the situation and provided the remedy. It is worthwhile to note the letter was described as coming from “the apostles and elders and brethren” (KJV). There was no animosity from one congregation to another. As the believers worked through their differences, the Church was coming together as a unified body of faith—both Jews and Gentiles. There were no second-class believers.

The letter first explained that the Judaizers (Jews who insisted Gentiles keep the Law) were neither sent nor approved by the leaders in Jerusalem (verse 24). This is important because the church at Jerusalem held great influence and respect in the Early Church. The Judaizers had acted alone, and it is strongly implied that their actions disturbed the apostles and elders.

The solution the Jerusalem Council had reached—not on their own but through the leading of the Holy Spirit—was to “lay no greater burden on you than these few requirements” (verse 28, NLT): Do not eat food offered to idols. Do not consume blood or meat from a strangled animal. Abstain from sexual immorality.

These instructions are among what Jews call the Seven Laws of Noah, who was the father of both Jews and Gentiles. The Jews considered these commands to predate the Law and believed they applied to everyone. The first six laws were: Do not worship idols; do not blaspheme God's name; do not kill; do not commit adultery; do not rob; do not consume “lifeblood” (Genesis 9:4, NLT); and establish courts of justice. In addition, Jews considered eating meat sacrificed to idols as participating in idolatry. So these instructions from the Jerusalem Council paved the way for healthy, unified fellowship between Jews and Gentiles by prohibiting behaviors that were offensive to Jews. They countered prejudice without adding any requirements to salvation.

Discuss

- ? How does prejudice manifest itself in the Church today?
- ? What are some ways your church can overcome prejudice and pursue unity?



Part 2—Worldliness and Pride

□ Don't Be Lukewarm

Revelation 3:14–22

Say: Comparisons are often made between the present-day church and the church in Laodicea, which had become self-reliant and saw little need for God. (Share your highlights from the following text.) **▶ (Play the video highlighting the site of the Laodicea church—available at RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult.)**

The letter to the church at Laodicea opens with a vivid description of Jesus as “the one who is the Amen—the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s new creation” (Revelation 3:14, *NLT*). The Hebrew word *amen* means faithfulness or truth and is sometimes used in Scripture to signify God’s steadfast nature. (See Isaiah 65:16, where “God of truth” can be translated “God of amen.”) This description of Jesus in Revelation drew a sharp contrast to the unfaithfulness of the Laodicean church, and verses 15–18 are a harsh and elaborate rebuke against them.

Positioned at a crossroads in the ancient Roman world, Laodicea was a wealthy city. This abundance had corrupted the faith of the believers there. Material wealth had blinded them to their spiritual poverty. They wore the expensive black woolen garments Laodicea famously produced, yet they were naked—lacking the white garments fit for heaven. They had worldly wealth, but not the golden riches of heaven that had been purified by God. And while Laodicea was known for its medical school, which exported an eye salve known as Phrygian powder across the Empire, the church needed ointment from God to restore their spiritual sight.

In short, the Laodiceans had become worldly to the point of being spiritually repulsive. Six miles to their north lay Hierapolis, a city known for its hot mineral springs. The water from the springs overflowed onto a plateau, then poured over a three-hundred-foot cliff near Laodicea, creating a beautiful, mineral-encrusted waterfall. People traveled to Hierapolis for its therapeutic hot water, but by the time the water reached Laodicea, it was lukewarm and disgusting to drink. Such was the Laodicean church: seemingly rich, beautiful, and appealing, but actually putrid.

Thankfully, God graciously corrects those He loves. Verse 20 is often used as an invitation from Christ to those outside the faith, but we cannot lose sight of its original context. Jesus was inviting the Laodicean Christians to return to fellowship with Him. Although they had wandered away, He had not forgotten them. In fact, He was the One making the first move, pursuing them. They needed only to turn from their worldliness and be reconciled to Him. Instead of the temporary riches of Laodicea, they would enjoy the untold riches and blessings of their eternal reward.



Resource Packet Item 2: Do Not Love This World

Distribute the worksheet and complete it as a class. Discuss how worldly values can distract and deceive Christians, causing them to drift away from God.

Discuss

? What are some ways the desire for wealth and self-sufficiency can pollute our hearts?

- ? How does this greed and independent pride seep into the church?
- ? How can we guard against sliding into worldliness?

□ God Opposes the Proud

1 Peter 5:5–7



Say: *Pride* is a complicated word—even when we set aside its cultural meaning related to homosexuality and gender issues. It’s a well-known vice, but at times we use the word in a positive manner: “Take pride in your work” or “You make my heart swell with pride.” So it is important for us to clarify what Peter meant by his statement that God opposes the proud. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

This passage opens with an interesting word picture: “Dress yourselves in humility as you relate to one another” (1 Peter 5:5, NLT). That term “dress yourselves” (NLT) or “be clothed” (KJV) refers to a servant putting on an apron in preparation to serve. Jesus himself did this when He washed the disciples’ feet (see John 13:4–17). Humility is tied to willful submission and service. We humble ourselves by elevating others, treating them with value and respect. It’s easy to imagine doing this in relationship to God. But showing humility toward one another can be difficult.

Peter put humility in the most basic spiritual terms by quoting Proverbs 3:34: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5, NLT). The ego is naturally at odds with the kingdom of God—the One who humbled himself to the point of becoming human for our sake. But the answer to pride is quite simple—though not always easy. We must submit ourselves to the “mighty hand” of God (verse 6, KJV). In the Old Testament, God’s hand represented discipline (Psalm 32:4) and deliverance (Deuteronomy 9:26; Ezekiel 20:34). Both meanings apply in Peter’s epistle, and they apply to us as well. As we submit to God in every aspect of life, we are shaped into the image of Christ and imitate His character by showing love and humility toward others. In the end, today’s struggles will be a distant memory.

The familiar exhortation in 1 Peter 5:7 to “[cast] all your care upon him” (KJV) refers to the many difficulties believers face while trying to lead godly lives in an ungodly world. This includes inner spiritual struggles along with outward trials like persecution, poverty, injustice, and sickness. Jesus will carry these burdens for us, because He cares for us.

Discuss

- ? What does Christian humility look like in someone’s everyday life?
- ? In what ways has God shown that He cares for you?

Part 3—Carnality and Immaturity

□ “Still Controlled by Your Sinful Nature”

1 Corinthians 3:1–4



Say: Have you ever been so exasperated with someone that you told them to “grow up”? The challenges of maturity are not limited to growing physically or emotionally. We also need to mature spiritually. That kind of maturity is

on display in the way we conduct our lives and the way we treat each other.
(Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul continued his exhortation to the Corinthians by giving an exceptionally harsh evaluation of their spiritual state. He was able to critique their profound spiritual immaturity without denying their status as Christians—although they were so immature that he had to address them as if they “belonged to this world” or “infants in Christ” (verse 1, NLT).

At the root of their problem was a sad reality: “You are still controlled by your sinful nature” (verse 3, NLT). For this reason, Paul had to treat them as spiritual infants, focusing on basic virtues rather than deeper doctrines. Instead of outgrowing their immaturity, they were stuck.

The signs were evident in their relationships with one another, which were filled with jealousy and quarreling. Some believers may not consider these to be *big sins* and might try to justify quarrels by pointing to others’ actions. Yet Paul saw this differently, asking two rhetorical questions that implied positive responses: “Doesn’t that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren’t you living like people of the world?” (verse 3, NLT). In their immature behavior, the Corinthian Christians were acting like people who hadn’t been transformed by Jesus.

Paul presented an example of their divisive quarreling. He and a charismatic teacher named Apollos served in Corinth, which was a major city in the province of Achaia, as mentioned in Acts 18:24–28. Both were doing a good work for the Lord. But the Corinthians had a distorted, worldly view of ministry, which led them to take sides based on whether they preferred Paul or Apollos.

Discuss

- ? Based on 1 Corinthians 3:1–4, what are the signs of worldliness?
- ? In what ways do Christians still become divided based on their loyalties?



□ God Does the Work

1 Corinthians 3:5–8

Say: People have always been drawn to celebrities, even in Paul’s day. His response to the division over his and Apollos’s ministries was to remind people that only God can bring forth fruit in any kingdom endeavor. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul refuted the Corinthians’ immaturity by confronting their wrong ideas and values. Paul and Apollos both preached the gospel faithfully. Each did their part to humbly serve God. But the Corinthians were divided over whose role was more important. They were drawn to personality and function, losing sight of Kingdom principles. But God was responsible for the outcome of both Paul’s and Apollos’s ministries, and each would find his reward in Christ.

Such carnal battles continue today. Maybe we divide over the kind of ministry or sermon or music we prefer. But Paul reminds us the answer to such disunity is to grow in the Lord together.



Resource Packet Item 3: Overcoming Sinful Desires

Distribute the worksheet and read the Scriptures together. Then discuss the questions and share ideas for overcoming sin and growing in the Lord.

Discuss

- ? What does it mean to become spiritually mature? What steps are involved in this kind of growth?
- ? What are some ways Christians divide over ministry matters? How can they mend those divisions?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Many problems in the local church result from human conflict. So the solution often results from building relationships through fellowship, prayer, love, and the kind of mutual respect that comes from seeing one another as bearers of the image of God.

Ministry in Action

- Introduce yourself to someone in your church you don't know. Try to make this a practice when new people visit.
- Perform an act of humble service for someone this week.
- Look for ways to compliment and encourage fellow Christians in your church as a way to establish relationships that are not so easily strained by differences.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Humbled by Pride.
2 Chronicles 26:11–21

Tuesday:

Condemned for Injustice.
Jeremiah 22:11–17

Wednesday:

Judged for Harlotry.
Ezekiel 16:15–19, 27–30

Thursday:

Worldly Wisdom Is Futile.
1 Corinthians 3:18–23

Friday:

Legalism Cannot Tame the Flesh.
Colossians 2:20–23

Saturday:

Favoritism Is Sinful.
James 2:1–9

Principles for Christian Living: 1, 2, 3 John

The Books of 1, 2, and 3 John are believed to have been written by the apostle John—also known as the “disciple Jesus loved” (John 21:20, *NLT*). The repetitive, cyclical nature of John’s writing was intended to emphasize two key ideas: God is light, and God is love.

John’s first letter was intended for a general audience, most likely the believers in the house churches John oversaw. Rather than introducing new concepts, the apostle emphasized ideas and phrases from Jesus’ teachings (as recorded in John’s Gospel) to communicate the deepest truths of the New Testament in the simplest terms. By understanding the truth about Jesus, the believers could have fellowship with one another and with God. John’s second and third letters applied these concepts to real-life situations in two local house churches.

Over the next several weeks, your class will discuss these essential principles of Christian faith and practice. Along with his first-century readers, you’ll be reminded by John to stay true to what you already know about Jesus—because knowing Jesus is knowing God.

Lesson 1 lays the foundation for John’s teachings: God is light, and as we walk in that light, we are able to have fellowship with Him and with each other.

Lesson 2 focuses on the concept of discipleship, which in essence means following Jesus’ example and obeying His commands. John also discussed the importance of avoiding worldliness, recognizing false teachers, and staying faithful to the Word.

Lesson 3 addresses the transformation that takes place when someone becomes a child of God. Because of Jesus’ righteousness at work in our lives, we are able to love one another, which proves we have passed from death to life.

Lesson 4 zeros in on the necessity of discerning between truth and error. Rather than listening to false teachers, our own feelings, or other deceptive sources, we must hold tightly to the teachings of Christ.

On Easter Sunday, lesson 5 celebrates the Resurrection by taking a closer look at Jesus’ encounters with Mary Magdalene, the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and the apostle Peter.

Lesson 6 reminds us of the miraculous nature of God’s love and explains how our love for God is demonstrated in the way we love people.

The unit concludes in Lesson 7 with an overview of 1 John 5, which describes the victories we have over evil and sin, the promise that God hears and answers our prayers, and the Blessed Hope of eternal life with God.

March 3, 2024

LESSON

1

Walk in Fellowship with God

Study Text

1 John 1:1 through 2:2

Central Truth

Christians are called into fellowship with God and other believers.



Key Verse

1 John 1:7

If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (KJV).

If we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand the importance of the apostle John's firsthand experience of the Incarnation.
- Students will recognize the joy of walking in the light of God's presence.
- Students will practice confession to uphold fellowship with God.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: We are beginning a study of 1, 2, and 3 John. These New Testament books were letters written by the apostle John in a caring, pastoral tone to encourage believers to remain faithful to the truth. As someone who had the opportunity of walking with the incarnate Christ, John specifically described God as life, light, and love. He also provided valuable insights for Christian living.

Opening Activity—It's Really Dark!

Ask: Have you ever experienced complete darkness? Maybe your home lost power, or you were camping under a starless sky, or you were in a hotel room and couldn't find the light switch. What was it like trying to find your way or locate what you were looking for with no light?

Say: Most of us know how hard it can be to navigate in darkness. We can't see the obstacles right in front of us or find the path we need to take. We experience fear, or at the very least, uncertainty. In those moments, we are grateful for even a glimmer of light to help us on our way. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In 1 John 1:5 the apostle John says, "God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all" (NLT). This one verse provides insight into one of the many benefits of walking with God. His light illuminates the way and guides His followers to discover the life He offers. His light dispels fear and uncertainty. His followers experience a deep sense of peace as they walk in the light of His presence. As we look closely at 1 John 1:1 through 2:2, we uncover priceless truths about walking in fellowship with God and with one another.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

1 John 1:1. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;

2. (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)

3. That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

4. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

5. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

6. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

7. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

8. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

10. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

2:1. My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

2. And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

1 John 1:1. We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life.

2. This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us.

3. We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

4. We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy.

5. This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all.

6. So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness; we are not practicing the truth.

7. But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.

8. If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth.

9. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.

10. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts.

2:1. My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous.

2. He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Say: The apostle John had the unique privilege of walking alongside Jesus throughout His earthly ministry. John was an eyewitness to His life, miracles, and teachings. Along with Peter and James, John had a close relationship with Jesus. John was present at the transfiguration of Jesus, witnessed a 12-year-old girl (and others) being raised from death to life, saw the Crucifixion, talked with the risen Lord, witnessed the ascension of Christ, and experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room. He began this letter by reminding us why he can speak with authority—he experienced firsthand what he shared with us in these letters. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The first few verses of 1 John are a reflection of the first chapter in the Gospel of John, where he provided clear descriptions of the many events he witnessed as he walked alongside Jesus. Considering John's Gospel adds significant value to the study of his epistles. Jesus is the One who existed from the beginning, the Word of Life, and the One who is life itself. He declared the apostles had heard, seen, looked on, and touched the Christ. They experienced the very Word of Life, and we can experience Him as well.

John emphasized the eternal reality of Jesus existing with the Father from the beginning, even before creation. Then Jesus took on human flesh, and people could see Him, hear Him, and touch Him. The Father made himself known to us in the person of Jesus Christ, and through Christ, He made a way for us to have fellowship with Him. In John 17, the apostle recorded the prayer Jesus prayed for all believers—where Jesus talked about the relationship He had with the Father before the world was made. He asked the Father that we would experience the same kind of fellowship with Him.

Discuss

- ? As we consider the Gospels, what did John see, hear, and experience as he walked with Jesus? What is the value of hearing from someone who had an up-close, in-person relationship with Jesus?
- ? John described Jesus as eternal, as the Word of Life, and as life itself. Which one of these descriptions encourages you the most today and why?
- ? Read John 17:20–26. How is Jesus' prayer reflected in 1 John 1:1–3?



Resource Packet Item 1: Similarities in John's Writings

Distribute the worksheet, and divide your class into small groups. Assign a different concept to each group. After a few minutes, ask them to share their findings. This page could also be sent home with students for additional study in the coming week.



Say: You can almost hear John's excitement in his words: "We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard" (1:3, NLT). He then explained one of his purposes for writing this letter—he clearly desired his readers to experience the same fellowship with one another and with the Father and Son that he and the other apostles had experienced. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As he began writing his first letter, the apostle wanted to remind his readers of Jesus' teaching and establish his authority on this topic by mentioning the time he spent with Jesus. Having lived alongside Jesus, John understood the richness of relationship between the Father and the Son in a tangible way.

The Gospel of John recorded the words of Jesus as He described himself as the true grapevine and the Father as the gardener. John helped us to understand how to experience life and fruitfulness as we stay firmly connected through relationship with Jesus (John 15). In this same portion of Scripture John recorded Jesus' invitation to live in Him and abide in His love (verses 5–11).

Jesus also challenged His followers to love one another (verse 17). The fellowship we enjoy with other believers is based on the love we've been shown by the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3). This love is self-sacrificing and fruitful, not fickle and superficial. It is founded on Jesus and His sacrifice for us, not on our personal preferences or similarities we enjoy in others. We can experience this deep, spiritual connection with individuals of different ages, ethnicities, education, socioeconomic levels, political views, and cultural preferences only through God's love.

Discuss

- ? Read John 15:5–17. How did Jesus describe the relationship He offers in these verses? What do you think Jesus is inviting us to experience when He says, "Remain in my love" (verse 9)?
- ? How did Jesus describe the fellowship we should offer to one another in John 15:12–13?



Part 2—Fellowship in the Light

Say: John desired for us to know the same joy he experienced in relationship with the Father and the Son. John's record of Jesus' teaching in John 15 also describes the joy of this unique fellowship. Listen again to the words of Jesus: "I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you" (John 15:9–12, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

We might mistakenly think happiness and joy are the same emotion. However, happiness is typically contingent upon abundance and easy circumstances. The type of joy we experience in a close relationship with God is not based on our ever-changing circumstances. Knowing our sins are forgiven by the sacrifice Jesus made on the Cross opens the way for us to encounter God in a deep, personal way.

John understood this close relationship based on joy. “We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy” (1 John 1:4, NLT). Unending joy comes as we grow more confident of God’s love for us. We grow to trust His love and believe He is working all things, even the most difficult things, for our good. This brings a joy that rises above our current circumstances. And each day as we read and meditate on His Word, His truth revives us and gives us joy (see Psalm 19:7–11).

Discuss

- ? How would you describe the joy of living in fellowship with the Father and the Son?
- ? How does understanding the love of God impact our joy?

□ Walk in the Light

1 John 1:5–7



Say: The most powerful truth of the gospel is contained in 1 John 1:5–7: “The blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin” (NLT). What an amazing gift we have been given—the opportunity to walk in the light of God’s love through the cleansing of our sins! Since He is the Light, we cannot continue to walk in darkness and claim to have a relationship with Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Within these three verses in the first chapter of 1 John, the apostle contrasted light and darkness. Light represents what is good and holy. Darkness represents sin and evil. Here John told us, “God is light”—the very source of all that is right and pure. In Him there is absolutely no darkness or evil, not even a hint. So those who are walking in darkness (or sin) are not walking with the Lord (verse 6).

Throughout the Gospel of John, the apostle recorded many times when Jesus referred to himself as light. John 8:12 may be the most descriptive and clear passage of all: “Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, ‘I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won’t have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life’” (NLT).

Because Jesus is the source of life and light, when we are in relationship with Him, we are no longer blinded by the deceitfulness of sin. Instead, we have the light of His truth to lead us to the life He offers. The writer of Psalm 119:105 reveals this truth, describing God’s Word as a lamp to guide our feet and a light for our path.

Walking in the light of God’s Word brings life to us individually but also provides the basis of genuine, life-giving fellowship with one another. Sin not only separates us from God; it also separates us from one another. But as we walk together in the light of God’s truth, we can enjoy relationships that encourage and sustain us in our pursuit of God.



Resource Packet Item 2: The Light

Divide the class into small groups and distribute the worksheet. Allow time for students to read the verses and discuss their insights. Encourage each group to share their discoveries with the class. Then discuss the final question together.

Discuss

- ? How do the verses in 1 John 1:5–7 challenge the false idea that we can continue in sin and remain in fellowship with God?
- ? Psalm 119:105 (NLT) says, “Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.” How does the light of God’s Word illuminate the right paths for our lives?
- ? How does sin destroy our relationships? How does walking in the light of God’s truth create healthy relationships?



Part 3—Fellowship through Cleansing

□ Confession

1 John 1:8–10

Say: The first step in experiencing fellowship with the Father is to acknowledge we are sinners. Salvation happens the moment we believe Jesus is God’s Son who died for us, and we confess and repent of our sins. This is an extravagant, undeserved gift. We cannot earn it or do anything to deserve it. However, confession does not end when we start following Jesus. Every established relationship with God must include continual confession. When we confess our sins to God, John assures us that God is faithful to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all wickedness. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The truth is, we continue to sin even after we are born again. Some examples:

- We allow fear to take the place of faith.
- We get angry and say hurtful words.
- We gossip about a coworker or fellow church member.
- We make unfair judgments about a situation we don’t understand fully.
- We are apathetic to the suffering of a friend.

The list of sins could go on and on. When we don’t regularly confess our sins, we hinder God’s ongoing work in our lives. One of the best ways to stay in a close relationship with the Father is to read His Word and allow the light of His truth to shine a spotlight on our motives, words, and behaviors. Only then can we easily recognize our sinful behavior and realize our need for confession. John clearly states, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us . . . we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 John 1:8,10, KJV).

We need to be quick to respond to the conviction we feel. As we make confession a regular part of our prayer life, we experience unbroken fellowship with our Creator. Any time we confess our sins to God, He will cleanse us (verse 9), lead us to right thinking, and help us to grow more like Christ.

Discuss

- ? What do we miss if we mistakenly think that confession is just for the moment of salvation?
- ? How can we live with a repentant heart, one that is quick to confess our sins and ask God for His cleansing?



Resource Packet Item 3: Confession

Distribute the worksheet, and assign each verse to one or more students. Then ask them to share their insights about confession and repentance.

□ Our Advocate

1 John 2:1–2



Say: We see the apostle’s affection for the recipients of this letter when he addressed them as “my dear children” (1 John 2:1, *NLT*) and encouraged them not to sin. He also lovingly reminded his readers (including us) that Jesus is our Advocate, our Defender, and our Redeemer. His sacrifice has paid the full price for our sins, and He stands before the Father pleading our case. No sin is beyond His forgiveness. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

First John 2:1 tells us, “We have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father” (*NLT*). Let’s look at Romans 8:31–34, which describes Jesus’ role as our advocate. “What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won’t he also give us everything else? Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God’s right hand, pleading for us” (*NLT*). The verses that follow assure us that with Christ as our advocate, nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Jesus promised before His ascension that He would send another Advocate, the Holy Spirit (John 14:15–17). The Holy Spirit comforts us, leads us into truth, and convicts us of sin. Paul also told us the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness and makes intercession for us “in harmony with God’s own will” (Romans 8:26–27, *NLT*). When we understand the Holy Spirit’s role as our Advocate, we can be confident in His leading. Any time we experience His conviction, we can know He is leading us to confess our sins and experience the joy of renewed closeness with the Father.

Discuss

- ? Read Romans 8:31–39 aloud. How is your faith strengthened by these verses?
- ? How does understanding the Holy Spirit’s role as our Advocate help us respond appropriately to His comfort, leading, and conviction?
- ? How is the extravagant love of God demonstrated through Jesus’ atoning work?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: John knew without any doubt that Jesus—the eternal, living Word—came to cleanse us from our sin and provide a way for us to have true fellowship with the Father and with one another. Every one of us has sinned, and that sin separates us from God and others. Fellowship with the Father begins when we acknowledge Jesus as God’s Son, believe He died in our place, and confess our sins. He is faithful to cleanse us from all unrighteousness and enter into relationship with us. Not only does Jesus offer us relationship with Him, but the light of His truth also guides us and allows us to have genuine fellowship with other believers.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Commit to telling one person about your relationship with the Father and the Son, and invite them to experience the same relationship you enjoy.
- Invite someone from your church family whom you don’t know well into your home for coffee or a meal. Make them feel welcome and encourage them to tell you about their faith journey.
- Read the Gospel of John this week and take note of the experiences the apostle had with Jesus. Consider the type of relationship they enjoyed with one another. Then apply those principles to discover the richness you can experience in fellowship with the Father and the Son.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Fellowship with God Broken.
Genesis 3:8–13,21–24

Tuesday:

Hospitality and Fellowship
Demonstrated. 2 Kings 4:8–13

Wednesday:

Fellowship Betrayed.
Psalm 55:12–14

Thursday:

Fellowship among Believers.
Acts 2:41–47

Friday:

Limitations of Fellowship.
2 Corinthians 6:14–18

Saturday:

The Right Hand of Fellowship.
Galatians 2:1–10

March 10, 2024

LESSON 2

Live as a Disciple of Christ

Study Text

1 John 2:3–29; 3 John 1–15 (NLT*)

*The *KJV* combines verses 14–15 into verse 14.

Central Truth

Christian discipleship means living in obedience to Christ.



Key Verse 1 John 2:6

He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked (KJV).

Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand that obedience to God's commands reveals our love for and knowledge of Him.
- Students will choose to obey the command of Jesus to love others the way He loves us.
- Students will recognize the need to guard their hearts and minds against false teachers by knowing God and His Word.

Introducing the Study

Say: Today's lesson is from 1 John 2 and the Book of 3 John. As the apostle writes, "Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did" (1 John 2:6, NLT). True disciples will follow Jesus' example in the way they interact with others, use their time and resources, respond to temptation, and engage with the world around them.

Opening Activity—The Highest Form of Flattery

Ask: Who is someone you admired when you were a child? In what ways does your life reflect their influence? Examples may include playing a certain sport because you admired an athlete or listening to country music because you admired a musician you saw on television.

Say: Imitating people we admire is one way of honoring them. We reveal our respect for them by wanting to be like them or taking an interest in things that are important to them. On a much deeper level, we reveal our love for and knowledge of God by obeying the things Jesus taught us. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

▼ **Play the "What Is a Disciple?" video—available at [RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult](https://www.RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult).**

First John 2 and the Book of 3 John encourage us to live as Jesus lived. The apostle John challenged us to reveal our knowledge of God by living in obedience to His commands. He helped us to understand one of the main ways we reveal our love for God is by loving one another and guarding against a love for the things of this world. John also helped us to recognize false teachers by observing how they live, and he encouraged us to remain in the truth of Christ's teaching.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

1 John 2:3. And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

4. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

5. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

6. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

7. Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.

8. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.

9. He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

10. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.

15. Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

24. Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.

25. And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.

26. These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.

27. But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

1 John 2:3. And we can be sure that we know him if we obey his commandments.

4. If someone claims, "I know God," but doesn't obey God's commandments, that person is a liar and is not living in the truth.

5. But those who obey God's word truly show how completely they love him. That is how we know we are living in him.

6. Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did.

7. Dear friends, I am not writing a new commandment for you; rather it is an old one you have had from the very beginning. This old commandment—to love one another—is the same message you heard before.

8. Yet it is also new. Jesus lived the truth of this commandment, and you also are living it. For the darkness is disappearing, and the true light is already shining.

9. If anyone claims, "I am living in the light," but hates a fellow believer, that person is still living in darkness.

10. Anyone who loves a fellow believer is living in the light and does not cause others to stumble.

15. Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you.

16. For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world.

17. And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.

24. So you must remain faithful to what you have been taught from the beginning. If you do, you will remain in fellowship with the Son and with the Father.

25. And in this fellowship we enjoy the eternal life he promised us.

26. I am writing these things to warn you about those who want to lead you astray.

27. But you have received the Holy Spirit, and he lives within you, so you don't need anyone to teach you what is true. For the Spirit teaches you everything you need to know, and what he teaches is true—it is not a lie. So just as he has taught you, remain in fellowship with Christ.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)

Part 1—Obey God’s Commands

□ Obedience Reveals Knowledge of God

1 John 2:3–6



Say: How can we be certain that we know and love God? This passage tells us clearly. “We can be sure that we know him if we obey his commandments. . . . Those who obey God’s Word truly show how completely they love him” (1 John 2:3,5, NLT). Instead of judging how well others are obeying God when you hear these verses, ask yourself: *Do my thoughts, words, and responses reveal my knowledge and love for God?* This isn’t an easy question to grapple with, but it’s important to allow God’s Word to guide us into living like Jesus in ever-increasing ways. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

People may claim to be Christians simply because they attend church or their family is traditionally Christian. However, true Christianity is not simply a matter of connecting with a church or proclaiming belief in God. It is demonstrated by a life of obedience to the Word of God. This passage in 1 John 2 couldn’t be more clear: We prove our knowledge of God and our love for Him by obeying His commandments. The more Christ’s disciples come to know Him and the Father through the pages of the Bible, the more they understand God’s great love for them.

Reading God’s Word also helps individuals see His power and sovereignty. This growing knowledge of God’s love and character helps His followers trust Him more and more. Obedience is a natural response for someone who truly knows God. Conversely, disobedience reveals unbelief and a disregard for God and the truth of His Word.

Those of us who claim to be Christ’s disciples should prioritize getting to know Him more every day. As we spend time in His Word, the Holy Spirit will help us grow more aware of who He is and just how much He loves us. Because of Christ’s unfailing love, we can trust His commands are always for our good. When we personally experience the depth of Christ’s love, we can easily love and obey Him in return.

Discuss

- ? Why is it important to read these passages and allow the Holy Spirit to shine a light on our own lives rather than using these verses to judge those around us?
- ? How does an increasing knowledge of God help us grow more obedient to His commands?
- ? How is our love for God demonstrated when we live as Jesus did (1 John 2:6)?

□ Love One Another

1 John 2:7–11; 3 John 1–8



Say: One of the main ways we reveal our knowledge and love for God is by loving each other. In one of Jesus’ last conversations with His disciples, He said, “I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my

Father's commandments and remain in his love. . . . This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you" (John 15:9–10,12, NLT). Then in verse 17, He repeated, "This is my command: Love each other" (NLT). When we do, we remain in His love. Our love for one another reveals our love for God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In 1 John 2, the apostle John again contrasted light and darkness. Those who are living in the light will love one another. Those who do not love their fellow believers are walking in the darkness, and this darkness will blind them to the truth. As John wrote, "Jesus lived the truth of this commandment" (1 John 2:8, NLT). If we are unclear about what love looks like, we simply have to look at the earthly life of Jesus. His love was never self-absorbed or based on feelings. He always chose to do what was best for others. When we love others the way Jesus loves us, we will walk in the light of truth and love.

The "one another" passages of the New Testament provide practical insights on what it looks like for us to love like Jesus. These verses challenge us to forgive, offer hospitality, encourage, serve, be kind, and honor others. We should allow the "one another" commands to guide the way we interact with those in our lives, especially the way we treat those who are closest to us. Jesus told us people would know we belong to Him by our love for one another.



Resource Packet Item 1: Obeying the "One Another" Passages

Distribute the worksheet and encourage the students to prayerfully read the passages, evaluating their own obedience level. Then ask them to allow the Holy Spirit to lead them to healthier relationships as they confess and ask for His help.

In 3 John 1–8, the apostle commended Gaius as one who lived according to the truth. And Gaius demonstrated his love for God by caring for the traveling teachers who came through his area. Gaius lived the "one another" passages in a tangible way and is an example for us today.

Discuss

- ? How is the way we interact with our family, friends, and coworkers a reflection of our love for God?
- ? The apostle John tells us, "Anyone who loves a fellow believer is living in the light. . . . Anyone who hates a fellow believer is still living and walking in darkness. Such a person does not know the way to go, having been blinded by the darkness" (1 John 2:10–11, NLT). How would you describe love as light and hatred as darkness?



Part 2—Know and Love the Father

□ You Who Belong to Him

1 John 2:12–14

Say: John was writing this letter to Christians of all ages and stages in their faith journey. He addressed them affectionately as "God's children"—both

those who are “mature in the faith,” and those who are “young in the faith” (1 John 2:12–13, *NLT*). These verses imply there is a progression as we grow in our knowledge and love for God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Looking closely at 1 John 2:12–14, we can see several attributes of true believers:

- Their sins are forgiven because of Jesus’ atoning work on the Cross.
- They know the Father and the Son.
- They experience victory over the evil one.
- God’s power helps them live strong, obedient lives, free from the entanglement of sin.
- They are hiding God’s Word in their hearts.

As disciples of Jesus, our growth is always impacted by our knowledge and application of God’s Word. Hebrews 4:12 reveals the power of the Scripture: “The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (*KJV*). His Word helps us see ourselves and our motives clearly. It consistently guides into all that is right and good.

Discuss

- ? What is the correlation between spiritual strength and God’s Word abiding in our hearts?
- ? What are some characteristics of believers who are mature in the faith?

□ Do Not Love the World

1 John 2:15–17



Say: The apostle John said clearly that the love of the Father is not in us when we love the world. He wasn’t referring to the physical earth but to worldliness—the “lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16, *KJV*). *Lust* can be defined simply as the desire for something we don’t have. The “lust of the flesh” refers specifically to sexual sin. The “lust of the eyes” is a covetous desire for material possessions. And the “pride of life” is arrogance in our positions and accomplishments. We cannot pursue these things and truly grow in our knowledge and love for God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Pursuing sexual satisfaction, material wealth, and elevated status will never satisfy our souls. These pursuits are fleeting and empty. Instead, God says,

Every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not?

hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live.” (Isaiah 55:1–3, KJV)

Pursuing God through faith in Jesus and listening diligently to His Word will satisfy the deepest part of us. All other pursuits will pass away.

Discuss

- ? How can we guard our hearts from worldly pursuits?
- ? How can we nurture the pursuit of God and His truth?



Resource Packet Item 2: God’s Invitation

Provide this worksheet as a study guide for students to use in the upcoming week. Consider making time in your next class to allow individuals to share their insights from Isaiah 55:1–13 and the invitation to pursue knowing God.



Part 3—Guard against Deception

□ Recognizing Antichrists

1 John 2:18–23

Say: “The last hour is here” (1 John 2:18, NLT). Since Jesus’ death and resurrection His followers have continued to live in the “last hour.” Jesus warned in Matthew 24:23–25 that false teachers would arise in the last days and cause many to fall away. John saw this happen in his lifetime. He wrote the three letters we call 1, 2, and 3 John to warn believers to be on guard against these “antichrists” by staying faithful to Jesus by knowing God’s Word. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In 1 John 2:18, John used the word *antichrists* to describe the false teachers who rose up within the church he was overseeing. This term can refer to those who oppose the truth of God’s Word or those who present themselves as counterfeit saviors. Either way, believers must be on guard against people who teach concepts contrary to the gospel—whether they come from inside or outside the church.

The apostle assured his readers they had been given the Spirit and could be certain of God’s truth. The Holy Spirit helps believers recognize false teachers who deny Jesus is the Christ and instead try to present a new or different way to experience the goodness of God. Some may accept Scripture as truth to a certain point, but they either add to or diminish the commands of God (see 2 Peter 3:15–17).

Second Peter 2 provides more insight on the dangers of false teachers, specifically those whose teaching was leading individuals into sexual immorality. A modern-day example of this type of false teacher is someone in church leadership who teaches that sexual relations outside of heterosexual marriage are acceptable and not sinful. This teaching leads many people into sin and denies the redeeming power of Jesus. Believers must know the truth of God’s Word and ask the Holy Spirit to uncover any false teachings they may hear or be tempted to believe.

Discuss

- ? The best way to recognize a counterfeit dollar bill is to study the real thing. How does studying God's Word protect us against false teaching?
- ? How should we respond when we encounter false teaching?
- ? Understanding that we all teach others through our lifestyles and conversations, how can we guard against becoming false teachers ourselves?



Resource Packet Item 3: The Danger of False Teachers

Distribute the worksheet and read 2 Peter 2 together. Then ask students to answer the questions and share their responses with the class. If your time is limited, you may choose to have students complete this worksheet at home.

□ Remain Faithful

1 John 2:24–29; 3 John 9–11



Say: Jesus invites us to abide or remain in His love (John 15:9) and allow His words to remain in us (verse 7). The best way to protect ourselves against false teaching is to trust His love and believe the truth of His Word. John issued the same challenge in 1 John 2:24–29, warning us about things which can lead us astray. We remain faithful as we enjoy close fellowship with God and our faithfulness will be demonstrated in righteous living. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Fellowship with God's people plays an important role in helping us, as believers, remain faithful. We should commit to a church family who believes the Bible is the infallible, authoritative Word of God. Gathering regularly to hear and learn from God's Word with other believers strengthens our faith. Our world is consistently sending messages to entice us toward the "lust of the flesh," the "lust of the eyes," and the "pride of life." We need to intentionally connect ourselves with others who believe the truth, remembering that "those who do good prove that they are God's children, and those who do evil prove that they do not know God" (3 John 11, NLT). Additionally, we should foster relationships within the body of Christ that are centered on the truth of the Bible. These healthy personal relationships will encourage us in our faith and help us recognize false teaching.

Discuss

- ? How can we practically abide in the love of Christ?
- ? How can fellowship with God's people keep us from believing false teachers and falling away from the truth?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: We reveal that we love and know God when we obey His commands. The clearest way we can do this is to love others. We can't say we love God and then hate each other. We should be growing in our faith and it should be evidenced by our ever-increasing likeness to Christ, which contrasts with the false teachers all around us. The best way to recognize the lies of the enemy is to know the truth we have received in God's Word. Our knowledge of God through His Word and our fellowship with Him and each other helps to keep us strong and overcome the evil one.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Make a fresh commitment to focus on loving those in your immediate family by putting into practice the “one another” passages in the New Testament.
- Read through the invitation found in Isaiah 55 and consider how you want to respond to His invitation to seek Him and listen diligently to His Word.
- Meet with someone who is also attending this class to talk about what stood out to you the most in this lesson. Encourage one another to remain faithful to the infallible Word of God.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Growing in Knowledge of God.
Exodus 33:12–23

Tuesday:

Knowing God through
Obedience. Deuteronomy 6:1–9

Wednesday:

Knowing God through Worship.
Psalm 100:1–5

Thursday:

Eternal Life Is Knowing God.
John 17:1–5

Friday:

Making Known the “Unknown”
God. Acts 17:22–31

Saturday:

Knowing Christ's Power and
Sufferings. Philippians 3:7–14

March 17, 2024

LESSON 3

Live as Children of God

Study Text

1 John 3:1–18

Central Truth

Becoming a child of God results in a transformed life.



Key Verse

1 John 3:10

In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother (KJV).

So now we can tell who are children of God and who are children of the devil. Anyone who does not live righteously and does not love other believers does not belong to God (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand that the Father's love motivates Him to call them His children.
- Students will learn to recognize those who belong to Christ as those who choose to live in repentance and righteousness.
- Students will be challenged to reveal God's character by loving one another.

Introducing the Study

Say: Today we will explore what God's children "look like." Children naturally share many physical traits with their biological parents, while other similarities are shaped by the time they spend together. Purposefully or not, parents pass along many dispositions to their children—like food preferences, political views, or spending habits—causing children to reflect their parents in countless ways.

Opening Activity—It Runs in the Family

Ask: Have you ever been able to immediately identify the parents of a child you just met? Maybe you noticed a similarity in the way they looked, in the sound of their voice, or in the way they responded to humor. Tell us about some traits that tend to run in your family.

Say: Physical traits can run in biological families, but we can also pick up mannerisms and values from people we spend a great deal of time with. Spiritually speaking, when we become children of God, His attributes become part of us through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. As we spend time in God's Word, we display His character in our response to temptations, challenges, disappointments, and even victories. Most importantly, God's love inspires the way we engage with each other. Our love for one another is evidence we are children of God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In 1 John 3, the apostle clearly reveals the Father's love and challenges us to guard against teachings that cause us to live in unrighteous ways. The Holy Spirit living in us enables us to stand against temptation, live in the righteousness of Christ, and show our love for God by loving one another.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

1 John 3:1. Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

2. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

3. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

7. Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.

8. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

9. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

10. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

11. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

12. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

13. Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

14. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

15. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

16. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

17. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

18. My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

1 John 3:1. See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are! But the people who belong to this world don't recognize that we are God's children because they don't know him.

2. Dear friends, we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is.

3. And all who have this eager expectation will keep themselves pure, just as he is pure.

7. Dear children, don't let anyone deceive you about this: When people do what is right, it shows that they are righteous, even as Christ is righteous.

8. But when people keep on sinning, it shows that they belong to the devil, who has been sinning since the beginning. But the Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil.

9. Those who have been born into God's family do not make a practice of sinning, because God's life is in them. So they can't keep on sinning, because they are children of God.

10. So now we can tell who are children of God and who are children of the devil. Anyone who does not live righteously and does not love other believers does not belong to God.

11. This is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another.

12. We must not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and killed his brother. And why did he kill him? Because Cain had been doing what was evil, and his brother had been doing what was righteous.

13. So don't be surprised, dear brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.

14. If we love our brothers and sisters who are believers, it proves that we have passed from death to life. But a person who has no love is still dead.

15. Anyone who hates another brother or sister is really a murderer at heart. And you know that murderers don't have eternal life within them.

16. We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters.

17. If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God's love be in that person?

18. Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Say: First John 3:1–3 proclaims a message of assurance. John lovingly reminded his readers they were the children of God. This wasn’t a far-off, distant hope; it was their current reality. The apostle wanted them to remember how much the Father loved them and look forward to one day seeing Jesus as He is. While it hasn’t yet been revealed what we will be like when Jesus appears, we know we will be like Him. This blessed assurance of who we are and the hope of who we will become should motivate us to keep ourselves pure. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus warned His followers that if the world hated Him, it will hate us too (John 15:18–19). John added, “The people who belong to this world don’t recognize that we are God’s children because they don’t know him” (1 John 3:1, NLT). Later in verse 13, he stated it even more clearly when he challenged us not to be surprised when the world hates us. This should encourage us not to seek our acceptance from people of the world, because we belong to God. As His children we can find our security, identity, and acceptance in our relationship with Him. God loves us dearly, and He is for us.

When we believe in Jesus and acknowledge Him as our Lord, we begin the process of becoming like Him. Our lives will reflect the character of Jesus in increasing ways as we grow to know Him more. The apostle Paul tells us, “May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God” (Philippians 1:11, NLT). This process of growth and transformation will continue until we see Jesus face to face.

As long as we live in these mortal bodies, we will face temptations and deal with the consequences of sin. But the moment we pass from this life into the next, we will be made complete in His presence. We will no longer struggle with sin or endure the effects of sin, for our earthly bodies will take on immortality (1 Corinthians 15:53–57).

Discuss

- ? Why do we need to be reminded of God’s great love for us?
- ? How would you describe the assurance for God’s children found in 1 John 3:1–3?
- ? According to 1 John 3:3, “All who have this eager expectation [of being like Christ] will keep themselves pure” (NLT). How does this assurance and hope motivate you to live a pure life?



Resource Packet Item 1: Exploring God’s Unfailing Love

Distribute the worksheet and encourage students to read the passages in the upcoming week, underlining or highlighting the portions that speak to them most clearly of God’s love. Ask them to prayerfully reflect on the ways they’ve experienced God’s love and look for ways to share the good news of His love with others this week.



Say: No one has ever lived a sinless life—except Jesus. That’s why He is the only One who could pay the price for the sins of the world. Thankfully, when we believe in Jesus, repent of our sins, and experience His forgiveness, we are restored into a right relationship with God. But even as followers of Jesus, we still sin occasionally. It’s important to understand the difference between *committing a sin* and *choosing to continue in sin*. The moment we commit a sin, we should repent, demonstrating that we belong to Christ. However, if we deliberately continue to sin and do not repent, our behavior shows that we don’t really know Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The writer of Hebrews tells us clearly, “If we deliberately continue sinning after we have received knowledge of the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice that will cover these sins. There is only the terrible expectation of God’s judgment and the raging fire that will consume his enemies” (Hebrews 10:26–27, NLT). Jesus paid the full price for our sins. When He forgives us, we have the choice and responsibility to live righteously. Hebrews 12 tells us how to walk away from sin and live the way God intends for His children:

Let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne. Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won’t become weary and give up. (verses 1–3, NLT)

To keep our eyes on Jesus, we must live in close relationship with Him, allowing God’s Spirit and His Word to guide us into the kind of life designed for us as His children.

Discuss

- ? What is the difference between committing a sin and continuing in sin?
- ? How do you strip off every weight of sin and keep your eyes on Jesus?



Say: John wanted his readers to clearly understand that people’s ongoing behavior reveals whether they belong to Christ or the devil. Evidently, there were false teachers spreading the idea that people could continue in sin and still be in right relationship with God. This simply isn’t true. If we live in Christ, He lives in us, and our lives display His righteousness. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Since the Fall in Genesis 3, humans have been tempted to question God’s Word: “Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?” (verse 1, *NLT*). One of the enemy’s favorite tactics is casting doubt on God’s Word, twisting and warping it to fit his agenda. Just like the original readers of 1 John, we need to be alert to any false teaching that says we can continue to live in sin and still belong to Christ.



Resource Packet Item 2: Did God Really Say . . . ?

Distribute the worksheet and have the class read Genesis 3:1–13. Encourage students to answer the questions at home or in small groups if class time permits.

John emphasized again and again that our behaviors matter. While we can’t earn our salvation by our works—it is by faith we have been saved—our righteous behavior reveals that God’s Spirit dwells in us. It is His grace and righteousness that empowers us to live free from the enslavement of sin. The apostle Paul talked about this in Romans 6:

Don’t you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living. Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you wholeheartedly obey this teaching we have given you. Now you are free from your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous living” (verses 16–18, *NLT*).

Christ’s righteousness frees us from the entanglements of sin and enables us to live holy lives.

Discuss

- ? What happened when Eve and Adam doubted the truth of God’s command?
- ? How can we guard against false teaching that causes us to question the validity or relevance of God’s Word?

□ Born into God’s Family

1 John 3:9–10



Say: When we acknowledge Jesus is the Son of God and repent of our sins, we are born again. We can be assured of God’s forgiveness. However, we still have areas of weakness and specific temptations to overcome. Thankfully, His Holy Spirit lives in us and helps us stand against temptation, making us victorious over sin. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

We learn a great deal about being “born again” from Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus (John 3:1–21). Nicodemus was a Jewish leader who witnessed the miracles of Jesus, and unlike many other Pharisees, he believed the miracles were from God. Jesus told him, “Unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God” (verse 3, *NLT*). Jesus helped Nicodemus understand the difference between physical birth and spiritual birth. Then Jesus told Nicodemus (and us) that God loved the

world so much He sent His Son so that everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life. Jesus came to give us life, and He sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in us. The Holy Spirit lovingly convicts us of sin, reminds us what God’s Word says, and leads us to righteousness. We depend on the Holy Spirit’s help to live in a way that pleases God.

Once again John clearly states in 1 John 3:10, “Anyone who does not live righteously and does not love other believers does not belong to God” (NLT). Apparently, there was a great deal of controversy among his original audience about the issues of living righteously and loving others. The apostle wanted believers to recognize who was truly born into the family of God.

Discuss

- ? How many times in 1 John 3:6–10 did John say that those who are born of God will not continue to sin? Why do you think he so strongly emphasized this point?
- ? How does it encourage you to know that living righteously is possible through the power of the Holy Spirit?



Part 3—God’s People Love One Another

□ Love Proves We Have Passed from Death to Life 1 John 3:11–15

Say: People who choose to continue in sin are often uncomfortable around people who live in the righteousness of Christ. The light of believers’ lives exposes the darkness of their sinful ways. Their discomfort can be displayed in a variety of ways: disregard, jealousy, belittling, scorn, dislike, or even hatred. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

John shares an example from Adam and Eve’s family. Their son Cain—whom John says “belonged to the evil one” (1 John 3:12, NLT)—killed his brother, Abel, because of Abel’s righteous behavior (Genesis 4:3–10). John then mentions Jesus’ warning in John 15:18—“If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first” (NLT). Within 1 John 3:11–15, John contrasts life and death, children of God and children of the devil, and love and hate. He challenges us with this clear statement: “If we love our brothers and sisters who are believers, it proves that we have passed from death to life” (verse 14, NLT).

How is this proof made evident? Many Scriptures help us clearly understand the way God’s children should walk in the fullness of the Spirit and reflect the life of Christ. The apostle Paul provided two very contrasting lists in Galatians 5—the fruit of the flesh (sin) and the fruit of the Spirit (righteousness). Anyone can say they love God, but a person’s behavior is the true litmus test. Those whose lives display the fruit of the flesh prove they belong to sin:

When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that

anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.
(Galatians 5:19–21, NLT)

After giving us this list, Paul described what it looks like when the Holy Spirit is leading our lives.

The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.
(Galatians 5:22–25, NLT)

These two lists describe opposite ways of interacting with one another—the fruit of the flesh fosters hate and death, while the fruit of the Spirit brings love and life. (We will dive much deeper into the fruit of the Spirit in our next unit, starting with lesson 8.)

Discuss

- ? How can someone's righteous life make a sinful person uncomfortable? How have you seen this play out in families, workplaces, and communities?
- ? What is the correlation between darkness, hate, and death? What is the correlation between light, love, and life?
- ? How does love prove we have passed from death to life?

□ Love Defined

1 John 3:16–18



Say: To understand the true definition of *love*, we must look closely at Jesus' example. The world has many misconceptions about what love is. Some think love is a feeling—something they can fall in and out of. Others love conditionally based on their view of someone's worth. But genuine, Christlike love is so much more than something you feel or something you earn. It's a decision to make sacrifices and do good for another person, no matter the cost—and the cost is often quite high. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus' commandment in John 15:12 was, "Love each other in the same way I have loved you" (NLT). Consider all the ways Jesus demonstrated His love for us:

- He willingly left heaven and came to earth as a helpless infant.
- He valued people who were considered less important in His culture, including children, women, sinners, and Gentiles.
- He healed the sick, fed the hungry, calmed storms, forgave sinners, raised the dead, embraced outcasts, and touched the untouchables.
- He willingly endured undeserved ridicule and lay down His life so we could be forgiven of our sins.
- He didn't leave us alone. Instead, He sent His Holy Spirit to dwell in us.

The way Jesus loves us is the opposite of the self-gratifying love of the world around us. He truly wants what is best for us! Loving like Jesus means we always act in the best interest of those we love. It is a self-sacrificing love.



Resource Packet Item 3: The Biblical Definition of Love

Distribute the worksheet and read through the passages, developing a biblical definition of *love* and contrasting it with the world's definition. You may choose to ask students to use the sheet for further study and personal reflection.

Discuss

- ? What does so-called “love” look like when it is motivated by selfishness?
- ? How would you define the love of Christ as described in 1 John 3:16–18? What does it look like for a believer to love this way?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Becoming a child of God results in a transformed life. This transformation is seen in our decision to live righteously. This doesn't mean we're perfect; it means we recognize our sin and are quick to repent and adjust our lives to better reflect Christ. This righteousness is seen most clearly in our love for each other. And this love is always focused on what is best for others.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Read 1 Corinthians 13, and insert your name everywhere you see the word *love*. Ask yourself if you are truly demonstrating the love of Christ to those around you.
- Think about how you can help meet a fellow believer's needs. Then take the necessary steps to follow through.
- Tell someone about Jesus' unconditional, extravagant love.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Being the People of God.
Leviticus 26:9–13

Tuesday:

God's People Forever.
2 Samuel 7:18–24

Wednesday:

Promises to God's People.
Jeremiah 31:31–40

Thursday:

The Right to Become God's Children. John 1:6–12

Friday:

Confirmed as God's Children.
Romans 8:16–21

Saturday:

Children of God by Faith.
Galatians 3:24–29

March 24, 2024

LESSON 4

Guarding God's Truth

Study Text

1 John 3:19 through 4:6; 2 John 7–11

Central Truth

Christians must discern between truth and error.



Key Verse

1 John 4:1

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world (KJV).

Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will experience the assurance of God's grace rather than depending on their feelings.
- Students will learn practices to help them discern between God's truth and the enemy's lies.
- Students will be challenged to diligently study God's Word instead of partnering with or encouraging false teachers.

Introducing the Study

Say: How can we tell when someone is telling the truth or lying? Most of the time, how well we know the individual directly impacts our ability to discern the truth of what they're saying.

Opening Activity—A Truth and a Lie

Ask: Can I have a few volunteers who will make two statements about themselves—one true and one untrue? Allow the class to vote on which statements are true and which are untrue. Exclude spouses, siblings, or parents from voting.

Say: Now we know these volunteers a little better! We didn't let their family members vote because their knowledge would have skewed the outcome. When we're close to someone, we naturally get to know them better. This is true in our relationships with each other and in our relationship with God. The more we get to know the Father, the easier it is to understand His Word and recognize His voice. In this lesson we will discover why it is so important to know and guard the truth of His Word. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In the passage we're studying today, John encourages believers to remember that God knows everything, and His truth supersedes our feelings. We are encouraged to come boldly into His presence and make our requests known to Him. By believing in God and loving one another, we remain in fellowship with God and we're able to distinguish between truth and lies. God's Spirit dwells in us and helps us to know and walk in the truth.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

1 John 3:19. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

20. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

21. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

22. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

23. And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

4:1. Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

2. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

3. And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

4. Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

5. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.

6. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

2 John 7. For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

9. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

10. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:

11. For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

1 John 3:19. Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God.

20. Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything.

21. Dear friends, if we don't feel guilty, we can come to God with bold confidence.

22. And we will receive from him whatever we ask because we obey him and do the things that please him.

23. And this is his commandment: We must believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he commanded us.

4:1. Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world.

2. This is how we know if they have the Spirit of God: If a person claiming to be a prophet acknowledges that Jesus Christ came in a real body, that person has the Spirit of God.

3. But if someone claims to be a prophet and does not acknowledge the truth about Jesus, that person is not from God. Such a person has the spirit of the Antichrist, which you heard is coming into the world and indeed is already here.

4. But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won a victory over those people, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world.

5. Those people belong to this world, so they speak from the world's viewpoint, and the world listens to them.

6. But we belong to God, and those who know God listen to us. If they do not belong to God, they do not listen to us. That is how we know if someone has the Spirit of truth or the spirit of deception.

2 John 7. I say this because many deceivers have gone out into the world. They deny that Jesus Christ came in a real body. Such a person is a deceiver and an antichrist.

9. Anyone who wanders away from this teaching has no relationship with God. But anyone who remains in the teaching of Christ has a relationship with both the Father and the Son.

10. If anyone comes to your meeting and does not teach the truth about Christ, don't invite that person into your home or give any kind of encouragement.

11. Anyone who encourages such people becomes a partner in their evil work.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Say: The apostle challenged believers in 1 John 3:18 to let our actions show that we love one another. Then, in the following four verses he explained how to have confidence in God rather than depending on our feelings. We may worry that we don't love others as well as we should, causing us to experience feelings of guilt. But John reminds us that God is greater than our feelings. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

No one feels loving all of the time. But when our motives are to demonstrate our love for God by loving others, He sees our heart, even if our actions are misunderstood (1 John 3:20). When we do fall short of loving others as we should, we can ask for God's mercy and help. He understands our frailty and is quick to forgive us and to help us get back on track.

God's forgiveness is so much greater than our feelings. No matter how we feel, we can receive His mercy and come confidently into His presence and make our requests known to Him. Thankfully, love is not based on how we feel at any given moment. When someone says or does something hurtful, our feelings for them will not be positive. But we don't have to let our feelings dictate our responses. The best way to overcome negative emotions is to obey Scripture. We can respond in love (in spite of our feelings) by demonstrating kindness, giving others good things, and treating them with honor. This is how we choose to put our love in action—by obeying the “one another” passages found throughout the New Testament.

Scripture never tells us to *feel* loving; it tells us to *act* in love. However, we can be encouraged, for when we choose to act in love through obedience to the truth of God's Word, our feelings toward people usually begin to change and grow more positive. Many influential leaders have noted that, “You can't feel your way into right behaviors, but you can behave your way into right feelings.”¹

Our obedience to truly love others with our actions pleases the heart of God. “And we will receive from him whatever we ask because we obey him and do the things that please him” (1 John 3:22, NLT). If we look at the context of this promise, we see it is surrounded by verses telling us to love one another (verses 18,23).

Our obedience to God's command to love others also impacts the effectiveness of our prayers and even our ability to receive forgiveness from God. As Jesus said, “If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matthew 6:14–15, NLT).

The apostle Peter challenges husbands to treat their wives with understanding and honor so their prayers will not be hindered (1 Peter 3:7). The same could certainly be said to the rest of us, no matter the kinds of relationships we have. We must not ignore the command to love others and stay in close fellowship with the Father.

1. E. Stanley Jones, *The Word Became Flesh* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1963), Week 52, Thursday.

Discuss

- ? What is the challenge of responding in love when your emotions are negative?
- ? How have you learned to respond biblically rather than allowing your emotions to lead your behavior?
- ? What is the importance of understanding the truth that God’s grace and forgiveness are greater than our feelings?



□ Dwell in Him

1 John 3:23–24

Say: The word *abide* means “to dwell, remain, or live in.” In 1 John 3:23–24, the apostle John tells us how to remain in fellowship with Jesus—believe in Him and love one another. In John 15, the apostle records Jesus’ invitation for His believers to live in Him, His Word, and His love. Jesus clearly connects living in His love with loving one another, and John echoes those same commands in these two verses. (Share your highlights from the following text.)



Resource Packet Item 1: Living in Jesus

Distribute the worksheet and allow time for students to read John 15:1–17 and underline each occurrence of the word *remain*. Then discuss the questions or encourage students to use them for personal study and reflection.

To remain in close fellowship with Jesus, believers need to intentionally take time to read and reflect on the truths of Scripture. God’s Word reminds us of the depth of His love, shows us His desire for righteous living, reveals our sin, and gives us clear instruction on how to love one another. God’s Word revives our soul, gives us wisdom, brings joy to the heart, and gives insights for living (Psalm 19:7–8). Reading and knowing His Word should be a top priority for every believer.

In John 15:4, Jesus said, “Remain in me, and I will remain in you” (NLT). John reminds us of this promise and celebrates its fulfillment in 1 John 3:24: “We know he lives in us because the Spirit he gave us lives in us” (NLT). God’s Spirit dwelling in us renews our minds, reminds us of truth, convicts us of sin, and encourages us to love one another. Thankfully, we do not have to rely on our own strength or wisdom to carry out His commands and live righteously. Jesus has provided everything we need to remain in relationship with Him—His Word and His Spirit.

Discuss

- ? How can we recognize when we are “dwelling” somewhere other than in Jesus, His Word, and His love?
- ? What adjustments should we make to ensure we remain in Jesus?



Part 2—Learn to Discern God’s Truth

□ Test the Spirits

1 John 4:1–3

Say: We can’t believe every teacher who claims to have a word from God. The Bible makes it clear that there are false teachers in this world. Some of them

may have positions of authority within local congregations, like pastors, teachers, or small group leaders. Others might have a large following, like popular speakers, podcasters, and authors. Some are known only in their family and circle of friends. No matter where a spiritual concept is shared—from a pulpit, a classroom, a book, a screen, or a dinner table—it’s vital that we remember to test what we see and hear against the truth of Scripture. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Practice these three simple steps to assess someone’s teaching and “try the spirits whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1, KJV):

- 1. Read and study the Scriptures for yourself.** Pray as you read God’s Word that you would understand what you are reading. God has revealed himself to us through His written Word, and He has given us His Holy Spirit to help us comprehend and apply it to our lives. The Bible is the standard by which we judge all moral, ethical, spiritual, and relational ideas. Therefore, we must be students of the Word.
- 2. Actively participate in your local church congregation so you get to know the people you allow to speak into your life.** The character of Christ will be seen in believers’ lives. If a leader says they love God, yet they are cruel to their spouse or children—beware. If a friend claims to have a word from God, yet their life is marked by gossip or greed, understand the message likely isn’t from the Lord.
- 3. Find out more about the beliefs of the people you are allowing to influence you—particularly whether they believe the Bible is the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God.** If they don’t believe in the authority of Scripture, avoid their teaching. Their view of Scripture allows them to pick and choose which passages to obey and which ones are supposedly irrelevant or out-of-date. Often, these individuals justify or embrace behaviors the Bible clearly defines as sin. They also may claim to have special knowledge that isn’t included in Scripture. Any teaching that does not embrace the inerrancy of the Bible is a false teaching.

John challenges us in 1 John 4:1–3 to allow God’s Word, not the culture around us, to shape our attitudes, behaviors, and responses. Many people will never read a Bible, but they will watch our lives and listen to our words. While we may never stand behind a pulpit or have a massive audience on social media, our actions and words still influence those around us. We need to represent Jesus and the truth of the gospel correctly—even around the dinner table or in a coffee shop.

Discuss

- ? What are the dangers of listening to advice from someone who doesn’t believe the Bible is the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God?
- ? How can we engage in kind, friendly conversation with family and friends who disagree with the truth of God’s Word?

**Resource Packet Item 2: Culturally Accepted Lies vs. Biblical Truth**

Distribute the worksheet and use it for group discussion or individual study regarding culturally accepted lies and biblical truths.

**Greater Is He That Is in You****1 John 4:4–6**

Say: The spread of false teaching and the hostility toward Christians in our culture can be frightening. It may seem at times that evil is prevailing, but this simply isn't the case. John affectionately reminds believers of this truth: We belong to God and His Spirit lives in us. Jesus has already won the victory. He has overcome the world and defeated death, hell, and the grave. And the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us (Romans 8:11)! When unbelievers listen to and adopt false ideas about God, we shouldn't be surprised or daunted. The Holy Spirit will empower us to understand and obey God's Word as we follow His guidance. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Our culture continues to grow more violent and rebellious, accepting nearly every kind of sinful lifestyle. If we focus on these trends, we will grow increasingly discouraged. It is important to lift our eyes and remind one another that God will judge all sin and conquer all evil. As believers, our future is secure, for we stand complete in Jesus. His blood covers our sins and removes our shame and punishment. Those in the world “speak from the world's viewpoint, and the world listens to them” (1 John 4:5, NLT). However, because we belong to Jesus, we should set our “sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth” (Colossians 3:1–2, NLT).

John wrote that those who belong to Christ will agree with sound teaching because God's Spirit dwells in us. But those who belong to the world will not agree with sound teaching because they have the spirit of deception and agree with one another (1 John 4:5). Although we believers live in the world and have relationships with many people who are not serving Jesus, we will be at odds with them on some level. This is one reason we need relationships with other believers. People who listen to, believe, and obey the truth can encourage us and remind us to do the same.

Discuss

- ? Why is it important to remember that “the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world” (1 John 4:4, NLT)?
- ? How are we at odds with those who do not believe scriptural truth?
- ? Why is it important to build relationships with other believers?

**Part 3—Hold to the Truth about Christ****Remain in the Teachings of Christ****2 John 7–9**

Say: In 2 John, the apostle warned believers to be careful not to wander from the teachings of Jesus—because people who don't walk in obedience to Him have no relationship with God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

When we aren't faithful to read and meditate on God's Word, our hearts are prone to wander. Knowing this tendency and the benefits of living by Scripture, Paul challenged the younger minister, Timothy, in this way:

You must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you. You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work. (2 Timothy 3:14–17, NLT)

Discuss

- ? Describe the practices of a diligent student of God's Word.
- ? How does it encourage you to know that "anyone who remains in the teaching of Christ has a relationship with both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9, NLT)?



Resource Packet Item 3: Remain in the Teaching of Christ

Distribute the worksheet, read aloud the two passages of Scripture, and use the questions to prompt discussion.

□ Don't Partner with Deception

2 John 10–11



Say: We all have relationships with people who don't believe God's Word is true. We're encouraged to share the good news with those in our families, workplaces, and communities who have yet to believe and to live out the gospel through relationship with them. However, believers are instructed not to partner with people who teach false doctrine. We shouldn't be hostile or unkind, but we must make sure we don't listen to or provide a platform for their false teaching or encourage them in any way. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Many passages of Scripture address how we should interact with false teachers. Paul was very straightforward in his words to the churches of Galatia:

I am shocked that you are turning away so soon from God, who called you to himself through the loving mercy of Christ. You are following a different way that pretends to be the Good News but is not the Good News at all. You are being fooled by those who deliberately twist the truth concerning Christ. Let God's curse fall on anyone, including us or even an angel from heaven, who preaches a different kind of Good News than the one we preached to you. I say again what we have said before: If anyone preaches any other Good News than the one you welcomed, let that person be cursed. (Galatians 1:6–9, NLT)

Paul's words may seem extreme, yet we must understand the seriousness of twisting the truth concerning the teaching of Christ. God has no tolerance for those who lead people away from salvation. We must be diligent to know the truth, recognize the lies, and not partner with false teachers.

Discuss

- ? How do you recognize when someone is teaching false ideas?
- ? How can we partner with false teachers—whether intentionally or unintentionally? According to this passage, what are we doing when we encourage false teachers?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: We can be confident before God if we know and obey the teaching of Christ. But we must guard that truth. Not everyone who claims to know God speaks the truth, so we must test what we are taught against the standard of God's Word. Those who belong to the world are being deceived, and they will agree with one another. As believers we have the Spirit of God dwelling in us, and we can understand and obey His Word. We must be diligent to remain in His Word and be on guard against all false teaching.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Read Psalm 119 and note all the benefits of knowing and obeying God's Word.
- Memorize 2 Timothy 3:14–17. Consider what you learn about God in this passage and how He intends for you to interact with His Word.
- Meet someone in this class for coffee or a meal and encourage one another by talking through your commitments to knowing and guarding the truth of God's Word.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Pharaoh's Lack of Integrity.
Exodus 9:25–35

Tuesday:

Discerning God's Way.
Job 34:1–12

Wednesday:

Judgment against False Prophets.
Jeremiah 23:25–32

Thursday:

Revelation from the Father.
Matthew 16:13–17

Friday:

Let No One Deceive You.
2 Thessalonians 2:1–4

Saturday:

Be on Your Guard. 2 Peter 3:14–18

March 31, 2024

LESSON 5

Experiencing the Resurrection

Study Text

Luke 24:13–35; John 20:1–18;
21:1–23

Central Truth

Because Christ is alive, we can experience a personal relationship with Him.



Key Verse Philippians 3:10

That I may know him [Christ], and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death (KJV).

I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will be able to describe how each individual in today's lesson encountered the living Christ right where they were.
- Students will view the resurrection of Jesus as an invitation to a personal relationship with Him.
- Students will reach out and call upon the living Christ in all circumstances.

Introducing the Study

Say: From a purely human standpoint, how would most people expect Jesus to appear after His resurrection? If these events had happened today, many would expect Him to call a high-profile press conference. Since this was Bible times, we might have expected Jesus to stride into the emperor's palace in Rome and present His credentials as King of kings, certified by virtue of rising from the dead. At the very least, we might expect that Jesus would organize a meeting of all His followers to show himself alive. But He did none of these things.

Opening Activity—Reporting from Jerusalem . . .

Ask: In our culture, if a public figure died, was buried, and came back to life a few days later, how might the news media report on the event? What speculations might they make?

Say: Jesus didn't go to Pilate or the religious leaders of the day to prove they were wrong about Him. Instead, He appeared to individuals or groups of believers at unexpected times as they went about their everyday lives. Today's lesson examines three case studies from Scripture. As we talk about each one, consider why Jesus may have chosen to interact with people in such personal and intimate ways after His resurrection. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus' resurrection authenticated His identity as Messiah and Son of God. It verified the efficacy of His sacrificial death to atone for sin. It confirmed His victory over death and Satan. In fact, it is the foundational event in God's plan to redeem and restore all creation.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

John 20:11. But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre,

12. And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

13. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my LORD, and I know not where they have laid him.

14. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.

15. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.

16. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.

Luke 24:28. And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further.

29. But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them.

30. And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them.

31. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.

32. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?

John 21:15. So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

16. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

17. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

New Living Translation

John 20:11. Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in.

12. She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying.

13. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" the angels asked her. "Because they have taken away my Lord," she replied, "and I don't know where they have put him."

14. She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him.

15. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who are you looking for?" She thought he was the gardener. "Sir," she said, "if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."

16. "Mary!" Jesus said. She turned to him and cried out, "Rabboni!" (which is Hebrew for "Teacher").

Luke 24:28. By this time they were nearing Emmaus and the end of their journey. Jesus acted as if he were going on,

29. but they begged him, "Stay the night with us, since it is getting late." So he went home with them.

30. As they sat down to eat, he took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them.

31. Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And at that moment he disappeared!

32. They said to each other, "Didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?"

John 21:15. After breakfast Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," Peter replied, "you know I love you." "Then feed my lambs," Jesus told him.

16. Jesus repeated the question: "Simon son of John, do you love me?" "Yes, Lord," Peter said, "you know I love you." "Then take care of my sheep," Jesus said.

17. A third time he asked him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you." Jesus said, "Then feed my sheep."

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Say: God sometimes chooses to work through unlikely people to display His glory. Mary Magdalene was certainly an unlikely candidate for being the first witness of the risen Savior. In the culture of the day, women were not considered valid witnesses in legal proceedings. Plus, Mary herself was not a woman of high standing or spotless reputation. In fact, Jesus had delivered her from seven demons (Mark 16:9). But God has a way of turning culture upside down to fulfill His own purposes. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Along with other faithful followers of Jesus, Mary Magdalene had stood at the foot of the Cross and watched Jesus' brutal execution. But she and the other women had been unable to prepare Jesus' body for a proper burial because of the approach of sundown and the start of the Sabbath. When they arrived at His tomb very early on Sunday morning, they must have been eager to anoint the body, as was the custom of the day. All four Gospels include the account of Mary Magdalene visiting Jesus' tomb, although Matthew, Mark, and Luke also describe other women accompanying her.

Mary found the stone at the entrance of the tomb had been removed, and she hurried to report the news to Peter and John. These two disciples, Jesus' close friends, raced to the tomb to investigate. They found the linen cloths that had been wrapped around Jesus' face and body. John recorded that he "saw and believed" Jesus had risen from the dead, although the original text of verse 9 indicates the disciples did not yet fully understand how Jesus' resurrection fulfilled Scripture.

After Peter and John returned home, Mary remained at the tomb weeping. When she looked inside, she saw two angels dressed in white. Apparently, the angels did not reveal themselves to Peter and John, but they decided to show themselves to Mary. Their question seems to reflect honest puzzlement: "Why are you crying?" (verse 13, NLT). Mary's answer shows she had no thoughts of angels or resurrection; she was concerned only with locating the missing body of Jesus.



Resource Packet Item 1: Marys in the New Testament

Distribute the information sheet detailing the numerous women named Mary whose stories are included in the New Testament. Discuss the influential roles they fulfilled in the life and work of Jesus.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think Mary and the other disciples were so slow to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead although He had predicted His resurrection on multiple occasions?
- ? Why do we find it hard to believe the words of Jesus when they seem to conflict with what we see and feel?



Say: Often our circumstances are so stressful that we fail to recognize the hand of God working in our lives. Mary’s grief over Jesus’ death and her distress over His missing body were dominating her thoughts and emotions as she stood outside the tomb. But Jesus knew just how to break through and reach her. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Mary turned and saw Jesus, the very One she was looking for, standing only a short distance away from her. But she did not recognize Him (John 20:14). Why not? Perhaps the tears in her eyes blurred her vision. Perhaps her last sight of Jesus as a lacerated, lifeless corpse left an indelible imprint on her mind. Perhaps Jesus’ countenance had changed after the Resurrection. Or perhaps Mary was simply so concerned with finding His body that she paid little attention to anything else.

Then Jesus spoke to Mary, and His questions echoed the angels’: “Why are you crying? . . . Who are you looking for?” (verse 15, NLT). Still, Mary did not understand. Her mind jumped to the conclusion that seems most likely: This must be the gardener. Jesus spoke again, this time calling Mary by name. She immediately recognized His voice, conveying tender love and comfort, spoken with an intimate knowledge of her heart and soul. The Good Shepherd knows His sheep, and they know His voice (see 10:27).

Having found Jesus alive and well, Mary embraced Him. Notice His response: “Don’t cling to me . . . for I haven’t yet ascended to the Father” (20:17, NLT). Jesus still had work to do on earth, and He also had an assignment for her. Mary was instructed to tell His disciples the news of His resurrection and imminent ascension. The news was too good to keep to herself. She had to go and tell the others. The fact that all four Gospel writers mention Mary Magdalene as a witness to the Resurrection added to its credibility. In first-century culture, male writers certainly would not have mentioned a woman’s testimony if it were not true.

At the Cross, when Mary’s hopes had been dashed and her heart broken, her love for Jesus remained constant. As a result, her faith was renewed and her joy restored. When our circumstances are chaotic and our minds muddled, we too can hold on to our love for Jesus.

Discuss

- ? Why do we—like Mary—sometimes fail to recognize Jesus’ presence or understand what He says?
- ? What might God’s choice of a woman to be among the first to herald the Resurrection say about the place of women in the Church today?



Part 2—Relationship with the Risen Christ

Say: When newsworthy events occur, it’s natural for people to talk them over. Recorded only by Luke, this account of the two disciples who encountered

Jesus on the road to Emmaus further bolsters the authenticity of evidence for the Resurrection. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Luke 24:13–16 describes two of Jesus’ disciples (not part of the Twelve) walking toward the town of Emmaus. It is noteworthy that there are two witnesses, and one is identified by name (possibly because he would have been known by at least some of Luke’s audience). In Jewish law, at least two witnesses were needed to validate the truth of an event.

Walking and talking, they discussed the events of the previous days. Then a fellow traveler started walking with them. It was Jesus himself, “but God kept them from recognizing him” (verse 16, *NLT*). It was not yet time for Jesus to reveal His identity.

Jesus asked about the topic of the disciples’ discussion. They reacted with surprise and sadness, then proceeded to recount the tragic story of Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion. They also related how their hopes of Israel’s redemption had seemingly perished with the Man they hoped was the Messiah. Finally, they shared the astonishing story of the women who had visited the tomb and encountered two angels who said Jesus was alive. Peter and John had run to the tomb and confirmed that it was empty, but no one seemed to know what to make of all this. So there they were, despondent and perplexed, walking and wondering.

Discuss

? Like Mary Magdalene, the disciples on the road to Emmaus did not recognize Jesus at first. Why might Jesus choose not to show himself to us in the way or at the time we expect?

□ Seeing and Believing

Luke 24:25–35



Say: We might be surprised at the anemic faith and spiritual dullness of these disciples. Hadn’t Jesus told them He would be killed and then rise from the dead? And now they had the testimony of the women and the angels, plus the evidence of an empty tomb. Still, they could not bring themselves to believe. However, we often miss God’s work in our lives too, even with the entire Bible in our hands. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Rather than simply reveal himself to these disciples, Jesus led them in a Bible study. They needed to see that the death and resurrection of the Messiah was not a strange new doctrine, but the fulfillment of prophecy. He may have covered passages like God’s declaration to the serpent in the Garden (Genesis 3:15), the promises to the patriarchs, the substitutionary deliverance of Isaac (Genesis 22:1–18), the exodus from Egypt and the Passover lamb (Exodus 12), the messianic Psalms (especially Psalm 22), and the prophets’ oracles (especially Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12). By the time they arrived at their destination, perhaps the disciples were finally beginning to understand that the Hebrew Scriptures were all about Jesus and that His suffering, death, and resurrection were part of God’s plan from the beginning.



Resource Packet Item 2: Christ in Prophecy

Distribute the worksheet, and ask the students to match the Scriptures with the messianic prophecies they contain. Then encourage students to reflect on the question about God's promises in their own lives.

When they neared Emmaus, Jesus indicated that He would keep traveling, but the disciples urged Him to stay the night. Such hospitality was common and expected in their culture. As they reclined at the table for the evening meal, Jesus took the role of host rather than guest. He blessed and broke the bread, and handed it to them. Perhaps something struck a chord in their memories, since Jesus had no doubt performed the same actions in their presence many times before. Perhaps they observed the nail prints in His hands as He passed the bread to them. Whatever had obscured their sight was removed, and through the revelation of the Holy Spirit they finally recognized Jesus. Because of His teaching that evening, they almost certainly had a more complete understanding of what it meant for Him to be the Messiah.

As soon as the disciples recognized Jesus, He vanished. His purpose had been achieved. In spite of the lateness of the hour, the disciples walked the seven miles back to Jerusalem to tell their fellow disciples about meeting the risen Christ.

God is present with us at all times, but like the travelers to Emmaus, we are not always aware of His presence. We all face times of confusion and disappointment, when we cannot understand God's plan. It is good to do as Jesus did and review the Scriptures. We can refocus ourselves and revive our hope by revisiting God's unfailing promises.

Discuss

- ? What Old Testament passages do you think Jesus might have shared to teach these disciples about His suffering and glory?
- ? Have you ever felt your "heart burn within [you]" (Luke 24:32, KJV) as you studied the Scriptures and found Christ revealed in them? Explain.



Part 3—Restored by the Risen Christ

□ Fellowship Breakfast

John 21:1–14

Say: Our third case study is from a later scene in John 21 where some of Christ's disciples saw Him a third time. This encounter likely brought back fond memories, but it also probably reminded Peter of his repeated denial of Christ. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Six other disciples had joined Peter for a night of fishing, but they caught nothing. At dawn, they heard a voice call from the shore, instructing them to cast the net on the right side, where they caught a huge number of fish. For Peter, James, and John, this undoubtedly brought to mind their first encounter with Jesus, when they answered the call to follow Him (see Luke 5:1–11).

John recognized that the voice belonged to Jesus. Impetuous Peter hurled himself into the sea and headed for the shore, leaving the others to bring in the boat,

towing the heavy net. They were all surprised to find Jesus there, waiting to serve them a breakfast of bread and fish.

Interestingly, the disciples noted the exact number of fish they caught, and John recorded it: 153 (verse 11). This specificity emphasizes the wonder of the event. This many large fish, combined with a soaking net, could weigh well over 300 pounds. Yet this time the net did not tear, unlike their first encounter with Jesus (see Luke 5:6). The disciples didn't ask Jesus to confirm His identity, as He had done in an earlier appearance (John 20:20), because "they knew it was the Lord" (21:12, NLT).

Discuss

- ? Why do you think Jesus chose this time and place to meet His disciples?
- ? Why do we, like the disciples, desire clear confirmation of Jesus' presence and power, even though we know He is with us?

□ Loving Conversation

John 21:15–23



Say: When we fail Jesus, He longs to reconnect with us. So it was with Peter, who had denied Him three times during His trial. Having "wept bitterly" (Matthew 26:75, KJV), Peter was obviously repentant, but he likely still carried the guilt of his failure. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

After breakfast, Jesus addressed Peter by his given name—*Simon*—rather than the name He himself had bestowed on him—*Peter*, which means "rock." Simon had not yet become the rock Jesus intended him to be; instead, Peter's denials had shown the old nature of his character at work.

Jesus' question, "Do you love me more than these?" (verse 15, NLT) could be interpreted three ways:

1. Do you love Me more than you love these fish, boats, and tools of the trade?
2. Do you love Me more than these other disciples love Me? *This had been Peter's claim on the night of Christ's arrest (see Matthew 26:33).*
3. Do you love Me more than you love these other disciples? *This would also provide a stark contrast to Peter's boasts in Matthew 26:33.*

Scholars generally agree that one of the last two explanations is most likely the correct understanding. In any case, Peter was aware of his failure and recognized that Jesus knew the extent and nature of his love and dedication. It grieved Peter that Jesus repeated the question a third time, but Jesus seemed to seek a confession of love that would negate Peter's previous denials.

Jesus told Peter how to demonstrate the love he confessed: through service to His people (John 21:15–17). Verbal declarations of love are insufficient in themselves. True love is shown in action (see 1 John 3:18).

In giving Peter the assignment to feed and care for His people, Jesus was also restoring Peter to his leadership role. But lest Peter believe this meant extra honor and privilege, Jesus warned him that his old age would bring pain and sacrifice (verses 18–19). Indeed, tradition

holds that Peter was crucified as a martyr, which Jesus alluded to. Regardless of past failures or future challenges, Peter's call remained the same: "Follow me" (verse 19, NLT).

Many of us, like Peter, live with painful memories of times we have failed the Lord. Thankfully, Jesus offers each of us forgiveness and restoration. Past failures need not limit our future service for God, but they can become learning experiences to help us depend on His grace. While we may not follow Peter's footsteps into martyrdom, each of us is called to run our own race. Rather than monitoring the course and running style of others, we must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

Discuss

- ? Why does Jesus connect our love for Him with our willingness to serve others?
- ? Why is it unwise to compare ourselves and our callings with others?



Resource Packet Item 3: Resurrection Sunday

Distribute the information sheet and encourage students to review the time line and Scriptures about Resurrection Sunday throughout the coming week.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: The Resurrection is more than a theological concept; it testifies to a living Savior who desires an intimate relationship with each of us. Jesus longs for us to spend time with Him, serve His people, and reach the world with the good news that He is alive!

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Commit to spending quality time with Jesus each day. Then add it to your schedule.
- Look for at least one way to serve another believer this week.
- Be alert for opportunities to share the news that Jesus is alive with someone who may be doubting or who does not believe.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Samson's Strength Restored.
Judges 16:25–30

Tuesday:

Naomi's Hope Restored.
Ruth 4:13–17

Wednesday:

David's Joy Restored. Psalm 51:1–13

Thursday:

Lazarus' Life Restored.
John 11:38–44

Friday:

Thomas' Faith Restored.
John 20:24–29

Saturday:

Saul Encounters the Risen Christ.
Acts 9:1–15

April 7, 2024

LESSON

6

Be Made Complete in Love

Study Text

1 John 4:7–21; 2 John 4–6

Central Truth

Christians demonstrate their love for God by loving others.



Key Verse

1 John 4:7

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God (KJV).

Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will realize their love for God is most evident in their love for others.
- Students will intentionally demonstrate God's love to the people He has placed in their lives.
- Students will depend upon the love of God and be ready to face Him with confidence on the Day of Judgment.

Introducing the Study

Say: We encounter the love of God in a myriad of ways. His faithfulness is seen in every sunrise. His provision is experienced with every meal. His care is felt in the shelter of our homes. God often uses the people in our lives to reveal His love to us in an ongoing way.

Opening Activity—Recognizing God's Love

Ask: Would someone tell us about a time when another person demonstrated their love for you in a meaningful way? After one or two students share, provide thank-you notes so students can express their gratitude (even if it is impossible to send the note).

Say: Do we always understand that the love shown to us by other believers is actually the love of God? John tells us “love comes from God” (1 John 4:7, NLT). As we recognize God's lovingkindness in our lives, we should express our gratitude to Him and to the people He uses to care for us. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Many believers mistakenly think their love for God is revealed only in religious activities, like attending church, paying tithes, or reading the Bible. However, John is quite clear in these passages of Scripture: Our love for God is seen most clearly in our interactions with others. The opposite is also true: “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ but hates a fellow believer, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see?” (1 John 4:20, NLT). If we truly know and love God, His love will be demonstrated in the way we treat others.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

1 John 4:7. Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

8. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

9. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

10. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

11. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

12. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

13. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

14. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

15. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

16. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

17. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

18. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

19. We love him, because he first loved us.

20. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

21. And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

2 John 5. And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.

6. And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.

New Living Translation

1 John 4:7. Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God.

8. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

9. God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him.

10. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

11. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other.

12. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.

13. And God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us.

14. Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

15. All who declare that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God.

16. We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.

17. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world.

18. Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love.

19. We love each other because he loved us first.

20. If someone says, "I love God," but hates a fellow believer, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see?

21. And he has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their fellow believers.

2 John 5. I am writing to remind you, dear friends, that we should love one another. This is not a new commandment, but one we have had from the beginning.

6. Love means doing what God has commanded us, and he has commanded us to love one another, just as you heard from the beginning.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Say: Once again, the apostle John addresses his readers as “beloved” or “dear friends.” His pastoral tone demonstrates a righteous desire that his readers would truly love one another. In 1 John 4:7–10, the apostle shares important truths about God, His love for us, and our love for one another:

1. God is the source of love (verses 7–8).
2. God truly loves us (verses 9–10). He expressed His love by sending His Son so we could have eternal life through Him.
3. Real love is seen in self-sacrificing actions (verse 10).
4. We are to love one another in the same way God loves us (verses 7,10).

(Share your highlights from the following text.)

Very few people would argue that love isn't important, but some might define love in a shallow, self-focused way. Many think of love as a feeling. More specifically, they believe it is whatever makes them feel good.

This understanding of love negatively impacts many outcomes in our society. Spouses who love this way quickly “fall out of love” and may be unfaithful to their marriage vows when they no longer experience the thrill they once felt. Parents who love this way may neglect their children when they feel parenting has become a burden. Friends who love this way are nowhere to be seen when difficulties arise, because they don't feel like investing their time or resources. Church members who love this way are quick to criticize and stir up dissension when they don't get their way.

Thankfully, God's love is far from shallow and self-focused. It is generous, extravagant, and self-sacrificing. In fact, His love for us is not based on our worthiness or even our response, but on His goodness. “This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins” (1 John 4:10, NLT). Before we could respond to His love, God sent His Son to die for our sins. He made a way for us to experience forgiveness and enjoy relationship with Him. Because of God's unflinching, sacrificial love, we can love others in the same extravagant way.

Discuss

- ? What are the pitfalls of love that is self-centered? What are the benefits of love that is self-sacrificing?
- ? How should experiencing God's love impact our responses to one another?
- ? Read John 3:16 and 1 John 4:7–10 aloud. How does John expand on the truth of John 3:16 in 1 John 4:7–10?



Say: “No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us” (1 John 4:12, NLT). In other words, people see and experience God’s love as we love one another. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

We experience and enjoy God’s love through every provision and every kindness. He wants us to reveal His love in the same way. In Matthew 25:31–46, Jesus illustrated this truth in a very sobering way, describing the final judgment, when everyone will be gathered into His presence. He will separate the righteous—the sheep—from the unrighteous—the goats. He will welcome His righteous followers to inherit the Kingdom, saying “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world” (verse 34, NLT). Then He will explain that when He was hungry, thirsty, a stranger (possibly homeless), naked, and in prison, they provided for His needs. When they question Him about this, the King will tell them, “I tell you the truth, when you did it to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me” (verse 40, NLT).

Then King Jesus will say to the unrighteous ones, “Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons” (verse 41, NLT). Then He will explain that when He was hungry, thirsty, a stranger (possibly homeless), naked, and in prison, they ignored Him and did not provide for His needs. When they question Him about this, the King will answer, “I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.’ And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life” (verse 45, NLT).

Jesus’ message is clear: The way we treat Him is reflected in the way we treat other people. Either He is telling us, “If you love others as I love you, you will be welcome into My kingdom,” or “If you don’t love others the way I love you, you will be destined for eternal punishment.” When we truly recognize and receive God’s love for us, the natural response is for us to love others. The way we treat others is how His love is brought to full expression in and through us (1 John 4:11–12).

Discuss

- ? How have you experienced God’s love through a friend or family member?
- ? How can we help others to know God by loving them?



Resource Packet Item 1: God’s Love Expressed through Us

Distribute the worksheet and give students time to list names and a few action steps. Encourage them to take the worksheet home and finalize plans to reveal God’s love in meaningful ways to specific people in the coming months.

Part 2—Love Is the Distinctive of God’s People

□ We Have Put Our Trust in His Love

1 John 4:13–16



Say: God’s Spirit lives in us and enables us to love one another. Thankfully, we don’t have to rely on our own power to love people. Instead, we can depend on His love flowing through us. When we are struggling to love others the way He commands, we should pray and ask for His help. This is praying according to His will, since He longs to reveal His love to others and He chooses to use us to do so. We can trust this is a prayer He will answer. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

We have never seen God, but the apostle John did see Jesus and even walked with Him throughout His earthly ministry (1 John 4:14). John witnessed Jesus’ teaching and miracles. He saw Jesus die, he raced to the empty tomb on Resurrection Sunday, and he spent time with the risen Savior. He was there when Jesus ascended to the Father and when the Holy Spirit descended on the Day of Pentecost. After experiencing all of this, John said, “We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love” (verse 16, NLT). John experienced the intense, self-sacrificing love of Jesus firsthand. He knew without a doubt that God’s love could be trusted. We too can know these truths as we read Scripture and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us into understanding. Our knowledge of Christ will help us to trust God’s love for us.

John continued, “God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them” (verse 16, NLT). Rather than relying on our own ability to drum up feelings of love, we should allow God’s love to flow through us and reach other people. As Paul put it, “We know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love” (Romans 5:5, NLT).

Discuss

- ? How can we grow in our knowledge of God’s love?
- ? How does grasping His love help us trust Him?
- ? How should we pray when we encounter people who are difficult to love?

□ Perfect Love Expels Fear

1 John 4:17–19



Say: A consistent theme throughout Scripture is God’s love for us. We know Him more as we spend time reading His Word and reflecting on His truth. The more we know Him, the more we recognize His love, mercy, kindness, and forgiveness at work in our lives. This growing knowledge of God and His love impacts the way we interact with others, helps us trust His love, and dispels our fear of judgment. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

John explained, “As we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world” (1 John 4:17, NLT). If our lives are void of love and

filled with fear, it means we have a limited understanding of God’s love for us. To combat this, we should pray for an ever-increasing grasp of His love and commit to reading His Word to know Him better.

In like manner, the apostle Paul prayed the Ephesians would grow in their knowledge of God’s love.

Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. (Ephesians 3:17–19, NLT)

Understanding God’s love is the key to a life that is strong, humble, confident, and compassionate.



Resource Packet Item 2: Trust God’s Great Love

Distribute the worksheet to help students reflect on God’s love and experience it more deeply during the upcoming week.

Discuss

- ? How does a growing understanding of God’s love affect the way believers react to difficult situations? the way we experience fear? the way we visualize standing before God on the Day of Judgment?
- ? How does Paul describe God’s love in Ephesians 3:17–19? What does it mean for someone to have their “roots . . . grow down into God’s love” (verse 17, NLT)?



Part 3—Walk in God’s Love

□ If We Truly Love God, We Will Love One Another 1 John 4:20–21

Say: It is encouraging to know that our ability to love grows the longer we walk with Christ (1 John 4:17). While we may not love perfectly all the time, love is the evidence of life in Christ and growth in spiritual maturity. John is quite clear in his letters: If we truly love God, we will love one another. Paul wrote to the Philippians, “I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ’s return. May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God” (Philippians 1:9–11, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The mark of spiritual maturity is a greater capacity to love. When the apostle Paul wrote about spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, he transitioned to an in-depth

description of love with this statement: “Now let me show you a way of life that is best of all” (verse 31, *NLT*).


Immature believers may think they only have to love someone as well as the other person loves them. Or they may think they only have to love people according to their perceived worthiness. But 1 John tells us something so much deeper: Our choice to love says more about the quality of our relationship with God than it says about the lovability of someone else. We love other people for one reason: because God loves us.

Discuss

- ? Before studying 1 John, how would you have defined spiritual maturity? How would you define it now?
- ? In what ways might a believer’s struggle to love other people send up red flags about his or her relationship with God?

□ Fulfill His Commands by Loving Others **2 John 4–6**

Say: In his second letter, John makes this simple statement: “Love means doing what God has commanded us” (2 John 6, *NLT*). In other words, when we do what God told us to do, we show that we love Him. When Jesus was asked what is the greatest commandment, He answered, “‘You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:37–40, *NLT*). According to Jesus, love fulfills all of God’s commands. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

 **Resource Packet Item 3: How Love Fulfills God’s Commands**
Distribute the worksheet and discuss how love for God and others (as described in John’s epistles) affects a believer’s ability to live out the principles found in the Ten Commandments.

When we love others the way God loves us, we will always act in their best interests. Spouses will put each other’s needs above their own and remain faithful to their marriage vows. Parents will lay down their lives to make sure their children are well cared for. Adults will do whatever is necessary to care for their aging parents with dignity and honor. Friends will rejoice together without envy. Employees will work with integrity and diligence for employers whether or not it is noticed or appreciated. Love is always the best motivation for righteous living.

Discuss

- ? What are some differences between responses motivated by duty and responses motivated by love?
- ? How does love make us better spouses, parents, children, friends, neighbors, employees, or employers?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: We will grow in our ability to love the more we know and understand God's great love for us. We can trust God's love for us. He loves us so much He sent His Son to take away our sins and make a way for us to have a right relationship with Him. God will take care of our every need and empower us to love others. As we love others the way God loves us, we can be assured our lives are pleasing to Him for we are living like Christ here in this world. This is the greatest indication that we live in God and love Him—our love for one another.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Read Psalm 145 and think about God's great love for you as described by the psalmist David.
- Intentionally share God's love in a tangible way with three people you come in contact with this week.
- Take note of the way you interact with those you are closest to. Do your interactions reveal your love, honor, and respect for God? Remember, the way you treat your spouse, children, parents, coworkers, and neighbors is the way you are treating God.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

God's Love for the Rejected.
Genesis 29:31–35

Tuesday:

God's Lovingkindness.
Psalm 63:1–4

Wednesday:

God's Love Declared.
Psalm 103:1–12

Thursday:

God's Great Love.
John 3:14–18

Friday:

Love Proves Discipleship.
John 13:34–39

Saturday:

The Greatness of Love.
1 Corinthians 13:1–13

April 14, 2024

LESSON 7

Live Victoriously in Christ

Study Text

1 John 5:1–21

Central Truth

Christians can live confidently and victoriously in Christ.



Key Verse 1 John 5:4

Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith (KJV).

Every child of God defeats this evil world, and we achieve this victory through our faith (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will recognize that believing in Jesus and depending on Him will help them live victoriously.
- Students will live securely and confidently in the knowledge that they have eternal life.
- Students will guard their hearts against anything that might take God's place.

Introducing the Study

Say: As children of God, we can live victoriously in this world. Through our faith in Jesus and dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit, we can overcome temptation and experience the life Jesus came to offer us. Let's look closely at 1 John 5 and discover how we can live victoriously in Christ. But before we get started, let's get to know a little more about one another by hearing some victories we experienced as children.

Opening Activity—You Win!

Ask: What childhood memory can you share about winning something? Describe that feeling of victory.

Examples may include a win at a sporting event, art/music competition, spelling contest, game, or random drawing of their name. Ask students to describe the feeling of victory.

Say: At times, life seems like a battle, and we're longing for victory. We experience conflict with our fleshly desires and temptations. We fight illnesses and the physical effects of aging. We have struggles in our relationships. Life can feel like an uphill challenge. Thankfully, we can live victoriously through Christ. As our key verse says, "Every child of God defeats this evil world, and we achieve this victory through our faith" (1 John 5:4, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The last chapter in 1 John describes the victories we have over evil and sin, the assurance that Jesus is God's Son, the promise God hears and answers our prayers, and the Blessed Hope of eternal life with God. John concluded his letter with a challenge to "keep away from anything that might take God's place in your hearts" (1 John 5:21, NLT).

Scripture Reading

King James Version

1 John 5:1. Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

2. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.

3. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

4. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

5. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

7. For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

8. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

9. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.

10. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

11. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

12. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

14. And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

15. And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

16. If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.

18. We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.

19. And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

20. And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

New Living Translation

1 John 5:1. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has become a child of God. And everyone who loves the Father loves his children, too.

2. We know we love God's children if we love God and obey his commandments.

3. Loving God means keeping his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome.

4. For every child of God defeats this evil world, and we achieve this victory through our faith.

5. And who can win this battle against the world? Only those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

7. So we have these three witnesses—*[in heaven—the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one.*

8. *And we have three witnesses on earth¹]* the Spirit, the water, and the blood—and all three agree.

9. Since we believe human testimony, surely we can believe the greater testimony that comes from God. And God has testified about his Son.

10. All who believe in the Son of God know in their hearts that this testimony is true. Those who don't believe this are actually calling God a liar because they don't believe what God has testified about his Son.

11. And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

12. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life.

14. And we are confident that he hears us whenever we ask for anything that pleases him.

15. And since we know he hears us when we make our requests, we also know that he will give us what we ask for.

16. If you see a fellow believer sinning in a way that does not lead to death, you should pray, and God will give that person life. But there is a sin that leads to death, and I am not saying you should pray for those who commit it.

18. We know that God's children do not make a practice of sinning, for God's Son holds them securely, and the evil one cannot touch them.

19. We know that we are children of God and that the world around us is under the control of the evil one.

20. And we know that the Son of God has come, and he has given us understanding so that we can know the true God. And now we live in fellowship with the true God because we live in fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the only true God, and he is eternal life.

1. This text is found in a few late manuscripts.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)

Part 1—Victory over the Evil World

□ His Commands Are Not Burdensome

1 John 5:1–3



Say: Up to this point in his epistle, John has written about loving and obeying God. Here he focuses on the importance of believing in the Son. “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has become a child of God. And everyone who loves the Father loves his children too” (1 John 5:1, *NLT*). John quickly tied together the truth that obeying God’s commands is the way for believers to love others. God’s Spirit dwelling in us gives us the desire and the ability to do what He commands. This is not a burdensome task, but one that produces life and joy. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Matthew records these words of Jesus:

Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light. (11:28–30, *NLT*)

As we enter into relationship with Jesus and walk closely with Him, we can allow Him to lead us. His direction isn’t just for major life decisions, but for every moment-by-moment interaction. Jesus can strengthen us against temptations, give us wisdom as we interact with others, help us in our tasks, guide us in our decisions, comfort us when we are grieving, heal us when we’ve been wounded, and so much more. When we truly live dependent upon Him, Jesus lightens our load in every way. The joy of closeness with Jesus overshadows any sacrifice of dying to our flesh. This is why John could write, “Loving God means keeping his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3, *NLT*).

Discuss

- ? How does love for God and others produce righteous behavior?
- ? How would you contrast the momentary pain of dying to our flesh to the lasting joy of obeying God’s commandments?
- ? How can we remember the joy of obedience in times of temptation? How can we rely on Jesus when we are tempted?

□ Win This Battle

1 John 5:4–5



Say: As long as we are living in this world, we will be in a battle. We fight our fleshly desires and the temptations brought into our lives by the enemy of our souls. We also struggle against the impact of sin. Because of the initial act of sin (see Genesis 3:1–19), there is sickness, loss, conflict, strife, and brokenness all around us. So how can we win this ongoing battle? By believing that Jesus is the Son of God! We must believe He is alive, He loves us, He forgives us, and He can be trusted completely. (Share your highlights from the following text.)



Resource Packet Item 1: Believe and Know

Distribute the worksheet and allow time for students to read through the passage. Ask them to underline the word *believe* and circle the word *know* each time they see these words in the chapter. Then discuss the questions together. If time is an issue, encourage students to use this worksheet for personal Bible study during the week.

The apostle John used the words *believe* and *know* many times in the conclusion of his first letter. He wanted his readers to understand the importance of believing that Jesus is the Son of God. As the writer of Hebrews explains, “It is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him” (Hebrews 11:6, NLT).

There are vast rewards for those who believe in Jesus and sincerely seek to know Him—peace, wisdom, guidance, joy, forgiveness, hope, and the knowledge of His constant presence with us. He also gives us forgiveness for our sins and freedom from condemnation and guilt. Jesus is there to help us with every battle we face.

Discuss

- ? What does a lack of dependence on God reveal about our belief in Him?
- ? How does knowing God and depending on Him bring victories into our lives?
- ? How would you describe the rewards awaiting those who sincerely seek Him?



Part 2—Those Who Believe Have Eternal Life

□ The Greater Testimony

1 John 5:6–10

Say: Each of the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) records the baptism of Jesus. Matthew wrote: “After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy” (Matthew 3:16–17, NLT). God spoke aloud and confirmed Jesus as His Son. In fact, all three persons of the Godhead made themselves known in this moment—God the Father spoke aloud, God the Son came up out of the water, and God the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove. Not only was Jesus’ deity proclaimed at His baptism, but it was confirmed through His death and resurrection. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Not only do all three synoptic Gospels record the baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22), but all record the Transfiguration as well (Matthew 17:1–9; Mark 9:2–10; Luke 9:28–36). At each of these events, God revealed himself in a supernatural way, verbally affirming Jesus as His Son. The apostle John witnessed these events and encouraged his readers in this way: “Since we believe human testimony, surely we can believe the greater testimony that comes from God. And God has testified about his Son. All who believe in the Son of God

know in their hearts that this testimony is true. Those who don't believe this are actually calling God a liar because they don't believe what God has testified about his Son" (1 John 5:9–10, NLT). John was declaring the testimony of Jesus' deity that he had heard firsthand from God himself and challenging his readers—including us—to believe as well.



Resource Packet Item 2: When God Speaks Aloud

Distribute the worksheet and allow time to read the Scriptures about Jesus' baptism and transfiguration. Then discuss the questions together. This worksheet could also be used for personal study during the week.

Discuss

- ? How are you encouraged by hearing or reading about the supernatural events surrounding Jesus' baptism?
- ? How will you respond to God's instruction, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy. Listen to him" (Matthew 17:5, NLT)?

□ So That You May Know

1 John 5:11–13



Say: Let's focus on 1 John 5:13: "I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13, NLT). Here, John revealed his purpose for writing this letter—so believers would know they have eternal life. The apostle shared the same truth in his Gospel: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16, KJV). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The only way to experience abundant life in this world and eternal life in heaven is to believe in Jesus, repent of sin, and follow Him. Some would like to think there are many paths to knowing truth, experiencing God, and gaining access to heaven. However, Jesus tells us clearly that He alone is the way to the Father and the life He offers (John 14:6–7). As John puts it in his epistle, "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life" (1 John 5:12, NLT).

Real life happens when our sins are forgiven and we are becoming more and more like Christ. The ultimate reward for our belief in Jesus is the opportunity to spend eternity with Him. The same apostle who wrote the letters we are studying also wrote the Book of Revelation, which includes this beautiful description of heaven: "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever" (Revelation 21:3–4, NLT). This is the reality for all who believe in Jesus; however, a different future awaits those who don't believe. "Towards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars—their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death" (verse 8, NLT).

Discuss

- ? How can we respond to people who say there are many paths to God?
- ? After reading 1 John 5:11–13, how would you encourage a believer who is doubting the reality of eternal life?
- ? Why is it important to remember the promise of eternal life with Jesus? How can it change our view of temporary struggles?



Part 3—Live Confidently in God

Prayers That Please Him

1 John 5:14–17

Say: As believers, we can be assured of eternal life. In addition to that, “we are confident that [God] hears us whenever we ask for anything that pleases him” (1 John 5:14, NLT). We can make our requests known to Him, fully believing that He hears us when we pray. God always answers our prayers according to His will and purposes. And when the answer is more than we might hope, we can rest in the knowledge of His love for us. God is working all things together for our good, even if we don’t understand His response in the moment (Romans 8:26–28). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In 1 John 5:16, the apostle shifted from instructions regarding personal prayer to instructions about intercession for other believers. We should pray for the people we love. John went on to explain that the way to respond to other people’s sins is to pray for them, knowing God hears our prayers and cares for others even more than we do.

In this passage, John drew a distinction between a sin that leads to death and one that does not. Many scholars debate the meaning of this passage. Based on details found in the original language, “a sin which is not unto death” (verse 16, KJV) most likely refers to a repeated, observable sin being committed by a fellow believer. John’s epistle has made it clear that a genuine Christian will not continue a pattern of sin, so we are to pray that God will restore that person’s spiritual life and fellowship with Him.

However, when someone is engaged in a “sin unto death” (verse 16, KJV), believers are not to pray for forgiveness, because it would not be in accord with God’s will. This type of sin that leads to death is not described, but it may refer to believers who persistently sin to the point of incurring God’s judgment by physical death (see Acts 5:1–11; 1 Corinthians 11:30). Or it may refer to heretical teachers and their followers whose death resulting from sin would be spiritual in nature. In either case, believers are not instructed to pray that God would forgive unless there is genuine repentance on the sinner’s part.

John was emphasizing the gravity of all kinds of sin when he wrote, “All wicked actions are sin” (1 John 5:17, NLT). God longs for everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). Yet John concluded that “not every sin leads to death.” So we should pray for the people we know to willingly repent and turn away from whatever sin they are engaged in, so they can experience salvation and the life-giving relationship Jesus offers.

Discuss

- ? How does 1 John 5:14–15 encourage you to pray?
- ? Read the account of Jesus praying in Gethsemane on the night He was arrested (Matthew 26:36–45; Luke 22:41–44). How can we follow Jesus' example and pray according to God's will?
- ? How can we trust God's love for us when we don't understand the way He responds to our prayers?
- ? Read 2 Peter 3:3–9. How does this passage encourage you to pray for those who need to repent of sin?



Resource Packet Item 3: Prayer Focus Journal

Distribute the worksheet for students to use in the coming week. Encourage them to begin their times of prayer by recognizing God's goodness and provision in their lives. Every good thing we experience comes from God (James 1:17). When we take time to acknowledge God's activity in our lives, it pleases Him and strengthens our faith. This prayer focus journal helps students pray with a different emphasis every day instead of trying to pray for everything on their heart every day.

□ Prioritize Relationship with God

1 John 5:18–21



Say: The final four verses in this letter contain a great deal of truth and encouragement for us as believers. John uses the word *know* four times in this brief passage. He wants us to know that, as God's children, we do not have to make a practice of sinning, because the evil one cannot touch us. He reminds us that we can know the true God because Jesus has helped us understand Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus came so we could know who God is; if we know Jesus, we know the Father. Not only can we understand who God is, but we can also live in fellowship with Him—the One who gives us eternal life. This is the greatest news of all! You can hear the apostle's love for his audience in the final sentence of this letter, and it is an important challenge for us as well. He instructed his readers to keep away from idols, which the NLT renders, "Dear children, keep away from anything that might take God's place in your hearts" (1 John 5:21).

The apostle James wrote, "Come close to God, and God will come close to you" (James 4:8, NLT). What a beautiful assurance. Every believer should prioritize knowing and loving God, because it is the single most important pursuit of life. We should order our daily schedules so we can meet with Him through Bible reading and prayer. Some people meet with God first thing in the morning, others use their lunch hour, and others prefer the evening. The time of day a person chooses is less important than their consistency. Reading God's Word daily can shape our thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. If we take time to privately seek Him, we can turn our attention to His ever-abiding presence in the busyness of our day. And when we are aware of His presence, we can strive to honor and please Him in everything we do.

The fellowship God offers us is all-encompassing. He wants us to depend on Him each moment of the day, believing He will supply our every need.

Discuss

- ? How do we practically prioritize our relationship with God?
- ? What are some indications that we have allowed an idol to take God's place in our hearts? How should we respond if we recognize this has happened?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: God wants us to know Him by getting to know Jesus. He invites us to believe in His Son, repent of our sins, and live a life free from the bondage of sin. He promises to hear us when we pray and answer those prayers according to His will and purposes. He wants us to depend on Him in every situation and experience the victorious life Jesus came to offer. The fellowship God offers us begins here on earth and extends throughout eternity. If you aren't following Jesus yet, today can be the day you start! I would love to talk to you about that after class. For the rest of us, let's remember what the Scripture says: "Warn each other every day, while it is still 'today,' so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God. . . . Remember what it says: 'Today when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts'" (Hebrews 3:13,15, NLT).

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Ask Jesus to show you the depth of His invitation in Matthew 11:28–30. Prioritize learning from Him every day through prayer and Bible reading.
- Examine your motives, attitudes, words, and behaviors and ask Jesus to help you rely on Him for victory in the areas where you are struggling.
- Look for an opportunity to share what you know about Jesus with someone who is not a believer.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Living in Covenant with God.
Genesis 17:1–10

Tuesday:

Confidence in God.
Psalm 20:1–9

Wednesday:

Trust in the Lord.
Jeremiah 17:5–8

Thursday:

Overcoming Evil.
Matthew 5:38–48

Friday:

Power to Overcome Evil.
Luke 10:17–20

Saturday:

Overcome Evil with Good.
Romans 12:14–21

The Fruit of the Spirit

When you consider the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—do you feel intimidated? Do you carry the heavy expectation that producing these attitudes is somehow your job as a follower of Jesus? What a to-do list that would be!

However, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer explained in *The Cost of Discipleship*,

Fruit is always the miraculous, the created; it is never the result of willing, but always a growth. The fruit of the Spirit is a gift of God, and only he can produce it. They who bear it know as little about it as the tree knows of its fruit. They know only the power of him on whom their life depends.¹

Over the next several weeks, your class will dive deep into studying these Christlike characteristics and how the Spirit naturally produces them in believers' lives as they walk with Him.

Our study begins in lesson 8 with a look at the biblical definition of spirituality. The key to producing the fruit of the Spirit is cultivating a life in the Spirit, allowing Him to guide our lives toward Christ and away from our sinful nature. Then lessons 9–11 break down these nine Christlike characteristics one by one, starting with the primary fruit of love, through which all the other fruit are manifested:

Joy is Love exulting and Peace is love at rest;
 Patience, Love enduring in every trial and test;
 Gentleness, Love yielding to all that is not sin;
 Goodness, Love in actions that flow from Christ within;
 Faith is Love's eyes opened, the living Christ to see;
 Meekness, Love not fighting but bowed at Calvary;
 Temperance, Love in harness and under Christ's control.
 For Christ is love in person, and Love, Christ in the soul.²

After lesson 12 explores how the Pentecostal experience reached beyond Jerusalem to touch Samaritans, Gentiles, and new believers in Ephesus, lesson 13 concludes our study of the fruit of the Spirit right back where we started: with love. Paul calls this the “more excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31, *κλν*), and no one can bear the fruit of the Spirit or operate in the gifts of the Spirit without it.

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Car. Kaiser Verlag München, trans., First Touchstone ed. 2018 (New York: Touchstone, 1959 SCM Press, Ltd.), 285.

2. Dr. Kenneth Moynagh (1913–1972), “The Fruit of the Spirit Is Love,” accessed November 10, 2022, stornowayfreechurch.com/news/poem-on-love-by-dr-kenneth-moynagh-1913-1972.

April 21, 2024

LESSON 8

Life in the Spirit

Study Text

John 3:5–8; 14:15–26; 16:7–11;
Romans 8:1–11; Galatians 5:16–21;
Titus 3:3–7

Central Truth

The Holy Spirit is central to Christian living.



Key Verse Galatians 5:16

Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh (KJV).

Let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will explain biblical spirituality.
- Students will appreciate the unique role of the Spirit within the Trinity and pursue a closer relationship with God through the Holy Spirit.
- Students will choose to deepen their personal spirituality by experimenting with a spiritual discipline or practice.

Introducing the Study

Say: Today, we're beginning a study on the fruit of the Spirit—the evidence of life in the Spirit. Spirituality is a popular topic of conversation today, which can open doors to share your faith and experience. But first, we should understand what being “spiritual” really means.

Opening Activity—Spiritual or Religious?

Ask: What does it mean to be spiritual? What does it mean to be religious? Do these terms apply only to Christians? Do you perceive yourself as spiritual? religious? both? neither? Try to get responses from as many people as you can.

Say: It's been said that Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship. Becoming a Christian is the process by which we are reconciled to God and find new life in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. Reflecting this idea, some in the Church today use the label “Christ-followers,” considering themselves to be apprenticed to Christ with the goal of being transformed into His likeness. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Our lesson opens with a nighttime conversation between Jesus and a pharisee named Nicodemus. Perhaps Nicodemus conducted his interview under cover of darkness because he was afraid of the Jews. After all, he was one of their leaders. Perhaps John's use of “by night” suggests that Nicodemus was in spiritual darkness. In either case, Jesus shone the light of truth on the question of true spirituality: Religion alone is not enough. No one can see the kingdom of God without new birth (John 3:3).

Scripture Reading

King James Version

John 3:5. Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

6. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

8. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

Titus 3:4. But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared,

5. Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

6. Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior.

John 14:16. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;

17. Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

16:7. Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

8. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:

9. Of sin, because they believe not on me;

10. Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more;

11. Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

Galatians 5:16. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

17. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

Romans 8:5. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.

6. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

New Living Translation

John 3:5. Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit.

6. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life.

7. So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.'

8. The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."

Titus 3:4. But—When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love,

5. he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit.

6. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior.

John 14:16. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you.

17. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you.

16:7. But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate won't come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you.

8. And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment.

9. The world's sin is that it refuses to believe in me.

10. Righteousness is available because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more.

11. Judgment will come because the ruler of this world has already been judged.

Galatians 5:16. So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves.

17. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.

Romans 8:5. Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit.

6. So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Part 1—Be Born of the Spirit

□ Necessity of the New Birth

John 3:5–8

Say: The biblical definition of *spirituality* is life in the Spirit. And that life begins with a new kind of birth. This isn't "a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God" (John 1:13, NLT). It's a spiritual birth—that is, a birth through the Spirit. This new life is available to any person who receives Jesus as Savior and puts their trust in Him. At the moment they are born again, they become the "children of God" (verse 12, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus explained that being born of the Spirit is necessary for one to enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5). "Humans can only reproduce human life" (verse 6, NLT), and although the value of human life is far above the rest of creation, human life still has limitations. It is physical, material, and mortal.

Natural birth—or as Jesus puts it, "being born of water" (verse 5, NLT)—produces human beings with human nature. Humans can be good people who care about each other's welfare, as the word *humanitarian* signifies. However, behavioral scientists attest that every human is broken or wounded in some way. Such is the human condition. Every human mind constructs an identity, or *ego*, with its own programs for happiness to try to make up for that brokenness. The ego seeks recognition and dignity while pursuing power, affection, or security. Unfortunately for our egos—our false, self-made identities—these agendas are unfulfilling and often harmful.

Without the Spirit of God, we cannot enter the kingdom of God—whether in eternity or in the present. Our human efforts cannot achieve the peace and power of God's rule or emulate God's way of living, thinking, behaving, and loving. It is the Holy Spirit who "gives birth to spiritual life" (verse 6, NLT).

Our human condition may have limitations, but God does not. Beyond that, God is full of kindness and love! Through the Holy Spirit:

- God gives us new birth: life in the Spirit.
- God produces Christ's nature in us: the fruit of the Spirit.
- God lets us participate in His supernatural work: the gifts of the Spirit.

What a marvel! In verse 8, Jesus compares the work of the Spirit to the nature of the wind. He moves powerfully and mysteriously, completely beyond human understanding and control.

Discuss

- ? How does the world's definition of *spirituality* ("related to the human spirit as opposed to something physical or material") compare to the biblical definition ("life in the Spirit")?
- ? Which program for happiness does your ego seek—power, affection, security, or something else? How is the Spirit forming you into your "true self," which lines up with God's unique design for you?



Say: What a difference there is between the old life and the new! In his letter to the church leader Titus, the apostle Paul described in sharp contrast the two ways of living: the old way of being human and the new way of living in Christ that comes from being born of the Spirit. To paraphrase Paul’s testimony, “At one time my life was a real mess too, but God . . . !” (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Human nature is foolish and disobedient. Without the Spirit’s guidance, our old selves can be easily misled and enslaved by the very things that used to seem attractive. But at salvation, God steps in and changes the narrative. The sheer goodness of God pierces through the darkness, despite the condition of a person’s soul. The Greek word translated “love” in Titus 3:4 carries a deeper meaning: “love for humanity.” God took the initiative to reach us, and our Savior still seeks out those who are trapped in the sinful human condition. No record of good deeds merited such kindness; it was because of God’s mercy.

What are the results of God’s intervention?

1. New birth—regeneration or being born again
2. New life—not just a recycling of the old nature but the gift of a qualitatively new nature

New birth and new life are brought about by the washing away of our sins and God’s generous gift of pouring out the Holy Spirit on us through Jesus Christ. Not only do we get a fresh start on life, but we get the wherewithal to keep living it. In God’s record books, we are now accounted as righteous; and in God’s family, we are now heirs. What a wonderful hope! This is all the work of grace, which is God’s unmerited kindness extended toward us.

Because of its poetic format in the original text, biblical scholars suggest that Titus 3:4–7 may have been an early Christian hymn or confession. Stating that it is a “trustworthy saying” (verse 8, NLT) indicates the importance of the message in verses 4–7; it is meant to be believed and lived out. Others propose Paul may have edited an earlier baptismal hymn (such as 1 Peter 1:3–5) into this prayer of thanksgiving. Whatever Paul’s intent, the content of these verses is so significant that New Testament congregations may have regularly repeated them as part of corporate worship.



Resource Packet Item 1: Old Life vs. New Life

Distribute the worksheet and encourage students to read the Scriptures and reflect on the differences between their old life of sin and their new life in Christ.

Discuss

- ? Do you recognize any of the vices listed in Titus 3:3 from your life before Christ?
- ? What hymns or worship songs can you name that encapsulate the truths found in Titus 3:4–7?



Part 2—Know That the Spirit Has Come

□ At Work in Their Hearts

John 14:15–26

Say: Jesus promised His disciples, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. . . . He will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you” (John 14:16–17,26, NLT). And Jesus’ promise has been fulfilled! (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In the week leading up to His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus had predicted His death to the crowd following Him (see John 12:23–36). Then during the Passover celebration, as Jesus was washing His disciples’ feet, He predicted His betrayal, later identifying Judas as the one who would betray Him. After Judas left the room, Jesus told the disciples, “I will be with you only a little longer” (13:33, NLT). Peter assured the Master of his loyalty even unto death; then Jesus described the way Peter would deny Him. Jesus had been deeply troubled (verse 21), and now His closest followers were troubled too (14:1). Jesus encouraged them with the promise that He would prepare a place for them, providing the only way they could get to the Father. Amid the disciples’ bewilderment, Jesus made them—and us—a great promise.

To those who love Christ and keep His commandments, Jesus promised the presence of the Holy Spirit (compare John 14:15 and 1 John 3:23–24). He described the Spirit’s work in the world using the title *Paraclete*, a word often translated “Comforter.” Based on the verb it is derived from—literally meaning “called alongside”—*Paraclete* could also be rendered as one who encourages, exhorts, urges, helps, advises (offering legal counsel), advocates (presenting a defense), or serves as a proxy (representing someone else). The *Paraclete* is a Comforter, Counselor, Companion, and so much more!

Jesus promised not to abandon His followers; instead, He would come to them (verse 18) and manifest himself to them (verse 21). Not only would He appear at His second coming, but daily both He and His Father would live within those who love and obey Him (verse 23). How? Jesus described the Spirit as “another” *Paraclete* (verse 16) who would be His “representative” (verse 26, NLT). In every way that Jesus was a *Paraclete* to His original disciples, the Holy Spirit was intended to be a *Paraclete* to all of Christ’s followers. There were two noteworthy differences:

1. Although Jesus would depart this world and return to the Father (13:1), the Spirit would remain with Christ’s followers forever.
2. Although the Incarnation physically limited Jesus to one time and place, the Spirit can be everywhere at all times—including within each believer!

The Father would send this precious partner and member of the Trinity to Jesus’ loving and obedient followers. The *Paraclete*, another Master Teacher like Jesus, would make the truth plain, reminding believers of everything the Savior said (verse 26).



Resource Packet Item 2: The Holy Spirit's Role in Discipleship

Distribute the worksheet and reflect on the three main roles of the Holy Spirit in discipleship based on the Greek words from which *Paraclete* originates.

Discuss

- ? What aspects of the Holy Spirit's work have you experienced in your life?
- ? What aspects would you like to experience more?

At Work in the World

John 16:7–11



Say: In God's wisdom, the coming of the Holy Spirit was preferable to Jesus' remaining on earth. As Jesus told His followers, "It is expedient for you that I go away" (John 16:7, *KJV*). Unless Jesus left, the Spirit would not come. But why was the Spirit's coming so important for Jesus' followers? On a personal level, the Spirit remained when Jesus departed. On a theological level, the Spirit provided the only way for Jesus' followers to fully understand Him. On a practical level, the Spirit mobilized and empowered Christ's followers to reach the world. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

John 14:17 says the world cannot accept the Holy Spirit since it does not see or recognize Him. John 16:8–11 shows that the result of this lack of recognition is not unbelievers' indifference, but their hostility—the same kind of hostility they had for Jesus.

As Jesus spoke to His disciples after the Passover meal, they were clearly troubled at the news of His departure. In fact, they were so grieved that Jesus told them, "There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now" (verse 12, *NLT*). Their sorrow must have been compounded by their growing awareness of the struggle between Jesus and the prince of this world, the suffering their Rabbi would soon undergo, and even their own impending persecution.

Jesus explained that the Spirit would shine the pure light of truth, convicting the world in three distinct areas (verses 8–11):

1. The *Paraclete* would show that the world was guilty of the basic sin of refusing to believe in Christ.
2. The *Paraclete* would show that the world did not understand God's righteousness, since they crucified Jesus, God's only begotten Son.
3. The *Paraclete* would show that the world was subject to judgment along with the ruler of this world.

Assured of ultimate victory and guided by the Holy Spirit, the disciples would be able to confidently go forth and challenge the world's interpretation of who Jesus is.

Discuss

- ? Give a specific example of how the Holy Spirit's presence and power gave you confidence to make a decision or speak up for Jesus.



Part 3—Walk in the Spirit

□ A Line to Toe

Galatians 5:16–21

Say: Living in the Spirit means finding the righteous center between living as a legalist or a libertine. It means abandoning our selfish, sinful desires so we can follow Christ and inherit the kingdom of God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The believers in Galatia were being subjected to false teaching that would have pulled them back under regulations of Mosaic law, and they were “biting and devouring one another” (Galatians 5:15, NLT) instead of choosing to “serve one another in love” (verse 13, NLT). In his letter, the apostle Paul called them instead to liberty and love by walking in the Spirit.

Before new birth, the old nature can be called the “flesh” or “sinful nature.” That old way craves evil—the opposite of what the Holy Spirit desires. Sometimes the internal conflict is so strong that a person is unable to do the things they know they should. The solution? Let the Holy Spirit guide your life. Walk hand in hand with the Holy Spirit. Keep in lockstep with the *Paraclete*. Listen for His voice, submit to His will, wait for His signal, and move at His command.

When you are led by the Spirit you need pursue only two commandments:

1. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30).
2. Love your neighbor as yourself (verse 31).

Paul reiterates Jesus’ teaching that these commands are the summation of the Law (Galatians 5:14; see Matthew 22:35–40). He then adds, “Let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves” (Galatians 5:16, NLT).

The sinful nature is obvious and so are the effects of following it. When people live under the influence of the sinful nature, they will be marked by all kinds of sin. Following these sinful cravings results in: “sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these” (verses 19–21, NLT). Paul warned what the end result would be: “Anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God” (verse 21, NLT).

Discuss

- ? Give an example of the pursuit of a fleshly desire that produced sinful effects.
- ? List one key principle you have learned in your life about walking in the Spirit. What tips could you share with new believers?



□ The Law of Life

Romans 8:1–11

Say: Those who are in Christ Jesus enjoy rich blessings from the Holy Spirit, including true freedom. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

God took the initiative to do what the Law could not do, sending His Son to save us and His Spirit to enable us to obey His commands. The purpose of salvation is not simply that we might escape punishment, but “that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us” (Romans 8:4, *KJV*). Only in those who surrender to the Spirit’s control can the righteous requirements of the Law be fulfilled.

The fleshly mind is alienated from God, and as Paul clearly states, “Letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death” (verse 6, *NLT*). The spiritual mind, however, is alive to God and alert to spiritual realities. “Letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace” (verse 6, *NLT*).



Resource Packet Item 3: The Spirit’s Fruit in My Life

Distribute the worksheet and encourage students to spend this week prayerfully assessing the Spirit’s fruit in their lives.

Discuss

? Give an example of one way you have learned to set your mind on the Spirit.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Spirituality, according to the Bible, is life in the Spirit. Such life requires a new spiritual birth, because the old, sinful nature cannot enter the kingdom of God. Life in the Spirit happens through a relationship with God as intimate as the disciples had with Jesus, made possible through the *Paraclete*.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Ask the Holy Spirit to open a door for evangelism this week. Without arguing about religion, ask someone about their spiritual life. Be ready to share about your relationship with Jesus.
- Reflect this week on what you most appreciate about the *Paraclete*. Thank the Lord for sending Him.
- Choose something you can do this week to tune in even more to the voice of the Spirit. What spiritual disciplines would help you most?

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

The Spirit Strives with Sinners.
Genesis 6:1–8

Tuesday:

The Spirit Resisted by Israel.
Isaiah 63:7–10

Wednesday:

The Spirit Changes Lives.
Ezekiel 36:25–29

Thursday:

Characterized by the Spirit.
Acts 6:1–7

Friday:

The Spirit Sets Free.
Romans 8:1–10

Saturday:

The Spirit Confirms Our
Redemption. Ephesians 1:3–14

April 28, 2024

LESSON

9

The Spirit Produces Love, Joy, Peace

Study Text

Luke 10:17–21; John 14:27; 16:33; Romans 5:1–2; 12:18–21; Galatians 5:22–23; Philippians 4:4–7; Colossians 3:13–15; 1 Thessalonians 1:5–7; 1 John 3:16–18

Central Truth

The Holy Spirit produces love, joy, and peace in the believer.



Key Verse
1 John 3:18

My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth (KJV).

Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will discover that the fruit of the Spirit, in its various expressions, is founded on love.
- Students will recognize that true love, joy, and peace are not mere emotions, but Christlike attitudes or dispositions that the Spirit produces in believers' lives.
- Students will choose love, joy, and peace.

Introducing the Study

Say: As we dive into our detailed study of the fruit of the Spirit, let's think about the difference between a fruit tree and a Christmas tree. Christmas trees are valuable because of external factors: the ornaments we place on them and the gifts we place under them. Fruit trees, on the other hand, are known for what they produce on their own. Think of the fruit of the Spirit as something that is naturally produced rather than something with which we decide to decorate ourselves. With that in mind, let's walk through God's produce department and start examining the Spirit's fruit.

Opening Activity—Fruit Quiz

Ask: How many kinds of fruit can you name in sixty seconds? Give the class one minute to list as many fruits (physical not spiritual) as they can.

Say: The gifts of the Spirit are expressions of God's grace freely given to meet needs in the church, while the fruit of the Spirit is evidence of personal transformation. A person producing fruit is being changed into the likeness of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

▶ Play the “Lessons from the Orchard” video—available at [RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult](https://www.RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult).

Emotions are natural feelings arising from our circumstances—the psychological responses to what's happening to us. Because they are so changeable, they cannot always be trusted.

The fruit of the Spirit, however, describe attitudes that the Spirit produces in believers' lives. They are based on what is true about God, our relationship with Him, and His will for us. They naturally grow as we walk in the Spirit day by day.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

Galatians 5:22. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

23. Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Colossians 3:13. Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

14. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

Luke 10:17. And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name.

18. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.

19. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

20. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.

21. In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.

John 16:33. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

Romans 5:1. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

2. By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Philippians 4:4. Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.

5. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.

6. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

7. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Galatians 5:22. But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

Colossians 3:13. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

14. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.

Luke 10:17. When the seventy-two disciples returned, they joyfully reported to him, "Lord, even the demons obey us when we use your name!"

18. "Yes," he told them, "I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning!"

19. Look, I have given you authority over all the power of the enemy, and you can walk among snakes and scorpions and crush them. Nothing will injure you.

20. But don't rejoice because evil spirits obey you; rejoice because your names are registered in heaven."

21. At that same time Jesus was filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit, and he said, "O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding these things from those who think themselves wise and clever, and for revealing them to the childlike. Yes, Father, it pleased you to do it this way."

John 16:33. "I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."

Romans 5:1. Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.

2. Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.

Philippians 4:4. Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!

5. Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.

6. Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.

7. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Part 1—Love by the Spirit

□ Love Over All

Galatians 5:22–23

Say: What does the Spirit produce in us? What kind of fruit does a life in the Spirit bear? The character of Christ! In just one word, the character of Christ is *love*. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul explained how to be controlled by God’s Spirit rather than human nature: “Let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves” (Galatians 5:16, *NLT*). Paul contrasted the two ways of living, explaining that the behavior of the old nature is obvious. Those who practice such things will not share a place in God’s kingdom (verses 19–21). But the opposite of these “works of the flesh” is “the fruit of the Spirit.” Verse 23 clearly tells us there’s no law against any of these fruit! That means when you’re following the Spirit’s leading, you don’t need to worry that you might be missing God’s mark and doing something wrong.

Interestingly, the original Greek text uses the singular term *fruit of the Spirit* rather than the plural *fruits of the Spirit*. Even the verb in verse 22 is singular: “The fruit of the Spirit *is*” (*KJV*, emphasis added). Based on this grammatical structure, many New Testament scholars interpret the Spirit’s fruit as being preeminently and all-inclusively love. After all, love is the supreme characteristic of God (1 John 4:7–8). If the fruit of the Spirit can be encapsulated under the heading of love, it makes sense that this God-given quality would have multiple manifestations in the lives of people being directed by the Spirit. It would sometimes look like patience, sometimes look like gentleness, sometimes look like faithfulness, etc.—but this love would always come from God himself, who “has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love” (Romans 5:5, *NLT*).

The fruit produced by living in the Spirit is an attitude of love, which pleases God, blesses others, and satisfies our souls. Sidestepping fickle emotions, it results in a settled way of thinking and feeling, which is reflected in our behavior. It results in a point of view that is based on the truth about God and His will for us.

Discuss

- ? What do you think about the fruit of the Spirit being captured in a single virtue?
- ? Share an example from your life when an attitude of steadfast love would have been much better than an emotional response.



Resource Packet Item 1: The Fruit of the Spirit Is Love

Distribute the worksheet and give students a few minutes to read the poem and Scripture passage. Then discuss the questions as a class.



□ Love Above All

Colossians 3:13–14; 1 John 3:16–18

Say: Not only does love encapsulate the fruit of the Spirit, but love is the number-one priority for a person living a Spirit-led life. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In his letter to the Colossians, the apostle Paul exhorted believers to get rid of sinful habits, stripping them off like dirty clothes (Colossians 3:5–9)! Instead, they were to put on new clothes: a Christlike nature that reflected their Creator (verse 10). The list of virtues believers should display looks much like the fruit of the Spirit: “tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience” (verse 12, NLT). We are to patiently forgive one another (verse 13). And above all these other things, we are to put on love! It is the “bond of perfectness” (verse 14, KJV) holding all the virtues together and binding “us all together in perfect harmony” (NLT). Among the many virtues Christians are called to cultivate and produce, love is supreme.

As we have studied already this quarter, John’s epistles reiterate the preeminence of love. Imitating Christ by loving others is non-negotiable for His followers. It is not just a matter of talk but of action; genuine love is demonstrated in deeds of compassion and kindness.

God’s kind of love—and the kind He asks us to show—is called *agape* in Greek. While *agape* does involve fond affection, it is so much more than fleeting infatuation or a shallow passion that bursts into flame and then dies quickly. It is more than mere self-interest that charms people to get what it wants. *Agape* is not self-centered, but selfless. It assesses and supplies other people’s needs. It is sensitive, yet discerning. After all, a person’s best interest sometimes requires tough love, not spineless enabling. Above all, *agape* is willing to pay any price. Depending on the situation, it may require sacrifice. As our perfect example, Jesus Christ, though equal to God, emptied himself of position and glory. He took the form of a servant, humbled himself, and became obedient to the point of death. He made the ultimate sacrifice (Philippians 2:6–9). This is the attitude the Spirit wants to cultivate in us (verse 5). This is the fruit we should produce. Just as our Savior gave up His life for us, “so we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters” (1 John 3:16, NLT). We show the truth of our love by our actions.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think love is the supreme virtue?
- ? Give an example of sacrificial love you have experienced or observed.

Part 2—Joy by the Spirit

□ Joy in Affliction and Suffering

1 Thessalonians 1:5–7



Say: “Joy is love exulting.”¹ The Holy Spirit produces the holy disposition of joy—a celebration of God’s love that transcends temporary heartache or trouble. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul’s Thessalonian correspondence was written to a congregation of new believers. Not only were they experiencing rugged persecution for their faith, but after preaching to them, Paul himself had been driven out of town by their persecutors (see Acts 17:5–10). The Thessalonian believers received the message of Christ with

1. Dr. Kenneth Moynagh (1913–1972), “The Fruit of the Spirit Is Love,” accessed November 10, 2022, stornowayfreechurch.com/news/poem-on-love-by-dr-kenneth-moynagh-1913-1972.

joy from the Spirit, despite the suffering it had brought them. Their courageous, joyful response made them examples to other believers.

Joy in affliction, suffering, pain, and persecution is not the natural response! But consider the difference between joy and happiness.

Happiness is circumstantial—the emotional response to something that is perceived as positive. People pursue things they think will make them happy. But studies show that people driven by external rewards like wealth and status tend to be less happy than people who prioritize things with intrinsic worth, like faith and family relationships. The Thessalonians' commitment to Jesus had changed everything! They knew they were loved, forgiven, and accepted by God. They had hope beyond persecution and death. They loved God more than everything in this world, even their lives. As a result, they had joy!

Joy is an attitude that the Spirit produces in the lives of believers. “Joy in the Holy Ghost” (Romans 14:17, *KJV*) is an essential mark of kingdom life. This joy is a spiritual disposition based on what is true about God, our relationship with Him, and His will for our lives. That’s why people who walk in the Spirit are not enslaved to their emotions or captive to their circumstances.

Discuss

- ? What aspect of God’s nature inspires celebration for you today?
- ? Tell of a time you experienced joy in the Holy Ghost in the midst of affliction.



□ Joy in Mission and Salvation

Luke 10:17–21

Say: Finding your purpose and place in God’s mission is a source of great fulfillment and joy. And finding peace with God brings the greatest joy imaginable! (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Having purpose and meaning in life increases both physical and mental health. Jewish psychiatrist Viktor Frankl, who survived multiple Nazi concentration camps during World War II, observed in his memoir, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, that the prisoners who survived were the ones who could identify a reason to live. Studies show that finding meaning in life is one of nine factors generally leading to long, healthy life. Meaning and purpose are intrinsic motivators, bringing health and happiness.

Returning from their first evangelistic mission, the seventy² apostles were overjoyed (Luke 10:17). They had been commissioned, they had served faithfully, and they had witnessed the power of Jesus’ name. Jesus rejoiced with them, sharing His own testimony of power over the enemy (verse 18).

Then, Jesus encouraged His disciples to shift the focus of their rejoicing. “Don’t rejoice because evil spirits obey you; rejoice because your names are registered in heaven” (verse 20, *NLT*). Belonging to God is the ultimate reason for joy! Even the mission of God is secondary in importance to that. Since working for God includes both successes and failures—people who respond to the message and people who

2. Some translations (including *NLT*) say “seventy-two.”

reject it—rejoicing in our work for God is not enough. Instead, we must rejoice in our relationship with God.

Verse 21 records Jesus himself rejoicing in the Holy Spirit, providing the perfect example for us. He thanked the Father for hiding the treasures of His truth from “those who think themselves wise and clever, and for revealing them to the child-like” (NLT). It pleased the Father to set things up this way, so that humble people are in the best position to discover His grace.

The Christian life is not comprised of knowing theology, understanding philosophy, mastering biblical languages, and grasping Church history. It does not consist of knowing about Christ, but knowing Christ himself. A relationship with Jesus does not require human intellect and earthly wisdom, but spiritual hunger and heavenly grace. Watching God’s grace in action makes Jesus rejoice. For God’s children, receiving and reciprocating His love, experience joy in the form of exultant (or jubilant) love. God finds joy in giving, Jesus finds joy in the transaction, and we find joy in receiving grace and living in relationship with Him.

Discuss

- ? Describe a time when you experienced joy while participating in God’s mission.
- ? How can you joyfully celebrate the relationship you have with Jesus?



Resource Packet Item 2: Rejoice in the Lord Always

Distribute the worksheet and divide the class into small groups. Assign a few Scriptures to each group, and give students a few minutes to list the reasons for rejoicing. Then discuss the results and the reflection question together.

Part 3—Peace by the Spirit

□ Peace in Your Heart John 16:33; Colossians 3:15; Romans 5:1–2



Say: “Peace is love at rest.”³ The deepest peace any person can find is peace with God. When we know we are loved by Him, we enjoy peace that is immovable. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus’ conversation with His disciples during the Last Supper is recorded in John 14–17. In it, Jesus explained that He was leaving and the *Paraclete* was coming in His place. The disciples were to remain in Jesus: in His words and in His love. They would be persecuted, but He promised the *Paraclete* would be with them. Then Jesus prayed for them—and for us.

Just before praying, Jesus said, “I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world” (John 16:33, NLT). Jesus was honest with His friends. Life on earth has struggles. Living for Jesus will not always be easy. But just imagine Jesus saying, “Let’s be honest: This world is gonna clobber you. But I have already conquered the world. So, chin up. Take courage. Find your peace in Me!”

3. Moynagh.

Paul gave insight into how to practice peace, saying, “Let the peace of God rule your hearts” (Colossians 3:15, *KJV*). The Greek word translated “rule” in this verse is not the typical word one used for a king’s rule. Instead, it is a word that only appears once in the New Testament and refers to someone who presided over or arbitrated public games. So picture peace as an umpire standing behind the home plate of your heart. You are at bat, hoping to get a good hit. The enemy of your soul is on the mound trying his best to strike you out. Peace is there to call the pitches on your behalf. In fact, he makes the call for you even before you swing. When the enemy pitches condemnation toward your heart, peace calls out, “Low and outside!” so you know not to take a swing. When the enemy pitches fear, anxiety, anger, or desolation, peace shouts, “Ball—way outside!” encouraging you to let those lies fly past.

Paul explained peace with God theologically in Romans 5:1–11. Christ’s work coupled with our faith makes us right with God and grants us access to grace. We now stand rejoicing in hope as we look forward to sharing God’s glory. This reconciliation—this restoration of our relationship with God—is why we can rest. Peace is love at rest.

Discuss

- ? In what ways do Jesus’ words in John 16:33 prepare you for the future?
- ? What thoughts pitched at your heart does peace warn you not to swing at?



□ Peace in Your Life John 14:27; Romans 12:18–21; Philippians 4:4–7

Say: Not only do we have peace with God—certain of our position in Him—but as His love works through us, we can also live peaceably with others. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Like the contrast between joy and happiness, there is a difference between biblical peace and the world’s concept of peace. The world defines peace as the absence of conflict, which means it only lasts as long as things remain calm. But the peace Jesus gives is not like that (John 14:27). In fact, God’s peace transcends our understanding (Philippians 4:7). This kind of peace is based on the Hebrew concept of *shalom*, which includes well-being, completeness, wholeness, flourishing, and prosperity. *Shalom* is both the condition and the outcome of living in right relationship with God.

To have *shalom* is to have life in Christ, with God, and by the Spirit. Right relationship with God results in steadfast well-being that transcends temporary trials. God’s peace is not the absence of conflict; it’s His presence in the midst of it! The world’s peace—freedom from disturbance—is fragile. One tiny problem arises, and the illusion of peace is shattered. But God’s peace is resilient (constantly bouncing back) and transcendent (soaring above our circumstances). The world doesn’t give us this peace, so the world can’t take it away!

When we’ve experienced the love of God and know His absolute power, we can live with *shalom*—the firm conviction that if all’s well between me and my sovereign God, I can face anything out there in the world.

Not only does the Holy Spirit give us peace with God, but His fruit in our lives leads to peace with others as well. The *shalom* in our hearts is manifested in the

way we interact with others. We are called to release revenge, respond to evil with goodness, be considerate in all we do, abandon worry, and pray with thanksgiving (Romans 12:18–21; Philippians 4:4–6). All the while, God’s *shalom* is protecting our hearts and minds as we live in Christ Jesus (verse 7).

Discuss

- ? Tell of a time you experienced God’s presence in the midst of a conflict.
- ? What truth about God gives you peace in a current challenging situation?



Resource Packet Item 3: Peace (Cinquain Poem)

Distribute the worksheet and give students a few minutes to reflect and write the poem as instructed. Ask a few volunteers to share their poems.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Love, joy, and peace are not mere emotions, but Christlike attitudes that the Spirit produces in our lives. The fruit of the Spirit in its various expressions is grounded on believers’ absolute confidence in the unconditional love of God. As they intentionally seek to stay in step with the Spirit, He produces evidence that they are walking with Christ.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Choose to live in God’s love and share it with others.
- Choose to live in the joy of the Holy Ghost—even in affliction—by celebrating what is true about God, your relationship with Him, and His will for your life.
- Choose to live in peace, knowing it is well with your soul.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Love God Wholeheartedly.
Deuteronomy 10:12–22

Tuesday:

Love Your Neighbor.
Leviticus 19:11–18

Wednesday:

Joy Expressed.
Psalm 66:1–6

Thursday:

Joy in Heaven.
Luke 15:1–10

Friday:

Christ Gives Peace.
John 14:22–29

Saturday:

Peace with God.
Romans 5:1–11

May 5, 2024

LESSON 10

The Spirit Produces Patience, Kindness, Goodness

Study Text

Proverbs 15:1; Luke 10:30–37; Galatians 5:22–23; Ephesians 4:1–3, 21–32; 5:8–10; Philippians 3:12–17; 2 Timothy 2:23–26; Titus 3:1–5; James 5:7–11

Central Truth

The Holy Spirit produces patience, kindness, and goodness in the believer.



Key Verse Ephesians 4:32

Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you (KJV).

Be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand the two directions of patience and endurance: with difficult people and with difficult circumstances.
- Students will recognize that bearing the fruit of the Spirit requires humility.
- Students will choose to put off old, sinful behaviors and put on new, Christlike behaviors.

Introducing the Study

Say: Being confident in God's love fills us with supernatural love, joy, and peace. Since He loved us first, we can share His love, rejoice in His love, and rest in His love. Humbly walking in the Spirit day by day also produces qualities that help us love people like Jesus does—showing patience, kindness, and goodness.

Opening Activity—A Loving Interaction

Ask: When have you experienced someone being patient with you, kind toward you, or good to you? What impressed you most about that experience? Try to get responses from as many people as you can.

Say: Recall that the fruit produced by the Spirit are attitudes in a disciple that match the attitudes of Jesus. All the attitudes are grounded in love. This lesson focuses on Christlike ways of thinking, speaking, and interacting with others. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Sometimes it seems that it would be much easier to live the Christian life alone, like a hermit in a desert cave. After all, many of the challenges of Christlike behavior happen when we're rubbing shoulders with other people.

There are all kinds of people in this world—including evil people, mean people, irresponsible people, dishonest people, and abusive people. Even in our churches and families, there are people who make bad decisions, who hold values that differ from ours, who don't think like us, or who have personalities that grate against ours. If we're honest, even people who love Jesus can be hard to get along with sometimes.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Galatians 5:22. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

23. Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Ephesians 4:1. I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,

2. With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.

James 5:7. Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.

8. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

Proverbs 15:1. A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.

2 Timothy 2:23. But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.

24. And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient.

Titus 3:1. Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work,

2. To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.

Ephesians 4:29. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

30. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

31. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

32. And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

5:9. For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.

New Living Translation

Galatians 5:22. But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23. gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

Ephesians 4:1. Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God.

2. Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.

James 5:7. Dear brothers and sisters, be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Consider the farmers who patiently wait for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They eagerly look for the valuable harvest to ripen.

8. You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near.

Proverbs 15:1. A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare.

2 Timothy 2:23. Again I say, don't get involved in foolish, ignorant arguments that only start fights.

24. A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people.

Titus 3:1. Remind the believers to submit to the government and its officers. They should be obedient, always ready to do what is good.

2. They must not slander anyone and must avoid quarreling. Instead, they should be gentle and show true humility to everyone.

Ephesians 4:29. Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.

30. And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.

31. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior.

32. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

5:9. For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Part 1—Patience by the Spirit

□ A Long Fuse

Galatians 5:22–23; Ephesians 4:1–3

Say: Two similar Greek words get translated into English as either *patience* or *endurance*. There is significant meaning behind each word. In our English Bible translations the two meanings overlap, so let's take a look at both of them to better understand this godly virtue of patience. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The first Greek word is *makrothumia*. Paul used this word in Ephesians 4:2 and Galatians 5:22 to mean “longsuffering” (KJV) or “patience” (NLT). It is built from two other words:

- *Makros*—meaning “long, far, distant.” We use a form of *makros* in our English word *macrocosm*, which refers to the distant reaches of the universe.
- *Thumos*—meaning “violent display of anger.” This is more than a feeling of anger; it is a passionate expression or destructive effect of the emotion of anger. We could call it “wrath” or “rage.”

Patience, therefore, is the holy disposition of being “distant from rage.” Instead of having an explosive temper or being easily set off by others, a Spirit-controlled believer bearing the fruit of patience is far from blowing up. Just as parents train their children to control their tempers by counting to ten, patience is the Holy Spirit telling us, “Count to a trillion. Don't lose your temper.”

Patience means “suffering long” with people—even people who are unbalanced, misshapen, abnormal, and broken. It means keeping your cool when you think someone else is wrong, someone else is the problem, someone else is just sooooo . . . [You can fill in the blank.] If rage is a stick of dynamite, patience is a hundred-mile fuse.

The holy disposition of patience requires humility, gentleness, and putting up with one another in love (Ephesians 4:2). Our marriages, families, and churches depend on it. The unity of the Spirit demands it.

Discuss

- ? In Ephesians 4:1, how does Paul describe this humble, gentle, and patient life?
- ? Think of a challenging person who you need to have more patience with. Don't say their name; simply reflect on how you can demonstrate patience. Ask the Holy Spirit to produce that fruit in you as you follow Christ.



Resource Packet Item 1: How Long Is My Fuse?

Distribute the worksheet and give students a few minutes to prayerfully consider the questions. Then discuss their responses without causing embarrassment.



□ Hanging Tight in Tough Situations

James 5:7–11

Say: Not only does the Holy Spirit produce in us the patience to deal with all kinds of people, but He also helps us endure difficult circumstances. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The second Greek word sometimes translated as “patience” or “endurance” is *hypomone*. Along with other New Testament writers, James used this word to describe endurance needed to deal with situations, as in James 5:11—“endure under suffering” and “Job, a man of great endurance” (NLT). (See also Romans 5:3–4, Hebrews 10:36, Revelation 1:9.) It is also built from two words:

- *Hypo*—meaning “under or below.” An example of this prefix appearing in English is *hypoglycemia*, which refers to an abnormal decrease in blood sugar.
- *Meno*—meaning “remain.”

Therefore, this kind of patience carries the idea of “remaining under” or persevering. Whereas *makrothumia* can refer to patience with people or situations, *hypomone* refers exclusively to endurance of circumstances. Picture yourself bent over under a heavy load, perhaps a heavy backpack. Imagine carrying that burden God has entrusted to you—like completing your education, praying for a wayward child, being faithful to a ministry assignment, or paying a debt. After carrying that load for a while, maybe you consider sliding out from under its weight. After all, it’s so heavy! Should you keep carrying it? Then the Holy Spirit encourages you to remain under the burden, faithfully completing your commitment even though it’s not easy. That is *hypomone*.

James, the brother of Jesus, encourages patience while we wait for the Lord’s return (James 5:7–11). He gave three examples to inspire us to patiently endure, using both *makrothumia* (verses 7–10) and *hypomone* (verse 11).

1. James describes farmers who are waiting for rain to cause their crops to produce a harvest. Just as they have faith the rain will come, we should have faith that the Lord will return soon (verses 7–8).
2. He reminds us of the prophets, who patiently endured suffering (verse 10).
3. He mentions “the patience of Job” (verse 11, *KJV*), who suffered greatly before experiencing the Lord’s “tenderness and mercy” (NLT).

Our greatest example of both kinds of patience is Jesus himself. In Hebrews 12:1–12, the author describes how Jesus’ *hypomone* should inspire our own. When we recall all the suffering and hostility He endured “because of the joy awaiting him” (verse 2, NLT), we “won’t become weary and give up” (verse 3, NLT). And as Peter explains, Jesus’ *makrothumia* is related to the timing of His return: “The Lord isn’t really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent” (2 Peter 3:9, NLT).

Discuss

- ? Ask God for the grace to carry whatever burden He has given you.
- ? Which do you find more challenging: patience with people or patience with circumstances?



Part 2—Kindness¹ by the Spirit

□ Avoid Disputes

Proverbs 15:1; 2 Timothy 2:23–26

Say: Conversation is one of the major ways people interact with each other.

When believers recognize each person's God-given value and refuse to engage in wars of words, we are demonstrating the holy disposition of kindness.

(Share your highlights from the following text.)

The wisdom of Proverbs 15:1 has changed many lives and relationships: “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (KJV). Even if outbursts of anger have become a habit, the Holy Spirit urges us to remember these words. As we submit to His gentle nudges, grievous words are removed from our conversation and soft answers become our sanctified style. Instead of throwing hurtful words into an argument like gasoline on a fire, our kind answers can turn conversations around.

Besides steering clear of angry outbursts, the disposition of kindness in conversation keeps us from engaging in verbal battles. As Paul advised, “Don't get involved in foolish, ignorant arguments that only start fights. A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone” (2 Timothy 2:23–24, NLT). It may be tempting to boldly declare your theological or political opinion in public, but think about this: You may end up in an ugly argument with someone you could have led to Christ. Beware: Engaging in arguments does not equal sharing the gospel! Imagine what it would be like to speak so kindly on a topic of disagreement that you could teach those who oppose you and win them to Jesus (see verses 25–26).

Discuss

? When have you seen a soft answer turn a conversation—and perhaps a heart—totally around?

? Synonyms for *kind* include *mild*, *peaceful*, *quiet*, *tolerant*, and *composed*.

Which of these characteristics do you need the Spirit to produce in your life?



Resource Packet Item 2: Memory Verse—Proverbs 15:1

Distribute the worksheet or prepare the memory verses (one per person) before class. Encourage students to post the verse in a prominent location where they can see it often and memorize it.



□ Refuse to Slander

Titus 3:1–5

Say: We know we shouldn't misuse the Lord's name, but Paul says in Titus 3:2 that believers must honor other people's names too—by refusing to engage in slander. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

1. Although KJV translates the Greek word *chrestotes* in Galatians 5:22 as “gentleness,” this lesson uses the NLT rendering of “kindness,” which better captures the word's meaning.

Our culture excels at slander. Media interviews become shouting matches, full of vile words and escalating interruptions. Athletes and politicians mercilessly trash-talk their opponents. Muckraking is fashionable; civility is not. Online search engines are designed to connect us with sources we agree with. Instead of learning new perspectives, we consume only what fuels our biases. As our bandwagons get bigger and the people on them get angrier, we can get caught up in the frenzy.

People sometimes defend such character assassination by saying, “It’s a free country—I can say whatever I want to!” But Scripture says, “Remind the believers to submit to the government and its officers. They should be obedient, always ready to do what is good. They must not slander anyone and must avoid quarreling. Instead, they should be gentle and show true humility to everyone” (Titus 3:1–2, NLT).

“But they don’t deserve it!” the unrepentant person might retort. Paul goes on to say in verse 3 that we weren’t deserving either. We used to be foolish, disobedient, deceived, and addicted to carnal pleasures and evil attitudes. Our lives were characterized by hate. But God! In kindness and love, our Savior appeared and rescued us. He delivered us from our sinful condition and hateful tradition. Did we deserve the salvation He brought? Absolutely not. It wasn’t because of anything good we had done. It was only “because of his mercy” (Titus 3:5, NLT).

The Holy Spirit invites us to share in God’s way of thinking and behaving: dispensing kindness and declaring life-giving words to everyone—even the people we consider undeserving.

Discuss

- ? How can Christ-followers practice kindness in their conversations without compromising their convictions?
- ? It’s been said that people who think they don’t need grace don’t believe others deserve it. Do you think that is true? Explain.

Part 3—Goodness by the Spirit

□ Practicing Being a Neighbor

Luke 10:30–37



Say: Goodness is an attitude of compassion and generosity. But in the New Testament context, it goes beyond good intentions; this kind of goodness takes action. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

There is no better example of this holy disposition than the Good Samaritan. Samaritans were despised by the Jews, but this man in Jesus’ story represented God far better than the Jewish religious leaders! Look at the active nature of the Samaritan’s goodness after he saw a complete stranger in distress: He felt compassion, went over to the injured man, soothed and bandaged his wounds, set him on his own donkey, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day, he paid the innkeeper to care for the traveler and promised to pay for anything else the man needed. That’s more than one or two action words. The Samaritan man was generous in every way—with his time, energy, possessions, and money. His selfless actions (beneficence) arose from a loving heart (benevolence). Remember,

the primary fruit of the Spirit and the source of them all is love. The Samaritan's compassion and love prompted his generous actions.

The word *neighbor* refers to someone who is nearby. In Jesus' story, only the Samaritan was willing to go near the one in need. The priest and the Levite may have been respected religious leaders, but when they saw the injured man—and even paused to look closer—they chose to do nothing. In fact, they got as far away from the injured man as they could. How easy it is for us who are religious to look for ways to justify ourselves like the man whose question prompted Jesus' story (Luke 10:27–29). Sometimes, we look for any reason to avoid getting near those in need.

By the end of the story, the religious expert understood who the man's neighbor truly was: “The one who showed him mercy.” Then Jesus said, “Yes, now go and do the same” (verse 37, NLT). And so must we.

Discuss

- ? What practical steps can you take to get near those who are in need? Is that your desire?
- ? Goodness is the action of doing good or giving generously. Which of those two actions is easier for you? Ask God to grow you in the other.



Putting Off and Putting On Ephesians 4:21–32; 5:8–10

Say: New life in Christ is often described in the New Testament as walking in the light. In his letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul described what this light produces in believers: “only what is good and right and true” (Ephesians 5:9, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Ephesians 4, Paul explained how to grow in goodness: “Throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life” (verse 22, NLT) as happily as you would get rid of dirty clothes when offered a brand-new wardrobe. So what's been in your closet far too long? Maybe it's a life corrupted by lust and deception. Throw it away and put on a new nature—one that is truly righteous and holy. Let the Spirit give you new thoughts and holy attitudes. Trash the lies you've been telling. Toss away that sinful anger. Put off that foul, abusive language. Those clothes never looked good on you anyway—so get rid of them! Instead, “put on your new nature, created to be like God” (verse 24, NLT).

What have you been accessorizing with? Take off the worthless jewelry of bitterness, rage, anger, and slander along with every kind of evil behavior. Instead, be adorned with the real thing—precious gems of kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. With the Spirit's help, you can put on the rarest jewel of all: love.

Maybe your old clothes sound different from the ones in Paul's list. Mature believers' temptations are usually subtle. We may have been drawn to something we thought was stunning, but now we've found out it's not attractive at all. It looks like the world, and it grieves the Spirit. As we continually learn the truth that comes from Jesus, we continually take off the things that don't please the Spirit, allowing Him to replace them with new thoughts and attitudes (verses 21–23).



Resource Packet Item 3: Put Off . . . Put On

Distribute the worksheet and divide the class into small groups. After a few minutes, ask one group to read their list. Encourage students to reflect on their lists throughout the week.

Paul specifically mentions the quality of goodness in 5:9—which literally reads, “The fruit of light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth.” Just as the rays of the sun help cause plants and flowers to grow, so the “light from the Lord” (verse 8, *NLT*) should bring goodness to life in the believer. Because God is inherently good, as we grow closer to Him, His goodness will be reflected in us.

Discuss

- ? What is one “garment” in your spiritual closet that needs to go?
- ? What aspect of Christlike character would you like to wear more often?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Confidence in God’s love for us coupled with the work of the Holy Spirit in us causes us to bear the Christlike fruit of love, joy, and peace. We also become the conduit of God’s love to others, showing patience, kindness, and goodness.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you bear the fruit of patience—with people and with situations.
- Memorize Proverbs 15:1 and count the number of times this week you intentionally put it into action.
- Choose to be kind in a conversation instead of swerving into conflict. (Specifically, refrain from disputes and refuse to engage in slander.) Ask the Lord to build a bridge that may bring others to Him through you.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Patience Rewarded.
Genesis 26:16–26

Tuesday:

Our Longsuffering God.
Nehemiah 9:26–31

Wednesday:

Our Gentle Shepherd.
Psalm 23:1–6

Thursday:

Lead Gently.
2 Timothy 2:23–26

Friday:

A Kind Neighbor.
Acts 9:36–43

Saturday:

Choose Kindness.
Ephesians 4:29 through 5:2

Unit 2: The Fruit of the Spirit

May 12, 2024

LESSON 11

The Spirit Produces Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-Control

Study Text

Psalm 25:8–11; Matthew 5:5; 11:28–30; 21:18–22; 1 Corinthians 9:24–27; Galatians 5:22–23; Hebrews 11:1–2,6; 2 Peter 1:3–8

Central Truth

The Holy Spirit produces faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in the believer.



Key Verse

2 Peter 1:3

According as his [God's] divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue (KJV).

By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand the two different uses of the word *faith* in the Bible.
- Students will affirm that being meek is not being weak.
- Students will choose the discipline of commitment to avoid the discipline of correction.

Introducing the Study

Say: Confidence in God's love for us causes us to bear the fruit of love, joy, and peace. We become the conduit of God's love to others, showing patience, kindness, and goodness. And as the Spirit leads us to give and receive love in greater measure, we demonstrate faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Opening Activity—Words of Faith

Ask: How many English words can you list that are related to the words *faith* or *belief*? List them on the board as the class calls them out, and then count the number of words.

Say: Remember, the fruit the Spirit produces in us causes our attitudes to match our Master's attitudes. These characteristics are all grounded in love. When we live out God's love with undivided integrity, we are faithful, gentle, and self-controlled. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In the Old Testament, the concept of *faith* is generally centered on God, not humanity. Rather than focusing on human intellectual assent (or belief), the text describes God's absolute trustworthiness and demands loyalty to Him. In the New Testament, however, *faith* can mean either subjective confidence (believing faith) or the objective basis for confidence (faithfulness).



Resource Packet Item 1: Faith and Faithfulness

Distribute the worksheet and assign the verses to individuals or small groups. Each verse contains the Greek word *pistis*, which can be translated "faith" or "faithfulness." After the students have completed the worksheet, discuss the results together.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Galatians 5:22. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

23. Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Hebrews 11:1. Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

2. For by it the elders obtained a good report.

6. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Psalms 25:8. Good and upright is the LORD: therefore will he teach sinners in the way.

9. The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.

10. All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.

11. For thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.

Matthew 5:5. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

1 Corinthians 9:24. Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

25. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

26. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

27. But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

2 Peter 1:3. According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

5. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

6. And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

7. And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

8. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

New Living Translation

Galatians 5:22. But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23. gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

Hebrews 11:1. Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see.

2. Through their faith, the people in days of old earned a good reputation.

6. And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.

Psalms 25:8. The LORD is good and does what is right; he shows the proper path to those who go astray.

9. He leads the humble in doing right, teaching them his way.

10. The LORD leads with unfailing love and faithfulness all who keep his covenant and obey his demands.

11. For the honor of your name, O LORD, forgive my many, many sins.

Matthew 5:5. "God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth."

1 Corinthians 9:24. Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!

25. All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize.

26. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing.

27. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.

2 Peter 1:3. By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence.

5. In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge,

6. and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness,

7. and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.

8. The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Part 1—Faithfulness by the Spirit

□ Faith that Moves Mountains

Matthew 21:18–22

Say: The biblical concepts of faith and faithfulness are closely related. Let’s take a closer look at each. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Entering Jerusalem on the Monday morning before His crucifixion, Jesus was hungry and noticed a fig tree beside the road. Typically, an early crop of figs would appear each spring before the leaves. So seeing the tree covered in leaves, Jesus expected to enjoy a little breakfast. Finding no fruit, He cursed the tree for its barrenness, and immediately the tree withered up. It may seem that Jesus was being ill-tempered, but He was performing a prophetic act like the Old Testament prophets. The fig tree was a recognized emblem of Israel, and His pronouncement was a sign of the judgment that would come on Israel for not producing the fruit of repentance and righteousness. Amazed, the disciples asked how it was possible for the tree to wither so quickly.

Jesus launched into an exhortation on faith. “I tell you the truth, if you have faith and don’t doubt, you can do things like this and much more. You can even say to this mountain, ‘May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and it will happen. You can pray for anything, and if you have faith, you will receive it” (Matthew 21:21–22, NLT).

Throughout His ministry, Jesus exposed the fruitless religion of the Jewish temple, presenting himself as its replacement. As He entered Jerusalem that Monday morning, the mountain He would have been facing was Mount Zion where the temple stood. Far more monumental than the withering of the fig tree would be the destruction of the temple and the system it represented. Both the witnessed miracle of the withered fig tree and the predicted miracle of the temple mount being essentially removed (which happened in AD 70; see Matthew 24:1–2) were examples to the disciples of the power of unwavering faith. Prayer can move mountains, and faith is the prerequisite. As we live in submission to God’s will and exercise our faith, trusting in the power and love of God, the Holy Spirit’s power can accomplish God’s will in our lives—even if it seems impossible.

Discuss

- ? Can you name a mountain God wants to remove? If you have faith, you may speak to that mountain right now.
- ? What is the most sudden or instantaneous miracle you have witnessed?



□ Faithfulness that Pleases God Galatians 5:22–23; Hebrews 11:1–2,6

Say: The Greek word *pistis* can be translated as “faith” or “faithfulness,” depending on a Scripture’s context. In Paul’s list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, most scholars conclude that it is best translated “faithfulness.” This characteristic of fidelity and trustworthiness is seen throughout the Bible—first in the nature of God and then as a requirement for His servants. Jesus used the word in His parables of stewardship (see Matthew 24:45 and

Luke 12:42); and Paul encouraged Timothy to choose faithful people when passing on the gospel tradition (2 Timothy 2:2). To His followers who bear the fruit of faithfulness, the Master will one day say, “Well done, my good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21,23, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Hebrews 11 lists many biblical heroes of faith. We think of this chapter as referring only to believing faith, which is intellectual assent to the promises of God. But think of the ways believing faith inspired each hero’s faithfulness. The outcome of their confidence in God was their commitment to Him.

This so-called Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11 could also be called the Hall of Faithfulness. Noah’s obedience made him a person God could rely on. Abraham followed God’s leading, moving his family to a new land, sight unseen. Moses was faithful to the God of the Hebrews, choosing to share their oppression rather than enjoying the privileges of Egypt. Some verses in this chapter more clearly refer to believing faith (like verses 1,3,6,13,14,19,22), while others refer to faithfulness. For those who remained faithful to God’s promises—even to death (verse 13)—“God is not ashamed to be called their God” (verse 16).

Remember: the meaning of *pistis* is both faith and faithfulness. The two nuances overlap in the biblical view; one gives rise to the other. The Old Testament emphasis on fidelity (God’s absolute trustworthiness and the believer’s response of loyalty) influences the New Testament concept of faithfulness. This response of fidelity to God is reflected in both belief and behavior. Being convinced of God’s absolute love and grace produces in the life of a Christ-follower the fruit of *pistis*: both faith and faithfulness. And without that it is impossible to please God (verse 6).

Discuss

- ? Do you think it is possible to have believing faith in God without demonstrating faithfulness to God?
- ? How does a Christian’s faithfulness inspire believing faith in others?

Part 2—Gentleness by the Spirit

□ The Lord Leads the Meek

Psalm 25:8–11



Say: The Greek word for the Spirit’s fruit of “gentleness” (Galatians 5:23, NLT; “meekness,” κτν) refers to an attitude that accepts God’s dealings with us as good without disputing or resisting. This gentleness is not demonstrated in weakness, but in power. A gentle person is like a mighty stallion under the Spirit’s bridle. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalm 25 is an acrostic psalm of David, designed to teach about prayer. In its original form, each stanza starts with a different Hebrew letter, so the psalm could be called, “A Primer on Prayer from A to Z.” In verses 1–10, the Psalmist looks to the Lord, declares his trust, and asks that none of God’s people be put to shame. He makes two interwoven pleas: for teaching and for guidance. The Psalmist appeals to the compassion and unfailing love of the Lord for him personally and then for

all people. Starting in verse 11, the author takes these themes further, pleading to the Lord as an individual.

So what can gentle, humble people expect from the Lord as they pray? “The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way. All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth” (verses 9–10, *KJV*). Three key concepts emerge in these verses: judgment, mercy, and truth.

- 1. Judgment.** The Lord assures His people that in the end there will be justice for the meek. At the same time, He guides them to execute righteous judgments on behalf of others.
- 2. Mercy.** The Psalmist also appeals to the Lord’s goodness and uprightness (verse 8). Although uprightness can sometimes make people intolerant of failure, the goodness of our upright God is seen in His mercy toward His people—even those who go astray.
- 3. Truth.** Because of God’s rock-solid faithfulness, there is consistency between what He says and does. Convinced of God’s loving character, the meek can accept God’s dealings as good without disputing or resisting.

Discuss

- ? Which of these three characteristics of God—justice, mercy, or truth—gives you the greatest encouragement to be meek in your present circumstances?
- ? Aristotle reflected on meekness as the perfect balance between getting angry without a reason and not getting angry at all. In other words, it means getting angry at the right time, to the right degree, and for the right reason. What do you think of this definition?



Resource Packet Item 2: Justice, Mercy, and Truth

Distribute the information sheet and briefly summarize it. Then encourage students to reflect on it during the week.



□ The Meek Are Not Weak

Matthew 5:5; 11:28–30

Say: Jesus said, “Blessed are the meek” (Matthew 5:5, *KJV*), and He also said, “I am meek” (11:29, *KJV*). What better example could we follow than Jesus? He is both the Lion and the Lamb! (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus quotes from Psalm 37: “Fret not thyself . . . for evildoers shall be cut off . . . but the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (verses 8–9, 11, *KJV*). In the psalm, David contrasted attitudes and destinies, instructing us not to worry about those who do evil. They will fade like the grass and wither away like the spring flowers, but those who trust in the Lord and do good will dwell in the land. Because of that, we should delight ourselves in the Lord, trusting that the Lord will look after His faithful people.

In Matthew 11:28–30, Jesus extended the invitation to come to Him, learn from

Him, and be like Him—the One who is meek and lowly. He promises to give rest as we follow Him and walk in the Spirit. When we follow Jesus’ example of humble, sacrificial love and “delight [ourselves] in the abundance of peace” (Psalm 37:11, KJV), we are able to bear the fruit of gentleness in our dealings with the people around us.

Discuss

- ? What are some examples of the mightiness and meekness of Jesus?
- ? How can you cooperate with the Holy Spirit to develop an attitude that accepts God’s dealings with you as good without disputing or resisting?

Part 3—Self-Control by the Spirit

□ Three Kinds of Discipline

1 Corinthians 9:24–27



Say: The New Testament includes three words that represent different levels of discipline: the discipline of correction, the discipline of commitment, and self-discipline. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The lowest level of discipline in the New Testament could be called the “discipline of correction.” This is the kind of instruction and correction that adults give to children. As the author of Hebrews explained, God’s discipline is not pleasant, but it is profitable (12:11). This word translated “discipline” is also found in 1 Corinthians 11:32, 1 Timothy 1:20 (translated as “learn [not to blaspheme]”), and 2 Timothy 2:25 (translated as “instruct”).

The second level of discipline could be called the “discipline of commitment.” The Greek word for this concept is related to our English word “gymnasium,” carrying the idea of exercising the body toward fitness or the spirit toward godliness. Forms of this word appear in 1 Timothy 4:7–8 and Hebrews 5:14.

The highest level of discipline is the “discipline of self-control.” Paul urged the believers in Corinth to exercise this highest kind of discipline in their spiritual lives (1 Corinthians 9:24–27). Corinth hosted the biennial Isthmian Games, which along with the Olympic Games were part of the ancient Greek Panhellenic Games. Paul’s writing in this passage is filled with athletic metaphors: contending for victory, running a race, boxing, and subjecting one’s body to a brutal workout. This discipline—the discipline of being in control of oneself—is the fruit of the Spirit we call self-control (Galatians 5:23, NLT; “temperance,” KJV). It is an attitude produced by the Spirit that results in God-honoring actions.

Discuss

- ? Describe a time that you experienced the rewards of self-control. What was the Holy Spirit’s role in the victory?
- ? Name one area where the Holy Spirit is asking you to exercise more of the discipline of commitment.



Say: Most of our study on the fruit of the Spirit has been based on Paul’s writings. But this passage in 2 Peter corresponds so beautifully: “God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. . . . In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God’s promises” (2 Peter 1:3,5, NLT). As we abide with Christ and walk closely with the Spirit, an amazing transformation takes place: We share God’s divine nature. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Like many of Paul’s letters, Peter’s second epistle began with a reminder of what God had done before launching into what believers should do. This intentional technique highlighted the fact God has already made it fully possible for us to do what He requires, resourcing it all “by his divine power” (2 Peter 1:3, NLT).

Our Savior calls us “to glory and virtue” (verse 3, KJV)—to mirror the radiant splendor and character of Jesus. Our aim is not autonomous self-control; rather, it is “love in harness and under Christ’s control.”¹ This is the Spirit’s way of making us “partakers of the divine nature” (verse 4, KJV). He has given us everything we need in the present along with His promises for the future!

Peter instructs us “to make every effort to respond to God’s promises” (verse 5, NLT) and exhorts us to “supplement [our] faith with a generous provision” of certain virtues: “Add to your *faith* virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge *temperance* [or self-control]; and to temperance *patience*; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness *charity* [or love]” (verses 5–7, KJV). Four of the virtues Peter mentions (those in italics) match Paul’s list of the fruit of the Spirit. The colorful Greek word for “add” (KJV; “supplement,” NLT) means to cooperate with a generous benefactor. God has made all this holy living possible through His grace; now we are to cooperate by obediently working with the Spirit.

In verse 8, Peter indicated that the characteristics he had just listed should “abound” (KJV) in believers. The Spirit-filled life should become ingrained as the believer cooperates with the Holy Spirit, and it should overflow, spilling over so that others are blessed. The goal is to be “more productive and useful” (NLT) rather than “barren” or “unfruitful” (KJV).

Discuss

- ? It is possible to have self-control without the Holy Spirit. What are the pros and cons of autonomous self-control?
- ? In what way would you most like to share God’s divine nature? What kind of submission to the Spirit would be required first?

1. Dr. Kenneth Moynagh (1913–1972), “The Fruit of the Spirit Is Love,” accessed November 10, 2022, stornowayfreechurch.com/news/poem-on-love-by-dr-kenneth-moynagh-1913-1972.



Resource Packet Item 3: The Fruit of the Spirit in My Life

Distribute the worksheet and give students a few minutes to formulate their prayers. If time is an issue, consider sending this worksheet home for students to complete during the week.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: The Spirit's fruit is visible in us when our attitudes match our Master's.

Living out Jesus' love with integrity will look like faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We will be faithful on the outside to the faith we claim on the inside. We will show the kind of humility and gentleness that accepts God's will without disputing or resisting. And we will control ourselves as we're guided by the Holy Spirit. God wants His children to be whole and undivided, with words and actions that line up with our identity in Christ. Let's submit to the Holy Spirit and marvel at the supernatural fruit He will produce in our lives.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- This week, intentionally practice both faith and faithfulness.
- Connect with a person you consider to be humble or gentle. Ask how they have learned to accept God's decisions as good without disputing or resisting.
- Submit to the Spirit's leading this week to live out Jesus' character and extend His love to someone who is not yet following Him.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Faith Tested.

Genesis 22:6–14

Tuesday:

Justified by Faith.

Romans 4:1–5, 18–25

Wednesday:

Learn in Meekness.

Psalms 25:8–15

Thursday:

Witness with Meekness.

1 Peter 3:13–18

Friday:

Integrity and Self-Control.

Genesis 39:5–12

Saturday:

Self-Controlled and Holy.

1 Peter 1:13–16

May 19, 2024

LESSON 12

Pentecostal Experience Continues

Study Text

Acts 8:5–17; 10:44–48; 11:1–18;
19:1–7

Central Truth

God's will is that every believer in Christ be baptized in the Holy Spirit.



Key Verse Acts 11:16

Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost (KJV).

“Then I thought of the Lord's words when he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit’” (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will explain that the gift of Holy Spirit baptism is for all Christians.
- Students will appreciate that God does not discriminate in giving the gift of the Spirit; all may receive.
- Students will be encouraged to seek Holy Spirit baptism and to pray for others to receive as well.

Introducing the Study

Say: As Pentecostals, we believe that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a gift intended for every believer. Peter proclaimed on the Day of Pentecost that the promised gift of the Holy Spirit “is to you, to your children, and to those far away—all who have been called by the Lord our God” (Acts 2:39, NLT).

Opening Activity—The Holy Spirit and You

Ask: If you have received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, how would you describe the experience? Invite a few people to share their responses to this question. Try to be sure to include people who are newer to the experience as well as those who have been Pentecostals for many years.

Say: While God does not change, He is creative. Some people may receive the Baptism at an altar and others may be at home on the couch. God does not discriminate regarding who can receive this gift. It is for everyone! (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The baptism in the Holy Spirit was the normal experience of both Jewish and Gentile believers in the Early Church. We will explore three incidents recorded in the Book of Acts, showing that the gift of the Holy Spirit is for all who believe. Three of the accounts of the baptism in the Holy Spirit specifically mention speaking in tongues as evidence (Acts 2:1–4; 10:44–46; 19:1–7). On other occasions, speaking in tongues is implied (8:14–19). Scripture is clear that speaking in tongues is the initial physical evidence of Holy Spirit baptism.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Acts 8:14. Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:

15. Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:

16. (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

17. Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

10:44. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

45. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

46. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,

47. Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

48. And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

11:15. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.

16. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.

19:1. And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,

2. He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.

3. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism.

4. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.

5. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

6. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.

7. And all the men were about twelve.

New Living Translation

Acts 8:14. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the people of Samaria had accepted God's message, they sent Peter and John there.

15. As soon as they arrived, they prayed for these new believers to receive the Holy Spirit.

16. The Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them, for they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

17. Then Peter and John laid their hands upon these believers, and they received the Holy Spirit.

10:44. Even as Peter was saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the message.

45. The Jewish believers who came with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles, too.

46. For they heard them speaking in other tongues and praising God. Then Peter asked,

47. "Can anyone object to their being baptized, now that they have received the Holy Spirit just as we did?"

48. So he gave orders for them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Afterward Cornelius asked him to stay with them for several days.

11:15. "As I began to speak," Peter continued, "the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as he fell on us at the beginning.

16. Then I thought of the Lord's words when he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'"

19:1. While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior regions until he reached Ephesus, on the coast, where he found several believers.

2. "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" he asked them. "No," they replied, "we haven't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

3. "Then what baptism did you experience?" he asked. And they replied, "The baptism of John."

4. Paul said, "John's baptism called for repentance from sin. But John himself told the people to believe in the one who would come later, meaning Jesus."

5. As soon as they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

6. Then when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in other tongues and prophesied.

7. There were about twelve men in all.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Part 1—Converts Receive the Spirit

□ Samaritans Receive Christ

Acts 8:5–6,12

Say: Beginning with the Early Church and continuing throughout history, there is a link between prayer, persecution, and revival. Because of the Early Church's commitment to prayer and because they were scattered due to persecution in Jerusalem, the gospel spread. As a direct result, people in Samaria and other parts of the first-century world became believers and subsequently received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Even today, God uses both prayer and persecution to spread the news of salvation to those who do not know Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As persecution began to intensify against the Early Church in Jerusalem, Christians started to scatter. During this time of extreme trial, Philip took the gospel to Samaria (Acts 8:1–5; note that this is the city of Samaria located in the region of Samaria). The Samaritans were descendants of Jews in the north who were not exiled to Assyria or Babylon and instead stayed and intermarried with the Canaanites. The Samaritans had a contentious relationship with the Jews (see John 4).

As Philip ministered, a powerful move of the Spirit drew people to his words (verse 6). The people of Samaria saw great miracles. Demonic spirits were cast out of individuals, and many diseases were healed. Amid this powerful testimony to God's Word, men and women repented of their sins, became followers of Christ, and were baptized in water (verse 12).

Miracles can still accompany the preaching of the gospel today. When the prayers of Christians are linked with the moving of the Holy Spirit, lives can be changed. The response to the gospel in Samaria came about because the Early Church prayed and expected the supernatural. As believers today, we should pray for such moves of God in our own communities. Prayer and dedication to God are key to seeing the lost respond to God. The power of God to touch the lost and bring them to repentance is no less present today than in the first century. God still confirms His Word with signs and wonders.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think miracles often accompany the proclamation of the gospel—both in the first century and today?
- ? How can you become more involved in proclaiming the gospel and believing for miracles?



□ Samaritans Receive the Spirit

Acts 8:14–17

Say: The revival in Samaria was soon reported in Jerusalem, so Peter and John came to lend a hand in the ministry. Upon their arrival, they learned that the Samaritans had believed in Jesus, but had not received the gift of the Holy Spirit. They did not want these new believers to miss out on the fullness of what God offered. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

When the church in Jerusalem received word of the move of God in Samaria, they sent Peter and John to encourage these new believers (Acts 8:14). Clearly a great work was being done and required the work of a number of spiritual leaders. With Peter and John coming to help, more people could be reached and disciplined. The Church was growing through the work of the Spirit.

The importance the Early Church placed on being baptized in the Holy Spirit is highlighted by the fact Peter and John immediately began to introduce this gift into the lives of the new Christians in Samaria (verse 15). They began to pray for these new believers to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. As they prayed, they laid hands on them, and the people received the Holy Spirit (verse 17).

This is the first time in the Early Church that someone other than Jews or proselytes to Judaism had accepted the gospel. Considering the bad relationship between Jews and Samaritans, the gift of the Spirit may have helped Jewish Christians see that God would save non-Jewish people, just as Jesus had declared in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20). The gift of the Spirit bridged the divide and brought unity into the Early Church. Both Jew and Gentile were receiving this gift.

Many issues divide people today: Politics, social class, race, nationality, and many other factors can bring disunity. But God can bridge every man-made division through the Spirit (see Ephesians 4:1–6). Take a moment to examine if you harbor any disunity with other Christians. Pray that God will direct you to act in whatever way you can to heal that disunity.

Discuss

? Why does the gift of the Spirit unite Christians who might otherwise be divided?



Resource Packet Item 1: The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

Distribute the worksheet, and use it as a discussion starter for your class. Note that the Spirit came upon particular individuals as needed throughout the Old Testament, rather than being available to dwell within all of God's people as in New Testament times.

Part 2—Gentiles Receive the Spirit

□ God Works in Unexpected Ways

Acts 10:44–48



Say: God does not always abide by the cultural norms that form the basis of many human decisions. Such was the case in the giving of the Holy Spirit. It had been a long-standing cultural rule that Jews didn't associate with Gentiles, so the Early Church had made little effort to reach Gentiles with the gospel—and no effort to introduce them to the gift of the Holy Spirit. But all of that was about to change! (Share your highlights from the following text.)

At the house of Cornelius, Peter became the first apostle to take the gospel directly to the Gentiles. While he was delivering his testimony about Christ, a wonderful thing happened. As he spoke, God poured out the Holy Spirit on Cornelius's household (Acts 10:44). This likely came as a surprise to Peter, who struggled to believe

that these people could even become Christians. Earlier in the chapter, God had told Peter in a vision that He would accept what Peter considered unclean (see verses 1–16). Now Peter began to understand that God was not concerned with unclean animals but with the salvation of people considered unclean by the Jews.

While Peter may have had difficulty taking the Gentiles' testimony of salvation seriously, he could not refute that the Holy Spirit had been poured out on them. Verse 45 states that those who traveled with Peter were astonished that God would do this.

Note that in this passage, the Bible clearly identifies the evidence of Holy Spirit baptism. The statement, "For they heard them speaking in other tongues" (verse 46, *NLT*), leaves no room for speculation. By the power of the Holy Spirit, these new believers were glorifying God in other languages.

Verse 47 indicates that there may have been discussion regarding whether or not to baptize in water these Gentiles who had been baptized in the Holy Spirit. But Peter ended any debate by declaring that a person did not have the right to refuse water baptism to those whom God had already baptized with His Spirit (verse 47). In other words, since God had accepted them, no human being had any right to reject them.

After the water baptism, Peter and those with him stayed in Caesarea to instruct Cornelius and the believers with him (verse 48). Once again, evangelism was followed by discipleship.

God is not limited by our understanding of how He operates or by our opinion of how He should operate. He knows the right time and place to do His work. We must be willing to be led by the Spirit even when it does not fit with our plans. Learning to trust God's ways in all we do is vital to seeing Him move in our lives.



Resource Packet Item 2: God Works in Unique Ways

Distribute the worksheet and lead the class in discussing biblical examples of God working in unusual ways to accomplish His plans. Then encourage students to think about how they've seen God work in unusual ways in their lives.

Discuss

- ? Why is it important to remember that God works in unexpected ways—and even in ways we wouldn't choose?
- ? Describe a time when God did something that surprised you. Why were you surprised?



□ God's Will Is Recognized

Acts 11:15–18

Say: The attitude of the Jews about associating with Gentiles was never clearer than in their reaction when Peter returned after witnessing what has become known as the "Gentile Pentecost" at Cornelius's house. But when they heard the whole story, the believers immediately recognized that God had accepted the Gentiles too. How did they know? Because He had poured out the Holy Spirit on them. This was an observable, indisputable sign. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Acts 11, Peter returned to Jerusalem. The apostles and believers there had heard of the Gentile conversions and criticized Peter's actions. Peter explained that the Holy Spirit outpouring he witnessed was identical to what had occurred on the Day of Pentecost. The Spirit had clearly filled the Gentile believers (verse 15).

Peter reminded his Jewish brothers and sisters what the Lord had taught them after His resurrection about the baptism in the Holy Spirit, concluding that if Jesus chose to baptize these believers in the Spirit, Peter was not going to refuse them water baptism (verses 16–17). Hearing Peter's explanation, the Jewish believers praised God for extending the opportunity of salvation to the Gentiles (verse 18).

This was a great unifying moment in the Early Church and marked an important turning point. God opened the door of unity and Spirit empowerment, and the Church seized the opportunity to march through it and reach out to all nations with the good news of salvation. The overwhelming majority of people who come to Christ today have no Jewish heritage, but by faith they have become the people of God.

Discuss

- ? Why do Christians sometimes struggle to accept God's will, even when it is clear?
- ? What are some ways you can carry out God's will to reach all people with the gospel?

Part 3—Disciples Receive the Spirit

□ Uninformed Disciples

Acts 19:1–5



Say: The Early Church's enthusiasm to spread the message of Christ and the message of Pentecost should motivate us to do the same. The disciples did not yet have the full written Word of God, so some believers didn't always have the complete message. Such was the case in Ephesus. When Paul arrived there, he found that some vital details about the faith were missing. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Acts 19 tells of Paul's ministry in Ephesus, an important city on the west coast of what is now Turkey. When Paul arrived there, he encountered "certain disciples" (19:1, *KJV*). The identity of these disciples has been a source of much discussion by Bible scholars. They may have been converted under the ministry of Apollos before he was discipled by Priscilla and Aquila (see 18:24–26).

Whatever the specifics, it is important to understand the spiritual condition of the Ephesians when Paul arrived. In his Gospel and the Book of Acts, Luke consistently used the term *disciples* to refer to followers of Jesus. Had Luke meant that these "certain disciples" were followers of John the Baptist, he likely would have said so. Apparently, these were Christians.

Paul realized that the Christian experience of these Ephesian believers was lacking. So he asked them a pointed question: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" (19:2, *NLT*; note that "when" might also be translated "since"). Paul clearly expected the baptism in the Holy Spirit to be the next step after conversion.

The disciples' response to Paul's question might seem strange. It is hard to imagine they had never heard of the existence of the Spirit, for both the Old Testament and John the Baptist spoke of Him. Many scholars believe that they simply did not know that the age of the Spirit had come (see Joel 2:28–29; Acts 2). These disciples didn't realize that the outpouring of the Spirit had taken place.

Paul took the time to explain the good news of Jesus, whose message and blessing had superseded John's. Before praying with them to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, Paul baptized them in water as Christ had commanded (19:5).

Discuss

- ? Is there any Christian teaching that you learned after having been a Christian for a period of time? How did this teaching impact your life?
- ? What can Acts 19:1–5 teach us about the importance of Bible study and discipleship?



Spirit-Baptized Disciples

Acts 19:6–7

Say: Paul knew God had more in store for the Ephesian believers after water baptism. They needed the empowerment of the Spirit that had been promised and poured out on other believers. Always ready to be used by the Spirit, Paul laid his hands on these disciples, and they were baptized in the Holy Spirit as evidenced by speaking in tongues. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

After Paul had instructed and baptized these disciples, he returned to the point where his conversation with them began. For believers to be effective in spreading the gospel, they need empowerment through the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Paul laid hands on the believers, and they were baptized in the Holy Spirit with the initial physical evidence of speaking in tongues (Acts 19:6). Clearly, God began to move among them in a powerful way, because they also prophesied.

Every believer should seek to be baptized in the Holy Spirit; it is an important part of the fruitful Christian life. One way God demonstrates His power to the world is through the lives of those who have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit baptism empowers and emboldens believers, opening the door so God can bless His people and His church with the gifts that are necessary to spread the gospel.

Like the Christians in Ephesus, some believers today struggle to understand even basic teachings of Scripture, such as the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Are you well-grounded in the Word? If not, commit to deep, regular study. Otherwise, reach out to be a discipler for someone who is searching the Word to learn more about God and what it means to serve Him.



Resource Packet Item 3: Have You Received?

Distribute the worksheet and use it to lead a discussion on how students can help others seek the baptism of the Spirit.

Discuss

- ? Why is Spirit baptism important?
- ? How would you explain why Christians should seek Holy Spirit baptism?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Many Christians today feel that salvation is the only experience with God that they want or need. While faith in Christ is the only requirement for salvation and eternal life, God desires more for His people. Holy Spirit baptism has been given by God to empower us for service and evangelism. We need to pray that God will baptize us, and all Christians, in the Holy Spirit.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- If you have not been baptized in the Holy Spirit, set aside time this week to pray for that gift.
- Share with another believer the benefits of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.
- Tell your children, grandchildren, or someone in the next generation about the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Spirit-Inspired Judge.
Judges 6:34–40

Tuesday:

Spirit-Inspired Levite.
2 Chronicles 20:14–19

Wednesday:

Spirit-Inspired Prophet.
Ezekiel 11:1–5

Thursday:

Spirit-Inspired Mother.
Luke 1:39–45

Friday:

Spirit-Inspired Father.
Luke 1:67–79

Saturday:

Spirit-Inspired Martyr.
Acts 7:54–60

May 26, 2024

LESSON 13

Love Is the Most Excellent Way

Study Text

Matthew 22:36–40; Romans 13:8–10; 1 Corinthians 13:1–13

Central Truth

Love is the greatest Christian virtue.



Key Verse 1 Corinthians 13:13

Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity (KJV).

Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will be able to describe Christian love.
- Students will recognize that love is greater than any spiritual gift and is the highest Christian virtue.
- Students will choose to walk in the Spirit and live out Christ's love.

Introducing the Study

Say: The first and primary fruit of the Spirit is love. It lays the foundation for the other fruit Paul lists in Galatians 5:22–23. In fact, every New Testament passage that lists and discusses the gifts of the Spirit mandates that they be exercised in love. Love is the most excellent way to stay in step with the Spirit, so let's conclude our study of the fruit of the Spirit by digging deeper into this concept.

Opening Activity—Songs of Love

Ask: What popular songs can you name—Christian or otherwise—that include the word love in their titles?

Say: The song of Christian love in 1 Corinthians 13 is one of the most beautiful chapters in the Bible. It's often read at weddings to describe the ideal loving relationship. It may have been written by another author before Paul's time, but Paul included it in his first letter to the Corinthians, placing it just after his introduction to the gifts of the Spirit (12:1–11) and just before his detailed discussion of how the gifts operate (chapter 14). Love is not simply an option for believers; it is the only way to walk in the Spirit. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

This lesson dives deep into 1 Corinthians 13. After explaining why a Christian community needs love, the chapter describes the nature of love—what it is, what it isn't, and what it does—before concluding with the declaration that love endures forever.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

1 Corinthians 13:1. Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

2. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

3. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

Matthew 22:36. Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

37. Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38. This is the first and great commandment.

39. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

40. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

1 Corinthians 13:4. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

5. Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

6. Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

7. Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

8. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

9. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

10. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

11. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

12. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

13. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

1 Corinthians 13:1. If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

2. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing.

3. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.

Matthew 22:36. "Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?"

37. Jesus replied, "You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind."

38. This is the first and greatest commandment.

39. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

40. The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."

1 Corinthians 13:4. Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud

5. or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged.

6. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.

7. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

8. Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever!

9. Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture!

10. But when the time of perfection comes, these partial things will become useless.

11. When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things.

12. Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.

13. Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Part 1—Love Is Essential

□ Worthless Without Love

1 Corinthians 13:1–3

Say: Paul doesn't say that spiritual gifts are useless or generosity is worthless without love. God can still use them to benefit others—as you may have witnessed—but they are of no personal benefit to the bearer if they aren't exercised with love. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Corinthian church was a dysfunctional, yet Pentecostal, congregation. Paul began his epistle by celebrating the fact that they were enriched with all utterance and knowledge and were lacking no spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 1:4–8). Just prior to the love chapter, Paul's words could be translated: "You are being zealous [or jealous] for the greater gifts. And still, I will show to you an even more surpassing way [to be zealous]" (12:31). He begins his explanation of love by giving three reasons why a Christian cannot be fruitful without love.

1. Without love, I am offensive (13:1). While the purpose of spiritual gifts is to edify others (14:26) and it is love that edifies (8:1), the Corinthians seem to have prized the exhibition of the more sensational spiritual gifts. Worshipers in Corinth's pagan mystery religions used copper gongs and clashing cymbals to invoke their gods, drive away demons, or excite one another. This monotonous noise in the streets would have been as grating as a constantly barking dog. Paul asserts that speaking in tongues without love is just as offensive—whether the words are human or heavenly.

2. Without love, I am nothing (13:2). Paul countered the Corinthians' opinion that those who possessed spiritual gifts must be extremely significant people. Rather than arguing that the value of the gifts is diminished without love, he contends that *we* are nothing without love—even if our ministry is spectacularly successful.

3. Without love, I gain nothing (verse 3). Paul uses two illustrations of self-sacrifice: giving away everything to feed the poor and submitting the body to be burned. Aren't these deeds inherently valuable to God? If such actions are motivated by self-interest instead of *agape* (selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love), nothing is gained. The effort is wasted, no matter how great the sacrifice.

Discuss

? Without naming names, describe a time you may have witnessed someone operating in a genuine spiritual gift or demonstrating great generosity without love. What tipped you off to the lack of love?



□ Crux of the Law and the Prophets

Matthew 22:36–40

Say: When the Pharisees learned that Jesus had successfully silenced the Sadducees, they decided to take their turn at attempting to trap Him with a question. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

"Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?" (Matthew 22:36, NLT). Jesus said to the legal expert who had asked the question, "Thou

shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (verse 37, KJV). “Love the LORD thy God” (from the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4–5—the credo of Judaism) is as orthodox as one can get! But truly loving God with the whole heart, soul, and mind was something no one could ever boast of having achieved.

Jesus didn’t stop there. Although He had been asked to identify the most important commandment, implying that there was only one, Jesus went on to add a second command from Leviticus 19:18. “A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:39, NLT). The first four of the Ten Commandments show responsibility to God, while the remaining six show responsibility toward others (see Exodus 20:1–17). By answering the lawyer’s question with two commandments instead of one, Jesus was accurately summarizing all ten commandments—plus the remainder of the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 22:40).

The original Ten Commandments contain mostly negative wording, setting boundaries that prohibit behavior that is disrespectful or harmful. Jesus’ summary of the Law and the Prophets, however, was framed in the positive, demanding initiative and action. That is what makes His words so powerful and compelling. Knowing the Law, reciting the Law, and debating the Law is not enough; it must be put into practice! For this legal expert who appears to have been strong in ethics and weak in relationships, Jesus’ emphasis on love went straight to the heart. When loving God and loving our neighbors are our top two priorities, everything else in the Law is commentary.

Discuss

- ? Can you imagine a legal expert not living out the law? Share an example if you choose.
- ? Give a few examples of laws, regulations, or policies (biblical, governmental, academic, etc.) that are stated in the negative and a few that are stated in the positive. Which seems to be more frequent? Why do you think this is so?



Resource Packet Item 1: Love in the Law and the Prophets

Distribute the worksheet and give students a few minutes to work on it, either individually or in small groups. Then discuss their responses.

Part 2—The Rule and Power of Love

□ The Debt of Love

Romans 13:8–10



Say: Romans 13 begins with a command to submit to authorities (verse 1). “Give to everyone what you owe them,” Paul wrote. “Pay your taxes and government fees to those who collect them, and give respect and honor to those who are in authority. Owe nothing to anyone—except for your obligation to love one another” (Romans 13:7–8, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Christ-followers have been forgiven of their sins and they should pay their bills, but there is one debt they can never be freed from: the obligation to love people. We are eternally indebted to Jesus. How could we ever pay Him back for all He’s

done? He told us in Matthew 25:40, “[What] you did . . . to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me” (NLT). Loving others on His behalf is our enduring obligation.

Echoing Jesus, Paul explained, “If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God’s law” (Romans 13:8, NLT). Then he proceeds to list five of the Ten Commandments involving responsibilities to others: “Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet” (verse 9, KJV). “These—and other such commandments—are summed up in this one commandment: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to others, so love fulfills the requirements of God’s law” (verses 9–10, NLT).

In one sense, love is the end of the Law, because it has its own moral compass. But more accurately, love *fulfills* the Law. Love intuitively discerns what true respect and compassion demand in each situation. It does no harm to its neighbor, just as the commandments prescribe. Murder robs people of life. Adultery robs people of their honor and family. Theft robs people of their possessions. A false witness robs people of their good reputation. Covetousness robs society of simplicity and contentment. All these behaviors harm our neighbors, but love seeks their highest good, thereby fulfilling the Law.



Resource Packet Item 2: Loving One Another

Distribute the worksheet and assign the Scriptures to individuals or small groups. After a few minutes, discuss the students’ answers.

Discuss

- ? Describe a relationship in which you feel deeply indebted.
- ? How is this enduring obligation to love totally different from the kind of crushing debt that may be associated with finances?



□ The Nature of Love

1 Corinthians 13:4–7

Say: Before the New Testament was written, the Greek word *agape* was not in common use. The incomparable love of God as seen in Jesus Christ required a new definition of the word. Transcending all human expressions of love, God lavishes His love without consideration of people’s worthiness. It’s a result of His gracious nature rather than any merit we may possess. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The kind of love that characterized Jesus must also characterize Christians or the world will not even recognize that we belong to Him. First Corinthians 13:4–7 describes the nature of love: what it is, what it isn’t, and what it does. Paul used multiple verbs to describe *agape*, because loving people are active. There are certain things we choose to do (or not do) because we are being conformed to the character of Christ.

Because love is patient and kind, it faces up to the darkness in three directions:

1. Love faces up to the darkness in ourselves (verses 4–5). Recognizing and renouncing attitudes that do not honor God, love simply does not do certain

things: It does not envy. It does not show off or brag. It does not puff itself up with arrogance. It does not behave rudely. It is not self-seeking or demanding.

2. Love faces up to the darkness in others (verses 5–6). Instead of blaming people who simply provoke us, love is not touchy or irritable. It has a long fuse. It keeps no record of wrongs—choosing to forget as well as forgive. Love resists that ugly streak in human nature that enjoys someone else’s failure. It does not celebrate injustice, but rejoices when the truth wins out.

3. Love faces up to the darkness around us (verse 7). Operating in gentleness and meekness, love does not rebel against God’s purpose and will. Choosing Christlike attitudes—even in the worst of times—love does the following things: It patiently bears all things, never giving up. It believes throughout all things, never losing faith. It hopes amid all things, never despairing. It endures all things, never losing sight of Jesus.

Discuss

- ? Which of love’s responses do you find most challenging: facing up to the darkness in yourself, the darkness in others, or the darkness around us?
- ? What would life be like without *agape*?

Part 3—Love Endures Forever

□ Greater than the Gifts

1 Corinthians 13:8–10



Say: Authentic *agape* cannot be manufactured on our own; it requires the work of the Holy Spirit. Only then will love *never* fail. God’s love never falls to pieces or loses its effectiveness. God’s love never gives out, even under the most intense and sustained pressure. God’s love keeps on reaching and keeps on caring; it’s a commitment of lovingkindness that never ends. *Agape* continues through life, beyond death, and into eternity. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Some of God’s most wonderful gifts will not last, including tongues, prophecy, and knowledge. In the perfection of our eternal communion with God, these gifts will become irrelevant. “Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever! Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture!” (1 Corinthians 13:8–9, NLT). These limited, finite functions serve the Church well in this temporal realm. “But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away” (verse 10, KJV).

Discuss

- ? Do you think there will be prayer in heaven? Explain your reasoning.
- ? What are you most looking forward to when “that which is perfect” has come?”



Resource Packet Item 3: Through Love’s Eyes

Distribute the worksheet and discuss the first half together. Then encourage students to complete the second half on their own.



Say: When perfection comes, imperfection will pass away. Something that is complete makes something that is partial suddenly obsolete. Paul illustrates this truth in two ways: a child becoming an adult and a reflection being replaced with the real thing. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Love is permanent. When all the things we delight in are gone—material comforts, social status, even spiritual gifts—only love will remain (1 Corinthians 13:10). Love is of God; God is love. When everything else vanishes, God and love remain.

Love is complete. Paul makes this point by using two examples:

- Children simply cannot grasp all the concepts mature adults can, which limits their speech and reasoning. But when children grow up, they “put away childish things” (verse 11, NLT).
- Corinth was known for manufacturing the finest bronze mirrors available at the time. Unlike modern mirrors (introduced in the thirteenth century), these ancient mirrors produced an imperfect reflection. Even with the best mirror, seeing a reflected image is not the same as seeing a person face to face.

Today we see only reflections of God: in creation, in the gospel, and in Jesus. Even though Jesus is the perfect revelation of God’s nature, our human minds can only partially grasp the infinite. Our knowledge is like a child’s. But one day, the veil will be drawn aside. “We will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely” (verse 12, NLT).

Love is supreme. The Corinthians had been concerned with tongues, prophecy, and knowledge, but Paul shifted their attention to three other qualities: faith, hope, and love. While we wait for the Kingdom to come in all its fullness, Paul encouraged us to:

- Focus on faith. Trust God’s forgiveness, acceptance, goodness, and mercy.
- Hold on to hope. Be future-oriented, realizing we are on our way home to live in the presence of God.
- Live in love. As great as faith and hope are, love is still greater. One day faith will give way to sight and hope will give way to fulfillment, but love will remain. We should focus on loving one another now so that the fellowship of the Christian community matches the fellowship we each have with Christ. Then one day we will enjoy complete unity with God and His love will be perfected in us (John 17:20–24).

Discuss

- ? Describe a time when the veil was lifted, and you had a moment of sudden revelation and insight from God. This is a glimpse of seeing Him face to face.
- ? Knowing that love lasts through eternity, what more can you do now to invest in that reality?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Love is the most excellent way! It is the means by which the Holy Spirit intends His fruit and gifts to function. It sums up the Law and the Prophets and is our only remaining debt. “Love is of God” (1 John 4:7, KJV) and “God is love” (verse 8). Christlike love is produced in us when we keep in step with the Spirit, and it must be the rule of our whole lives until we see Jesus. On that day—when perfection has come—we will also be perfected in love. We may not see clearly now, but when He appears we will see Him clearly, and we will be like Him (3:2)! Even now, “all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image” (2 Corinthians 3:18, NLT).

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- This week, pay your ongoing debt to love others by intentionally mirroring the love of Christ.
- Catch yourself when you're tempted to be irritable or easily angered. Refuse to be rude.
- Find a specific way to show kind or generous love without drawing attention to yourself.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Love at All Times.
Exodus 23:1–9

Tuesday:

Love Covers All Sins.
Proverbs 10:6–12

Wednesday:

Angered by God's Love.
Jonah 4:1–11

Thursday:

Love God Wholeheartedly.
Mark 12:28–34

Friday:

Encourage Others to Love.
Hebrews 10:19–25

Saturday:

Love One Another.
1 John 3:11–18

Timothy, Titus, Philemon

This unit explores what are commonly known as the pastoral letters that Paul wrote to his younger associates in ministry. These lessons do not provide a verse-by-verse commentary on Paul's letters, but rather take a thematic approach that considers the entire body of instruction he shared with Timothy, Titus, and Philemon.

Although these letters were written to ministry associates, the instructions they contain are not exclusive to those who are called to full-time ministry. All believers are “royal priests” (1 Peter 2:9, *NLT*). While certain responsibilities fall to those in church leadership, every believer will benefit from the instructions in the pastoral letters.

The opening lesson emphasizes defense against false teachings, a theme that runs throughout the writings of Paul, Peter, and other New Testament authors. Every believer should be equipped to recognize and deal with such teachings that could affect them, their families, and other people under their influence.

Lesson 2 revolves around the theme of personal relationships in ministry. The advice for such relationships applies not just to those in church leadership, but to all Christians.

Lessons 3 and 4 focus on the calling to ministry and the fulfillment of the role of church leadership. Such responsibilities are not limited to those in vocational ministry, but are shared with other local church leaders.

In lesson 5, we will explore the spiritual practices and disciplines that cause all believers to grow in Christ and become more effective for Him.

The final two lessons deal with the topics of setting an example for others to follow and engaging in Christian mentoring. Every person is an example to someone else, which is a tremendous responsibility. Other people are directly impacted by everything we say and do. Taking that responsibility seriously and being involved in a mentoring relationship (as a mentor or mentee) serves to strengthen the body of Christ.

Picture your class taking their seats alongside Timothy, Titus, and Philemon as together you glean from Paul's inspired instructions.

June 2, 2024

LESSON

1

Stand against False Teaching

Study Text

1 Timothy 1:5–7; 4:1–3; 6:3–6;
2 Timothy 3:1–7; 4:1–5; Titus 3:8–11

Central Truth

Christians learn to detect false doctrine as they are instructed in God's Word.



Key Verse 2 Timothy 4:4

They shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (KJV).

They will reject the truth and chase after myths (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will distinguish between true and false teaching.
- Students will desire to avoid false teaching and false teachers.
- Students will fortify resistance to false teaching.

Introducing the Study

Say: A Bible scholar was once told by an acquaintance that they attended “a real New Testament church.” The scholar’s response surprised her friend: “That’s great! I’d like to come sometime soon and interview the heretics.” As we see in many of the New Testament letters, the dust of revival scarcely settles before heresy or false teaching often crops up.

Opening Activity—The Honeymoon Is Over

Ask: Have you heard the saying, “The honeymoon is over”? In what situations have you experienced the truth of that statement? Examples may include jobs, friendships, hobbies, political alliances, and of course, romantic relationships. Discuss the reasons behind the shift.

Say: Wonderful descriptions in the Book of Acts following the Day of Pentecost might make us think the Early Church community was nearly perfect. They prayed, worshipped, and ate together. They shared to meet everyone’s needs. And they grew through the apostles’ teaching and the Holy Spirit’s presence. However, the New Testament also records the fact that false teaching soon crept into the Church, leading many believers astray. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

We learn from the letters Paul wrote near the end of his ministry that heretical teachers were running rampant in certain churches. He charged both Timothy in Ephesus and Titus on the island of Crete to combat false teaching and oppose its proponents. This context is key when reading 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. From Paul’s instructions to these Early Church leaders, we can learn how we ought to respond to false teaching we encounter today.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

1 Timothy 4:1. Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

2. Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;

3. Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.

6:3. If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;

4. He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings,

5. Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.

2 Timothy 4:1. I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;

2. Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine.

3. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

4. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

5. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

Titus 3:8. This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.

9. But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain.

10. A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject;

11. Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.

New Living Translation

1 Timothy 4:1. Now the Holy Spirit tells us clearly that in the last times some will turn away from the true faith; they will follow deceptive spirits and teachings that come from demons.

2. These people are hypocrites and liars, and their consciences are dead.

3. They will say it is wrong to be married and wrong to eat certain foods. But God created those foods to be eaten with thanks by faithful people who know the truth.

6:3. Some people may contradict our teaching, but these are the wholesome teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. These teachings promote a godly life.

4. Anyone who teaches something different is arrogant and lacks understanding. Such a person has an unhealthy desire to quibble over the meaning of words. This stirs up arguments ending in jealousy, division, slander, and evil suspicions.

5. These people always cause trouble. Their minds are corrupt, and they have turned their backs on the truth. To them, a show of godliness is just a way to become wealthy.

2 Timothy 4:1. I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when he comes to set up his Kingdom:

2. Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching.

3. For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear.

4. They will reject the truth and chase after myths.

5. But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you.

Titus 3:8. This is a trustworthy saying, and I want you to insist on these teachings so that all who trust in God will devote themselves to doing good. These teachings are good and beneficial for everyone.

9. Do not get involved in foolish discussions about spiritual pedigrees or in quarrels and fights about obedience to Jewish laws. These things are useless and a waste of time.

10. If people are causing divisions among you, give a first and second warning. After that, have nothing more to do with them.

11. For people like that have turned away from the truth, and their own sins condemn them.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Say: Like Timothy, we are living in an era of deception. The Holy Spirit led Paul to issue clear warnings to God’s people about this reality, and when we look around us, we can see why. The specifics of the deception may be different in the twenty-first century, but the ultimate source is the same: Satan. Jesus called him the “father of lies” (John 8:44, NLT), and Paul did not mince words when denouncing the humans used to spread the enemy’s false messages. (Share your highlights from the following text.) ▼ **(To learn more about the heresies that threatened the Early Church, play the video available at [RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult](https://www.RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult).)**

Whether Paul was referring in 1 Timothy 4:1 to a specific message of the Spirit or a more general prophetic theme, his message certainly aligns with Jesus’ own warnings in the Gospels (see Matthew 24:11,24–25). Paul had personally witnessed such abandonment of the true faith in Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Timothy 1:19–20).

Hypocrisy and seared consciences were two characteristics of the false teachers.

- “Speaking lies in hypocrisy” (4:2, KJV): The word *hypocrite* comes from the Greek word for “actor,” so one might say that these false teachers were playing roles like expert actors.
- “Having their conscience seared with a hot iron” (verse 2, KJV): Theologian George Knight suggests that this vivid description “gives the inner basis for the conduct.” With their consciences deadened, they are self-deceived deceivers.¹

Verse 3 describes some of the specific false teaching active in Timothy’s situation: They were forbidding marriage and commanding the avoidance of certain foods. Both characteristics are ascetic in nature. *Asceticism* is defined by Merriam-Webster as “the practice of strict self-denial as a measure of personal and especially spiritual discipline.” An exploration of all the passages in the pastoral letters (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) indicates that this false teaching was a combination of ascetic, speculative, and argumentative tendencies mixed with a distortion of Jewish elements.

Paul indicated the threat would come in “latter times” (4:1, KJV). This phrase seems to parallel the more common phrase, “last days” (see 2 Timothy 3:1). We can see from the full context that “latter times” included Timothy’s own time. In fact, the Church has always understood it existed in the “last days” reality, set in motion by God’s redemptive work in Jesus (Acts 2:16–17). Like Timothy, we find ourselves in the era of “latter times” deception.

Discuss

- ? What factors do you think contributed to Timothy’s church falling prey to false teaching? Are there factors that make certain churches more or less vulnerable?
- ? What steps can believers take to discern whether teachings they hear align with the New Testament?

1. George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 109.



Resource Packet Item 1: Warnings against False Teaching

Distribute the worksheet and assign individuals or small groups to read the passages and note the characteristics of false teachers and false teachings. Then discuss your findings together.



□ The Purveyors of Deception

1 Timothy 6:3–6

Say: Soon after this passage comes a statement we often hear quoted: “The love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Timothy 6:10, *KJV*). Isn’t it interesting that this sweeping statement occurs in the context of a discussion of false teachers and their motives? The “unholy trinity” of money, sex, and power often lie behind messages that deviate from the truth of Jesus Christ. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In 1 Timothy 6:2, Paul summed up his instructions in the letter as things Timothy should teach and encourage everyone to obey. Starting in verse 3, he took up the issue of people teaching contradictory things. For Paul, matters relating to the gospel of Jesus Christ were of the utmost importance. He demonstrated great generosity in minor matters not central to salvation, but he vehemently denounced any departure from the true gospel.

Paul’s concern is reflected in his description of the gospel: It is wholesome, centered on Jesus, and godly (verse 3). “Wholesome” translates a Greek word from which we derive our word *hygiene*. It referred generally to physical health, and in an extended sense it pointed to correct or sound teaching. In these pastoral letters where false teaching was such a pervasive problem, Paul frequently described true teaching in terms related to health (see 1 Timothy 1:10–11; 2 Timothy 1:13; 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1–2).

Paul then went on to characterize those who were contradicting godly and wholesome teachings. They were arrogant, ignorant, argumentative, mentally corrupt, and out for their own gain. They exhibited an “unhealthy desire to quibble over the meaning of words” (verse 4, *NLT*; see 2 Timothy 2:23). Their minds and their motives were corrupt, and they viewed godliness as a means to a financial end.

Paul wrapped up this depiction of false teachers with a corrected framework for our thinking: “True godliness with contentment is itself great wealth” (verse 6, *NLT*). In the verses that follow, he continued to warn about focusing one’s desires on material possessions, bringing to mind Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount: “You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money” (Matthew 6:24, *NLT*).

Discuss

- ? How is nourishment of one’s spirit comparable to nourishment of one’s body? What happens if we routinely consume unhealthy things?
- ? Some of us have seen prominent ministries brought down by scandal. How has money been a factor in some of these situations? What false teachings (if any) were being perpetuated?



Say: Between his first and second letters to Timothy, Paul had been arrested (again) and imprisoned in Rome (again). This time, he was facing execution. Because of that, his words in this second letter are particularly moving. Paul intended to pass the mantle to Timothy—his “true son in the faith” (1 Timothy 1:2, *NLT*)—fortifying him for the mission that still lay ahead. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In 2 Timothy 4:1, Paul emphasized the seriousness of his final charge to Timothy: It was made in the presence of God the Father and His Son. There is no higher authority in the universe. To drive that point home, Paul focused on the role of Christ as Judge of the living and the dead. His vivid language draws our attention to the moment we will stand before Jesus when He returns in all His glory.

The charge in verse 2 has five parts: preach, be prepared, correct, rebuke, and encourage. First, “preach the word.” This is a foundational requirement for ministry. Earlier in this same letter, Paul reminded Timothy that the Word of God cannot be chained (2:9; although Paul himself was imprisoned) and that a good worker who is approved of God will correctly handle the “word of truth” (verse 15). Proclaiming God’s truth is absolutely vital and we must “be prepared” to do so “whether the time is favorable or not” (4:2, *NLT*; “in season and out of season,” *KJV*; see 1 Peter 3:15).



Resource Packet Item 2: Be Prepared

Distribute the worksheet, and discuss the questions together. Encourage students to take the page home, reflect on their responses, and commit to sharing the gospel whether the timing is convenient or inconvenient.

Timothy was also charged to:

- “Correct” people under his leadership (2 Timothy 4:2, *NLT*). In view of the false teaching being propagated, substantial correction would have been necessary.
- “Rebuke,” which refers to warning and admonishing people who do not respond to correction.
- “Encourage” (*NLT*) those who are listening to sound teaching. Everyone needs encouragement in following the right path.

All these tasks are to be done “patiently” and “with good teaching” (*NLT*). Leadership and cooperation require patience. Correction, rebuke, and encouragement are ongoing tasks of ministry, and the results are never guaranteed.

Discuss

- ? Do these tasks remind anyone of parenting? Paul often referred to himself as a father in relation to the people he led. How is good ministry like good parenting?
- ? For those of us who are not in full-time vocational ministry, how do Paul’s instructions apply to us? How should we respond to those who minister to us?



Say: Following his initial sacred charge, Paul further described the deceptions that caused him to write this letter. This heresy was not a distant, “end-times” threat. It was already happening. In this age between Jesus’ first and second comings—when Jesus is already King but His kingdom is not yet fully come—all believers must keep clear minds and faithfully carry out their ministry. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul described a time when people will not “endure sound doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:3, *KJV*) or “listen to sound and wholesome teaching” (*NLT*). He had clarified in his first letter that “sound doctrine” is “according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God” (1 Timothy 1:10–11, *KJV*). This unwillingness to put up with healthy teaching must not deter us from proclaiming the whole gospel. Instead, Paul advised Timothy to “be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth” (2:15, *NLT*).

Paul also described the response Timothy could expect: “They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear” (2 Timothy 4:3, *NLT*). Like the Old Testament prophets, the apostles, and Jesus himself, Timothy would be rejected by those who were looking for a message more suitable to their tastes. In those days, curious seekers were drawn to the city marketplace for something new; today, they search online.

Paul frequently associated “myths” with false teachers (verse 4; see 1 Timothy 1:3–4; 4:7; Titus 1:14). Some suggest these myths involved the goddess Artemis (see Acts 19:23–34). Regardless, these false teachings appealed to some cultural fascination.

“Keep a clear mind in every situation” (2 Timothy 4:5, *NLT*) is literally a command to “be sober” (see 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 2:2–4, *KJV*). This verb indicates someone is keeping their head rather than succumbing to a mental or spiritual fog. The phrase “endure afflictions” (2 Timothy 4:5, *KJV*) had already appeared twice before in this letter (1:8, 2:3), emphasizing Paul’s admonition that Timothy endure suffering with him. Writing from prison, Paul was modeling the endurance Timothy would need.

Paul adds, “Work at telling others the Good News, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you” (verse 5, *NLT*). Communicating the gospel means using both actions and words. Each of us should “work at” a consistent lifestyle of sharing the message of Jesus with the people we encounter.

Discuss

- ? How would you rate the modern-day church’s ability to “endure sound doctrine”?
- ? How should laypeople go about discovering and developing their God-given ministries (2 Timothy 4:5)?



Part 3—Avoid False Teachers and Their Teachings

Say: The best strategy for dealing with heresy is to learn to identify it and then keep away from it altogether. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul had commissioned Titus to strengthen the churches on the island of Crete and oppose the deception that was being spread there. Having just summarized the good news of Jesus in Titus 3:4–7, Paul now placed special emphasis on the truth of the gospel, demonstrating the stark contrast between what was true and what was false.

Titus was to “insist on these teachings” (verse 8, NLT) or “affirm constantly” (KJV) all the elements of the gospel. Why? “So that all who trust in God will devote themselves to doing good” (NLT). In other words, true teaching promotes good works. Good works sometimes get a “bad rap,” because we know they cannot save us (verse 5). Could Paul make it any plainer than he did in Ephesians 2:8–10? Although they can’t bring salvation, good works are a result of it. The Holy Spirit works through sound teaching to cultivate good works among us.

Paul affirmed that true teachings are “good and beneficial for everyone” (Titus 3:8, NLT). In this one verse, he uses the same adjective (good) to describe the teachings and the actions they produce. These teachings are beneficial, profitable, and advantageous for everyone; they produce good fruit.

The contrast between good teachings (verse 8) and false teachings (verse 9) is stark. False teachings are unprofitable, unbeneficial, and disadvantageous. They are “a waste of time” (NLT; “vain,” KJV) and can take the form of “foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law” (KJV). Bickering and pointless speculation abound. The interest in “genealogies” (KJV) or “spiritual pedigrees” (NLT) Paul mentioned may be related to branches of Hellenistic Judaism that were concerned with Old Testament lists of ancestry.

Discuss

- ? Do we sometimes fail to emphasize good works in an effort to avoid “works-based righteousness”? How can we maintain the appropriate balance?
- ? Why is it harmful to engage in the arguments and speculations of false teachings?

False Teachers

Titus 3:10–11



Say: After warning about the content of false teaching, Paul dealt with those who propagate it. False teachers could not be allowed to continue spreading their unhealthy preoccupations. So Paul instructed Timothy to protect the health of the body of Christ by putting up a barrier between the church and anyone engaged in false teaching. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The divisiveness of false teachers went beyond honest discussions or minor disagreements about church matters; these people were actively and intentionally undermining the truth of the gospel with their arguments. Titus should give them up to two warnings or admonitions. The offenders could choose to listen to or ignore these good faith efforts at rehabilitation. Paul’s instructions are similar to the pattern Jesus gave for confronting a brother or sister who has sinned (Matthew 18:15–17). In both cases, if someone refused to listen, they were to be rejected. We

can see Paul's pastoral heart in his desire for a redemptive, restorative result. This is the goal of all church discipline. In extreme cases, one prays that separation from the community of believers will somehow cause the offender to turn back to the truth and fellowship they are missing.



Resource Packet Item 3: Dealing with a False Teaching

Distribute the worksheet and discuss its content. Encourage students to talk about ways to apply Paul's instructions to their lives today.

Discuss

- ? What steps can be taken to ensure that local church discipline is redemptive rather than punitive?
- ? What is an appropriate way to voice concern in one's local church without causing division?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: The best defense against error and falsehood is thorough saturation in the truth of God's Word. Along with learning and knowing the truth, we must also live out the truth.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Read God's Word avidly, training your mind to look for and live out its central truths.
- Expect good deeds to flow from the good teaching you receive and from the lives of those who teach it.
- Identify trustworthy teachers of God's Word and supplement your spiritual diet with their messages.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Speak Only What Comes from God. Numbers 23:3–12

Tuesday:

Stand against False Prophets. Jeremiah 23:23–32

Wednesday:

Shepherds Are Held Accountable. Ezekiel 34:1–10

Thursday:

Jesus Christ Is the Judge. Matthew 7:15–23

Friday:

Discern the Source of Truth. Acts 16:16–26

Saturday:

Christians Delivered, False Prophets Condemned. 2 Peter 2:1–9

June 9, 2024

LESSON 2

Personal Relationships in Christian Ministry

Study Text

1 Timothy 1:18–19; 5:21–23;
6:20–21; 2 Timothy 1:2–4;
Philemon 4–7,17–22

Central Truth

Leadership development includes relationships that involve prayer and mentoring.



Key Verse 2 Timothy 1:4

Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy (KJV).

I long to see you again, for I remember your tears as we parted. And I will be filled with joy when we are together again (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will discuss the relationships between Paul and Timothy and between Paul and Philemon.
- Students will realize the importance of genuine and edifying relationships in the body of Christ.
- Students will pray daily on behalf of Christian leaders.

Introducing the Study

Say: It's been said, "We practice daily what we believe; all the rest is just religious talk." Whether or not this statement is true in every instance, it gives us a great deal to think about. What do I practice daily? What do I not practice daily that I claim to believe? Is it just religious talk?

Opening Activity—What Do You Believe?

Ask: Imagine that someone quietly observed your behaviors during the past week. What are some things they would conclude that you believe because you practice them daily? What core beliefs do you hold that there may not be tangible evidence for? Make two columns on a whiteboard or screen and record class input.

Say: Today we're taking a look at some core beliefs and behaviors related to relationships and leadership development. Paul's practice of praying for his ministry coworkers was especially powerful. May we be able to say with Paul, "Night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers" (2 Timothy 1:3, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Christian life is not isolated. Instead, following Jesus' example, it is laid down in service to God and others. Serving Jesus compels us to minister in some way—whether it is vocational or not—and relationships are key in our calling to be disciples who disciple others. In our unique giftedness, each of us should be developing in leadership and building relationships centered on prayer and mentoring.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

1 Timothy 1:18. This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare;

19. Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck.

5:21. I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.

22. Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.

23. Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.

6:20. O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called:

21. Which some professing have erred concerning the faith. Grace be with thee. Amen.

2 Timothy 1:2. To Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

3. I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day;

4. Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy.

Philemon 4. I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers,

5. Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints;

6. That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.

7. For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.

17. If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.

18. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account;

19. I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.

20. Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord.

New Living Translation

1 Timothy 1:18. Timothy, my son, here are my instructions for you, based on the prophetic words spoken about you earlier. May they help you fight well in the Lord's battles.

19. Cling to your faith in Christ, and keep your conscience clear. For some people have deliberately violated their consciences; as a result, their faith has been shipwrecked.

5:21. I solemnly command you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus and the highest angels to obey these instructions without taking sides or showing favoritism to anyone.

22. Never be in a hurry about appointing a church leader. Do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

23. Don't drink only water. You ought to drink a little wine for the sake of your stomach because you are sick so often.

6:20. Timothy, guard what God has entrusted to you. Avoid godless, foolish discussions with those who oppose you with their so-called knowledge.

21. Some people have wandered from the faith by following such foolishness. May God's grace be with you all.

2 Timothy 1:2. I am writing to Timothy, my dear son. May God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord give you grace, mercy, and peace.

3. Timothy, I thank God for you—the God I serve with a clear conscience, just as my ancestors did. Night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.

4. I long to see you again, for I remember your tears as we parted. And I will be filled with joy when we are together again.

Philemon 4. I always thank my God when I pray for you, Philemon,

5. because I keep hearing about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all of God's people.

6. And I am praying that you will put into action the generosity that comes from your faith as you understand and experience all the good things we have in Christ.

7. Your love has given me much joy and comfort, my brother, for your kindness has often refreshed the hearts of God's people.

17. So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.

18. If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge it to me.

19. I, PAUL, WRITE THIS WITH MY OWN HAND: I WILL REPAY IT. AND I WON'T MENTION THAT YOU OWE ME YOUR VERY SOUL!

20. Yes, my brother, please do me this favor for the Lord's sake. Give me this encouragement in Christ.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Say: Timothy was Paul’s younger ministry coworker whom he called “my dear son” (2 Timothy 1:2, NLT). Paul’s letters to him are well suited to guide us in ministry development as well. Not only can we apply Paul’s instructions, but we can also follow his example in relating with Timothy. Paul counseled Timothy to guard the calling he’d received from the Lord and then taught him how to do that. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul’s instructions in 1 Timothy 1:18 aligned with prophetic words that had been spoken about Timothy earlier in his life. Empowered by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, the Early Church was edified by the prophetic ministry of many “sons and daughters” (Acts 2:17–18, NLT). Paul did not include the specifics of these prophecies in his letter; after all, Timothy certainly would have remembered them himself. But Paul reaffirmed their validity and reminded Timothy of them. Not every Christian’s calling happens in the same way. Frequently it is more of a gradual process of discernment. And sometimes we need to be reminded of what we already know: The Lord is working in our lives.

Paul described Timothy’s work in Ephesus as fighting “in the Lord’s battles” (verse 18, NLT). The military imagery aptly expresses what it is like to oppose the deceptive schemes of the enemy. Paul similarly described his own ministry: “I have fought the good fight” (2 Timothy 4:7, NLT). Fighting these kinds of battles involves carrying forward the mission and purpose of Jesus—the One who “came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15). The enemy will use any means at his disposal to thwart that purpose; therefore, every believer is part of this war.

The instruction to “cling to your faith in Christ” (verse 19, NLT) may seem more “interior” than fighting a battle, but it is nonetheless active. Clinging or holding fast to something demands exertion, and Paul’s original wording implies an ongoing effort. Faith or trust in the Lord is, of course, fundamental to the Christian life. The act of believing is what makes someone a believer.

Paul then instructs Timothy to keep his conscience clear. We also must maintain a steady commitment to Christ, listening to the Spirit as He guides our thinking, directs our behavior, and anchors our outward activities of ministry.

Discuss

- ? Prophetic giftings in the church did not end with the Early Church. Has anyone here experienced a prophetic word spoken in relation to your ministry? Was this word confirmed in your later life?
- ? As an analogy, how well does the military imagery Paul uses in this passage fit with Timothy’s ministry? With ministry in general today?



Resource Packet Item 1: Biblical Images for Ministry

Distribute the worksheet and reflect on some of the Bible’s metaphors for ministry. Discuss how they might apply to our lives today.



Say: Timothy’s situation in Ephesus required a strengthening of church leadership. To that end, Paul’s letter contained many instructions regarding his and others’ leadership development. Paul mentored Timothy, and in turn, Timothy mentored others. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul charged Timothy to carry out his mission “without taking sides or showing favoritism to anyone” (1 Timothy 5:21, *NLT*). It is natural to feel a greater inclination toward certain people, but personal preference must not be allowed to affect how we treat others in ministry. This is especially true in the context of Paul’s instructions: disciplinary matters (verses 19–20) and the appointment of leaders (verse 22). Favoritism in such areas would undermine the health of the community. Instead, leaders should take plenty of time to make impartial, sound decisions.

Guarding one’s calling includes staying pure and not sharing in other people’s sins (verse 22). While this applies to all situations, in this passage it particularly relates to appointing church leaders. Making hasty decisions in this area could have serious consequences. Those who make such appointments share in the guilt of the leader who was promoted prematurely. False teachers were a very real threat to Timothy’s church, so it was vital that he take the time to verify each potential leader’s calling and qualifications.

Amid these ministerial instructions, Paul paused to give Timothy a brief personal word of advice. “Don’t drink only water. You ought to drink a little wine for the sake of your stomach because you are sick so often” (verse 23, *NLT*). Although Timothy had been abstaining from wine and drinking only water (which was likely impure), Paul recommended the use of a small amount of wine for medicinal purposes, indicating that he was concerned with both Timothy’s spiritual and physical health. (Interestingly, wine in New Testament times had a lower alcohol content than today’s wine, and it was usually diluted with water.¹)

God entrusted Timothy—and He has entrusted each of us—with a calling. We must guard our callings well and help others do the same.

Discuss

- ? How can we avoid favoritism in ministry? What are some methods for avoiding favoritism in the workplace that might be adaptable for ministry contexts?
- ? Is there anyone in your life who can advise you about both spiritual and physical health? How are such relationships developed?



Part 2—Intercede for Christian Leaders

Say: Paul’s letters overflow with evidence of deep relationships, especially here in 2 Timothy—his final letter included in Scripture. Paul’s love and commitment included faithful, daily prayer. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

¹ “Abstinence from Alcohol,” Assemblies of God (USA), accessed October 4, 2022, ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/Abstinence-from-Alcohol.

Paul addressed Timothy as his “dear son” (2 Timothy 1:2, *NLT*)—his beloved spiritual child. (The adjective translated “dear” comes from the word *agape*, meaning “sacrificial, unconditional love.”)

Paul’s typical greeting blessed recipients with grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, but in writing to Timothy, he included mercy, which means “kindness or concern expressed for someone in need.”² Perhaps Paul knew that Timothy thought of himself as someone in need. He immediately followed up his greeting with the assurance that he was faithfully praying for Timothy. Although he did not mention any specific prayer needs, he emphasized his gratitude for Timothy. How uplifting to know when someone thanks God for you!

In verse 4, Paul expressed his longing to see Timothy again, a hope he would mention again at the end of the letter (2 Timothy 4:9–13,21). He recalled Timothy’s sorrow at their recent parting and described the joy their reunion would bring him, communicating his genuine affection.

Developing ministry associates was an integral part of Paul’s missionary endeavors. Within the limitations of communicating in the first-century world, he took every opportunity to speak into their lives and always brought them before the Father in prayer.

Discuss

- ? Is there anyone you would consider your spiritual parent? How has that relationship influenced your spiritual development?
- ? What kinds of situations or issues prompt you to pray most faithfully? How does it affect you when someone tells you that they are praying for you?

□ Intercede Strategically


Philemon 4–7



Say: In this brief letter, Paul sent a message to another ministry coworker for whom he prayed faithfully and thanked God: Philemon. Paul described his strategic, specific prayers for Philemon’s testimony to be strengthened and God’s purposes to be accomplished through him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Philemon was a Christian of considerable means and a leader in the Colossian church. He had come to faith in Jesus through Paul’s ministry, making him another of Paul’s spiritual offspring and coworkers. The church in Colossae had been founded by Epaphras (another of Paul’s ministry associates) and met in Philemon’s house. Paul was writing to him from prison, probably in Rome (although some scholars think he may have written from Ephesus).

Resource Packet Item 2: Philemon Overview

 Distribute the worksheet and assign each question to an individual or small group. Ask them to read Philemon with their specific question in mind, and then discuss their observations together.

2. William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 316.

Paul stressed his thankfulness for Philemon—just as he had in his letters to Timothy. He commended Philemon’s faith and love (Philemon 5), two of the cardinal virtues of the Christian life. Paul had been hearing good reports about Philemon through his network of ministry partners. Paul often described the Church as a family, and families find ways to keep in touch across the miles.

Paul’s description of Philemon in verse 7 is a goal to which we can all aspire: showing kindness that refreshes the hearts of God’s people. Paul prayed that Philemon would put into action the generosity that came from his faith, understanding and experiencing “all the good things we have in Christ” (verse 6, NLT). Philemon seems to have been well on his way, but Paul prayed for even greater generosity to flow from him as his faith deepened. This request is likely linked to the specific action Paul hoped Philemon would take: reconciling with Onesimus, his runaway slave, and setting him free to work with Paul. As we grasp the significance of all the blessings we have in Christ, generosity toward others should be supercharged. This extravagant generosity was God’s intent for Philemon—and it is His plan for us—so that His mission can be fulfilled. Paul’s prayer for Philemon was strategic, focused on the accomplishment of God’s purposes.

Discuss

- ? How might we pray strategically for a brother or sister in Christ, keeping our focus on God’s purposes? How often do we remember to do that amid our many other prayer requests?
- ? What tangible, concrete actions can we take to show kindness that refreshes the hearts of God’s people?



Part 3—Affirm and Correct Fellow Christians

□ Affirm

Philemon 17

Say: The Church is meant to be a vibrant community, showcasing God’s love and character in shared life and relationships. The New Testament emphasizes this with the word translated “one another,” which occurs one hundred times. We looked at some of these passages last quarter as we studied the Epistles of John and the fruit of the Spirit. Today, we’re focusing on our responsibility to affirm and correct one another. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul was generous in affirming Philemon. Paul had commended his faith and love, explaining how he thanked God for Philemon and received comfort and joy from his love. In verse 1, Paul called Philemon his “beloved coworker” (NLT), and here in verse 17, Paul designates him as his partner. Paul used these terms for his ministry associates who worked side by side with him to spread the gospel. His partnership with Philemon included shared goals, fellowship, and strong trust. Paul trusted that Philemon would welcome him into his home with kindness and generosity. In fact, Paul was “confident” that Philemon would do “what I ask and even more!” (verse 21, NLT).

These words strongly affirmed Philemon’s character, faith, and ministry. Paul looked for the good in Philemon and shouted it from the rooftops. After all, this

letter would have been read in front of the entire church that met in Philemon's home (verse 2). Christians should follow Paul's example and generously affirm and build one another up, speaking the truth in love. This is what it means to be brothers and sisters in Christ. Only in the context of such lovingkindness can effective correction take place.

Discuss

- ? Recall a situation or relationship in which you have been affirmed. What kind of tone did the affirmation set? How did you respond? What fruits were produced by the affirmation you received?
- ? What can you do to be sure your church is characterized by this kind of affirmation? How could this affect the church's reputation in the world?



Resource Packet Item 3: Words of Affirmation

Distribute the worksheet and give students time to review the information. Then encourage them to write their own words of affirmation to be shared with someone in your church.

□ Correct

Philemon 18–20



Say: Believers cannot shy away from the responsibility to correct one another. This is an extension of love and affirmation. Proverbs 3:12 says, “The LORD corrects those he loves, just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights” (NLT). When we avoid the mutual correction that God intended the Church to practice, it shows our apathy and lack of love for one another. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul did not spell out all the details of the situation between Onesimus and Philemon. The Colossian church would have been quite aware of the matter. Consequently, modern-day readers do not know as much about the circumstances as we might like. However, we can still apply the letter's principles to our own lives.

It is clear that Onesimus (whose name means “useful”) was Philemon's slave. In that time and place, slavery was a given, and most enslaved people were captured in war, trapped in poverty, or born to mothers who were enslaved. (This form of enslavement was not related to race or ethnicity.) Paul's letters included guidance for both Christian slaves and Christian masters who were Christians, and his words laid the groundwork for the system later being overturned. Masters were to treat their slaves as brothers and sisters, remembering that they all truly belonged to and served the same Master in heaven.

When he was still in Philemon's household, Onesimus had not been a follower of Christ and had wronged Philemon in some way. He had then run away. Although Paul was in prison (probably in Rome or Caesarea), he and Onesimus connected, and Onesimus became a Christian. Legally speaking, this led to a sticky situation in which Philemon had the authority to punish Onesimus—even as far as demanding his death.

Paul's solution has been called a micro illustration of the gospel itself. He sent Onesimus back to Philemon with this letter, advocating for their reconciliation and offering to pay the price himself for any way Onesimus had wronged Philemon. He commended Onesimus to Philemon in the strongest terms: "Now he will mean much more to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord" (verse 16, NLT).

Paul did not want to pull rank and command Philemon's obedience, but he pointedly led Philemon to view the situation from a Christian perspective and take action accordingly. Ultimately, Paul desired Philemon to release Onesimus so that he could join Paul in ministering the gospel (verses 13–14).

Discuss

- ? How can we avoid manipulation when attempting to correct others?
- ? How does Paul's handling of this situation provide a model for us today?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Guard, intercede, affirm, and correct: This lesson is packed with practical applications. We should guard our own calling—clinging to our faith and taking care of ourselves and others—so that we can be effective agents of the gospel in our world and minister to people.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Schedule coffee or lunch with another believer with the simple goal of getting to know one another better.
- Choose one pastor, one church board member, and one missionary to pray strategically for this week.
- Contact the ministry leaders you prayed for and express your gratitude for their work.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Establish Covenant Ministerial Relationships. Genesis 14:14–20

Tuesday:

Intercede for Leaders in Error. Job 42:1–10

Wednesday:

Consecrated and Called to Community. Isaiah 6:1–8

Thursday:

Know Christ Well, Know More. Matthew 13:10–16

Friday:

Mentor Leaders in the Truth. Acts 18:24 through 19:1

Saturday:

Authority Displayed in Church Relations. 1 Peter 4:17 through 5:7

June 16, 2024

LESSON 3

Christian Calling and Vocation

Study Text

1 Timothy 2:1–7; 4:14; 6:11–16;
2 Timothy 1:5–7, 13–14

Central Truth

Christian leaders need continual prayer to remain faithful in their calling.



Key Verse 1 Timothy 4:14

Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery (KJV).

Do not neglect the spiritual gift you received through the prophecy spoken over you when the elders of the church laid their hands on you (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand the biblical concept of vocation.
- Students will seek the Holy Spirit's empowerment.
- Students will pray for secular and Christian leaders.

Introducing the Study

Say: The word *vocation* refers to a person's profession or trade, and it comes from the Latin word for "calling." It's an occupation someone is drawn to and qualified for.

Opening Activity—Vocations

Ask: What is your vocation, and how did you settle on it?

Say: The Christian understanding of vocation is related to the word's Latin root. A vocation is a calling, and the One who does the calling is God. The vast majority of people don't hear God's voice audibly, but they seek God's guidance and choose their vocation accordingly. If we see a vocation as just a job or think it only means full-time ministry, we don't fully understand what it means. A ministry calling is certainly important, but every believer is called to serve the Lord, living and working for Him (Colossians 3:23). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The entire Christian life is a response to God's call. What a transformational perspective to have as we walk in the Spirit day by day! We are what we are by the will of God—whether we're parents, children, siblings, friends, teachers, plumbers, businesswomen, engineers, maintenance workers . . . Fill in the blank for your own call!

Whatever our vocation, we are called to fulfill our role in faithful service to God. Believers should support one another in our various callings, especially through prayer. This world is a battlefield, and we need God's strength and guidance as we engage in doing His will.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

1 Timothy 2:1. I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;

2. For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

3. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior;

4. Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

5. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

6. Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

7. Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity.

4:14. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.

2 Timothy 1:5. When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.

6. Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.

1 Timothy 6:12. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

13. I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession;

14. That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ:

15. Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords;

16. Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen.

2 Timothy 1:13. Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

14. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.

New Living Translation

1 Timothy 2:1. I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them.

2. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity.

3. This is good and pleases God our Savior,

4. who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.

5. For, There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus.

6. He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the message God gave to the world at just the right time.

7. And I have been chosen as a preacher and apostle to teach the Gentiles this message about faith and truth. I'm not exaggerating—just telling the truth.

4:14. Do not neglect the spiritual gift you received through the prophecy spoken over you when the elders of the church laid their hands on you.

2 Timothy 1:5. I remember your genuine faith, for you share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother, Eunice. And I know that same faith continues strong in you.

6. This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you.

1 Timothy 6:12. Fight the good fight for the true faith. Hold tightly to the eternal life to which God has called you, which you have declared so well before many witnesses.

13. And I charge you before God, who gives life to all, and before Christ Jesus, who gave a good testimony before Pontius Pilate,

14. that you obey this command without wavering. Then no one can find fault with you from now until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.

15. For, At just the right time Christ will be revealed from heaven by the blessed and only almighty God, the King of all kings and Lord of all lords.

16. He alone can never die, and he lives in light so brilliant that no human can approach him. No human eye has ever seen him, nor ever will. All honor and power to him forever! Amen.

2 Timothy 1:13. Hold on to the pattern of wholesome teaching you learned from me—a pattern shaped by the faith and love that you have in Christ Jesus.

14. Through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within us, carefully guard the precious truth that has been entrusted to you.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)

Part 1—Pray for Secular and Church Leaders

□ Pray for All People and for Church Leaders

1 Timothy 2:1,3–7



Say: The Inuit language of the indigenous people of Alaska includes many words for snow, because it is such a dominant part of their lives. Arguably, Christians should have just as many words for prayer. It should be our foundational practice. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In 1 Timothy 2:1 (KJV), Paul exhorted believers using four distinct words for prayer:

- *Supplications* are urgent requests to meet a need. While this term can be slightly more specific than the next, it may also be translated simply as “prayers.”
- *Prayers* can refer to any petitions addressed to God.
- *Intercessions* is a term related to a request made to a high official, like a king. In the context of prayer, it chiefly relates to requests made on others’ behalf.
- *Giving of thanks* is an expression of gratitude toward God.¹

Paul did not intend to create a strict categorical analysis of prayer (the terms overlap in many ways), but his goal was to provide a multifaceted overview of prayer and its importance.

These prayers should be made “for all people” (verse 1, NLT). Why? “This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth” (verses 3–4, NLT). We pray for all people, because God wants everyone to be reconciled to Him.

This is also why we pray for church leaders—those who, like Paul, are called to preach and teach the message of salvation. Paul was called to minister primarily among the Gentiles, while Peter and others ministered primarily among the Jews (Galatians 2:8). Many modern-day church leaders serve in specific contexts to reach specific people with the gospel. But in His sovereignty, God has given all of His people a meaningful role in His redemptive work: prayer. Our task is to align our lives and our prayers with His purposes, praying for both the harvest and the laborers who bring it in (Matthew 9:37–38).

Discuss

- ? God’s desire is that all people would understand the truth and be saved. How is His desire accomplished? What is your role?

□ Pray for Secular Leaders

1 Timothy 2:2



Say: Praying for “all people” includes one special subset: people who hold positions of authority in the world. For Paul and Timothy, that meant emperor and kings. For us, it means presidents, governors, senators, congressional representatives, judges, mayors, school board members, and so on. Agreeing with someone’s politics is not a prerequisite for prayer. In fact, the authority figure in Paul’s day was the emperor Nero—a hedonistic tyrant under whose reign Paul and Peter were eventually executed. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

1. William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 213, 878, 339, 416.

The reason for making supplications, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving for secular leaders is primarily that they may be saved. However, there is another reason. Because of the authority they hold, these leaders' decisions and actions impact the environment in which God's people carry out the Great Commission. The work of God's people is either helped or hindered by their leadership.

Another reason for such prayer is "so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity" (1 Timothy 2:2, NLT). As the Lord had spoken through Jeremiah to His people exiled in Babylon, "Pray to the LORD for [the peace and prosperity of Babylon], for its welfare will determine your welfare" (Jeremiah 29:7, NLT).

For our faith to be genuine, we must live it out in whatever environment we find ourselves. Paul clearly states, "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12, NLT), and he and the other early Christians took seriously Jesus' command to "pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44, NLT). The "peaceful and quiet lives" Paul mentions (1 Timothy 2:2, NLT) are not ultimately designed for Christians' comfort but for their witness in the world. "Make it your goal to live a quiet life. . . . Then people who are not believers will respect the way you live" (1 Thessalonians 4:11–12, NLT). We pray for all people, because God desires all people to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4).



Resource Packet Item 1: Early Christians in Prayer

Distribute the worksheet and divide your class into small groups. Assign one section to each group and ask them to read it and highlight a few phrases that are especially significant. Then ask each group to share a summary.

Discuss

- ? How did Paul find the motivation to pray for the same authorities who arrested him for spreading the gospel? How do we find the motivation to pray for leaders with whom we may disagree?
- ? What are the potential results of our prayers for secular leaders? How might God's purposes be advanced through our prayers?



Part 2—Guard Your Calling and Vocation

□ Treasure Your Spiritual Heritage

2 Timothy 1:5

Say: Timothy was a third-generation Christian, following in the footsteps of his mother and grandmother before him. Some of us may have a similar heritage, while others are the first in their family to follow Jesus. But we are all adopted into the family of God and share a powerful spiritual heritage. And we can contribute to the heritage of the generations that follow. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Acts 16:1–3 provides a bit more of Timothy's personal history. His father was Greek, and his mother was Jewish. Evidently Timothy, his mother Eunice, and his grandmother Lois had come to faith in Jesus when Paul first brought the gospel to Lystra (14:8–20). The believers in that area spoke well of Timothy, and Paul wanted him to

join his missionary team. Because of his Gentile father, Timothy had not been circumcised. Since this would have presented an obstacle to ministering to Jews in that area, Paul arranged to have him circumcised.

The faith in Christ which “first filled” (2 Timothy 1:5, NLT) Lois and Eunice was strong in Timothy also. From his childhood, these Jewish women had taught Timothy the Old Testament Scriptures, laying the groundwork for him to “receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus” (3:15, NLT). Timothy’s spiritual heritage came from these faithful women along with Paul himself, who was truly a father to him in the faith (1 Timothy 1:2). Paul told Timothy to treasure that heritage: “You must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you” (2 Timothy 3:14, NLT). He was also to be the same kind of teacher for others, transferring the heritage of faithfulness and truth to succeeding generations.

Discuss

- ? How important is a solid spiritual heritage? What should a believer do if their family of origin did not provide such a heritage?
- ? Which family takes precedence for the believer: the family of origin or the family of faith? How should conflict between these families be resolved?

□ Exercise Your Spiritual Gifts

1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6



Say: When Paul and other elders had laid their hands on Timothy to commission him for ministry, prophetic words had been spoken over him and Timothy had received a spiritual gift from God. Spiritual gifts are given to benefit and strengthen God’s people. For the good of the church, we shouldn’t neglect our spiritual gifts; instead, they should be fanned into flame! (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In these passages, Paul emphasized Timothy’s ministerial roles of teaching and preaching: “Focus on reading the Scriptures to the church, encouraging the believers, and teaching them” (1 Timothy 4:13, NLT). He also made the point that no one should look down on Timothy because of his youth and that “God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7, NLT).

Had Timothy possibly allowed others’ doubts about his youth to hamper the exercise of his spiritual gift? Or perhaps Paul had no specific concern but generally wanted to encourage Timothy—as Hebrews 10:25 says we must all do for one another. After all, if Timothy were to neglect his spiritual gift, it would deprive the Ephesian believers of his unique, God-given role in strengthening the community.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul’s teaching on spiritual gifts is the context for the powerful image of the Church as the body of Christ. Each member’s gift is necessary for the Body to function fully. God bestows gifts as He sees fit, and no gift is superior or inferior. “In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary” (verse 22, NLT). All believers, not just ministers, must exercise their spiritual gifts for the good of the whole.



Resource Packet Item 2: Fan into Flames

Distribute the worksheet and assign each case study to one or more small groups. Give students a few minutes to read and respond, and then discuss their responses together.

Discuss

- ? How are spiritual gifts received? Does it always happen by someone laying hands on us? How do we know what our spiritual gifts are?
- ? Lists and descriptions of various spiritual gifts can be found in Romans 12:6–8, 1 Corinthians 12:7–11, and Ephesians 4:11–13. What spiritual gift(s) has God given you? How are you using your gifts to strengthen the body of Christ?



Part 3—Fight to Be Faithful

□ Fight with a Sure Hope

1 Timothy 6:12–16

Say: Jesus never promised that following Him would be easy. In fact, He warned His disciples that they would face persecution and trouble. But He assured them of His continued presence and ultimate victory. “Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world” (John 16:33, *NLT*). Paul’s words to Timothy align with Jesus’ warnings and encouragement. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Though translated similarly, Paul’s wording in 1 Timothy 6:12–16 (in contrast to 1:18, which was clearly military imagery) may be related to either warfare or the athletic arena. Either way, the focus is on the contest, the battle, the struggle of faith. Timothy was encouraged to fight to be faithful, and so must we. As we engage in this struggle, we have the sure hope and confidence that God has called us to eternal life and Jesus has already won the victory!

God’s timing is impeccable. He gave His message of good news in Christ to the world “at just the right time” (2:6, *NLT*). The same wording appears here concerning the Second Coming (6:15, *NLT*). We join with believers through the ages in praying, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20, *KJV*). The Father holds the times and seasons in His hand (Acts 1:7) and is patiently allowing more and more people to hear and respond to the gospel (2 Peter 3:9). But one day soon—at just the right time—our Lord will return in unimaginable splendor and His righteous reign will never end!

Meanwhile, we fight the good fight and hold tightly to God’s promise of eternal life. Paul instructed Timothy, “Run from all these evil things. Pursue righteousness and a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness” (1 Timothy 6:11, *NLT*). Fighting the good fight means running away from some things and running toward other things.

Discuss

- ? If the Christian life is a struggle, what makes it worth the fight?



Say: Paul's commands make it clear that every believer has the responsibility to engage in the good fight. We should make every effort to live faithful, godly lives—even with the understanding that we cannot succeed in our own power. Fully aware of our own weakness and fallibility, we call upon the Lord, depending on His strength to continue fighting. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Timothy had indeed received precious truth. He had been given a firm scriptural foundation, he had received salvation, and he had been trained under the teaching of Paul. Gifted by the Holy Spirit to preach and teach that truth, Timothy was charged with carefully guarding the good deposit entrusted to him. He was instructed to fight to protect and preserve the message of truth against all false teachings.

How must Timothy guard this trust? “Through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within us” (2 Timothy 1:14, *NLT*). The New Testament consistently connects the Holy Spirit with power. Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere” (Acts 1:8, *NLT*). Paul explained the Spirit's power brings “confident hope” (Romans 15:13, *NLT*) and he “relied only on the power of the Holy Spirit” when engaging in ministry (1 Corinthians 2:4, *NLT*).

We must also rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. As Pentecostals, we believe that “all believers are entitled to and should ardently expect and earnestly seek the promise of the Father, the baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire, according to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the normal experience of all in the early Christian Church. With it comes the enduement of power for life and service, the bestowment of the gifts and their uses in the work of the ministry.”²

When Paul wrote, “Be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18, *KJV*), his word choice indicated this was not to be a one-time event but an ongoing experience. We are to *keep on* being filled with the Spirit. We need His empowering presence daily. Our life, our service, and our fight to be faithful are only possible through His power. To think otherwise and rely only on our human effort is a recipe for failure.



Resource Packet Item 3: Empowered to Witness

Distribute the worksheet and read aloud the passage about following the Holy Spirit's direction when witnessing. Then discuss the questions together.

Discuss

- ? How can we “carefully guard the precious truth” (2 Timothy 1:14, *NLT*)? What kinds of things threaten its safety?
- ? If you have experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit, would you share a personal testimony with the class? What would you say to someone who is wondering if they should seek this experience?

2. “Our 16 Fundamental Truths: The Baptism in the Holy Spirit,” Assemblies of God 16 Fundamental Truths, Assemblies of God (USA), accessed October 4, 2022, ag.org/Beliefs/Statement-of-Fundamental-Truths.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: *Pray, guard, fight.* The three verbs in this lesson's section titles illustrate the reality that there is an important battle underway, we have something to protect, and we can't do it in our own power. This is not an individual war. We're in this together. God has unified us for this purpose, and our variety of gifts and vocations come together to build up the Body for carrying out His mission. Let's commit to drawing upon all the resources He offers by praying for each other and seeking the Spirit's presence and power.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Make a list of leaders—both secular and in the church—to pray for every day this week.
- Thank God for your spiritual heritage, whether it's long or short. If you are able, personally thank someone who has contributed to it.
- Begin each day by inviting the Holy Spirit to fill, empower, and use you for God's purposes.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Recognize and Commission Leaders. Numbers 27:12–23

Tuesday:

See Leaders from God's Perspective. 1 Samuel 16:4–13

Wednesday:

Yield to God's Direction. Jonah 1:1–10

Thursday:

Christ's Call Turns the Tables. Mark 2:13–22

Friday:

Priorities for Christian Leaders. Luke 9:57 through 10:3

Saturday:

Provide for Church Leaders. 1 Corinthians 9:1–10

June 23, 2024

LESSON 4

Teaching on Church Leadership

Study Text

1 Timothy 3:1–13; 5:17–20;
Titus 1:5–9

Central Truth

Qualified Christian leaders ensure proper care for God’s household.



Key Verse 1 Timothy 3:1

This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of bishop, he desireth a good work (KJV).

This is a trustworthy saying: “If someone aspires to be a church leader, he desires an honorable position” (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will consider various ministry roles in the church and the qualifications for those who fulfill them.
- Students will appreciate the restorative nature of a disciplinary process for ministers.
- Students will support their ministers with their prayers, finances, and time.

Introducing the Study

Say: Leadership is a major topic in both sacred and secular spheres. Books, blogs, and podcasts abound on the subject. Today we will see the kinds of qualities that must be exhibited by leaders in the church. Primarily, these involve the character of the leader. Are they living the kind of life that God’s people should follow?

Opening Activity—Leaders You’ve Known

Ask: Who are some of the best leaders you have known in your lifetime? What characteristics made them good leaders? Examples may include bosses or supervisors, church leaders, volunteer or community leaders, etc.

Say: As children we played a game in which everyone tried to watch and mimic the actions of one leader. Like that childhood game, we often practice the same leadership techniques we have observed in leaders we have followed. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul had left Timothy and Titus in Ephesus and Crete, respectively, with a task to carry out amid an era of deceptive false teaching. Key to their mission was the appointment and continued cultivation of solid leadership that would help the churches remain faithful.

Ministry “offices” were not yet clearly defined with roles and responsibilities, so we must not think exclusively of “pastors” in the same sense as today. But we will see that the characteristics and qualifications Paul described are still foundational and necessary for all those who “take care of God’s church” (1 Timothy 3:5, NLT), including pastors and those in ministry alongside them.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

1 Timothy 3:1. This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.

2. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach;

3. Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;

4. One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;

6. Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

7. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

5:19. Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.

20. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.

Titus 1:6. If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.

7. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;

8. But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate;

9. Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

1 Timothy 3:8. Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre;

10. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.

11. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.

12. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

13. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

New Living Translation

1 Timothy 3:1. This is a trustworthy saying: "If someone aspires to be a church leader, he desires an honorable position."

2. So a church leader must be a man whose life is above reproach. He must be faithful to his wife. He must exercise self-control, live wisely, and have a good reputation. He must enjoy having guests in his home, and he must be able to teach.

3. He must not be a heavy drinker or be violent. He must be gentle, not quarrelsome, and not love money.

4. He must manage his own family well, having children who respect and obey him.

6. A church leader must not be a new believer, because he might become proud, and the devil would cause him to fall.

7. Also, people outside the church must speak well of him so that he will not be disgraced and fall into the devil's trap.

5:19. Do not listen to an accusation against an elder unless it is confirmed by two or three witnesses.

20. Those who sin should be reprimanded in front of the whole church; this will serve as a strong warning to others.

Titus 1:6. An elder must live a blameless life. He must be faithful to his wife, and his children must be believers who don't have a reputation for being wild or rebellious.

7. A church leader is a manager of God's household, so he must live a blameless life. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered; he must not be a heavy drinker, violent, or dishonest with money.

8. Rather, he must enjoy having guests in his home, and he must love what is good. He must live wisely and be just. He must live a devout and disciplined life.

9. He must have a strong belief in the trustworthy message he was taught; then he will be able to encourage others with wholesome teaching and show those who oppose it where they are wrong

1 Timothy 3:8. In the same way, deacons must be well respected and have integrity. They must not be heavy drinkers or dishonest with money.

10. Before they are appointed as deacons, let them be closely examined. If they pass the test, then let them serve as deacons.

11. In the same way, their wives must be respected and must not slander others. They must exercise self-control and be faithful in everything they do.

12. A deacon must be faithful to his wife, and he must manage his children and household well.

13. Those who do well as deacons will be rewarded with respect from others and will have increased confidence in their faith in Christ Jesus.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)

Part 1—Qualifications for Pastors

□ Live Exemplary Lives

1 Timothy 3:1–3



Say: Those who have the responsibility of leading God’s church must live exemplary lives. Of course, none will be sinlessly perfect, but they are to be an example to all of how the gospel truths and the Holy Spirit’s indwelling produce the kind of life that pleases God and shines His light in the world. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Greek word translated “church leader” (1 Timothy 3:2, *NLT*; “bishop,” *KJV*) describes someone with responsibilities for care and oversight of others. This is “a good work,” (verse 1, *KJV*; “an honorable position,” *NLT*), something one might aspire to be. Paul’s list of required characteristics begins with a comprehensive description for a life “above reproach” (*NLT*). The remaining qualities describe an exemplary life in detail.

For this first-century context, two assumptions can be noted in verse 2: The individual would have been married and male. (Women generally lacked the educational and social opportunities open to males.) This brings into sharper focus Paul’s instructions elsewhere as to how women should learn (2:11), his affirmation of numerous women in ministry contexts (see Romans 16:1–16), and his teaching that the single life as a calling has some advantages (1 Corinthians 7:7,32–35). The Assemblies of God has historically ordained women and men, single and married, to pastoral ministry.

Though marriage could be commonly assumed, marital faithfulness was not an expectation for men in the general culture. Paul, however, required that the church leader be “a one-woman man.” (The *NLT* has appropriately understood the “husband of one wife” phrasing in Greek to mean “faithful to his wife.”) Paul said self-control and wise living should be characteristic of “older men” in general (Titus 2:2) and they would naturally undergird a good reputation. The leader must be exemplary in the hospitality which should characterize every Christian (see 1 Peter 4:9) and must be able to teach, suggesting that this is one responsibility of leaders.

Church leaders must not be “given to wine” (1 Timothy 3:3, *KJV*).¹ They must not be violent, but rather gentle. Finally, they must not be argumentative or lovers of money. (Both of these qualities were prominent among false teachers.)

Discuss

- ? Do you know individuals whose lives fit these criteria? Is your own life an example of these qualifications?
- ? Why are these criteria important for leaders in the church?

□ Be Worthy of Respect

1 Timothy 3:4–7



Say: Pastors and other church leaders must be the kind of people who are respected in their homes, churches, and communities. Their humility, maturity, and wisdom in the things of God, forged through time spent walking

¹ “Abstinence from Alcohol,” Assemblies of God (USA), accessed October 4, 2022, ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/Abstinence-from-Alcohol.

with the Lord, will bring honor to them, to the church, and to God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Those who are charged with care and supervision of the church must demonstrate their abilities in the care and oversight of their own households. Faithfulness in smaller areas allows the steward to be given greater responsibility, as in Jesus' Parable of the Talents (see Matthew 25:13–30). We should recall that these Early Churches met in homes and the homeowners would often be the leaders (a further reason hospitality was so important). Relationships within the household (including multiple generations and even servants or slaves) would be very much on display and needed to embody the gospel.

The household codes prevalent at the time instructed wives, children, and slaves to be in complete subjection to the head of household. A smoothly run household was highly prized. Paul's gospel-shaped renditions of such codes (Ephesians 5:21 through 6:9; Colossians 3:18 through 4:1) addressed the same three sets of relationships while making important countercultural modifications. Note especially the demands placed upon the patriarch himself, which was not a feature of the secular codes. The Christian head of household was to model the self-sacrificing love of Christ for his wife (Ephesians 5:25) and to keep in mind that he and his slaves were fellow servants of the same Master (6:9; Colossians 4:1). Even more fundamentally, the structure of the Ephesians passage in the original language makes it clear that the infilling, abiding presence and work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers must permeate and transform every relationship in the household. The results might on the surface look like the ideal Greco-Roman household, but in fact they were founded upon the radically different premises of mutual submission (Ephesians 5:21) and the example of Christ.

Church leaders were to be mature in the faith—seasoned veterans in “the good fight”—lest the enemy exploit a weakness. It is true that even a mature Christian can stumble, but in general the wisdom acquired through a longer walk with Christ will yield invaluable experience that will serve well in discipling others. The two references to the devil in 1 Timothy 3:6–7 “bring together the complementary ideas of coming under his sway and sharing in his condemnation.”² Satan desires to sabotage God's servants; this is a great reason to pray faithfully for our church leaders!



Resource Packet Item 1: A Different Standard?

Distribute the worksheet, and allow students to complete the first portion in small groups. Then discuss the questions about church leadership qualifications.

Discuss

- ? In what ways might a new convert be more susceptible to pride? What strategy might the enemy use against them in this area?
- ? How does a church leader's family life reflect upon their leadership of the church? What should characterize faithful leaders' handling of their families?

2. I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 483.

Part 2—Admonitions for Pastoral Leaders

□ Matters of Compensation and Correction

1 Timothy 5:17–20



Say: Paul consistently upheld the principle that the church must support its ministers. Grounded in the Old Testament, this teaching was articulated by Jesus, who told His disciples to “accept hospitality, because those who work deserve their pay” (Luke 10:7, *NLT*). It is also critical that ministers be held accountable and corrected if they stray. Paul established guidelines for such cases. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

“Elders” is a very literal translation of the Greek; these were older people who exercised leadership roles. Paul had not used this word in his earlier letters, but it probably includes the “bishops and deacons” mentioned in Philippians 1:1 (*KJV*). Church leadership was plural, developing, and somewhat fluid in these early years. Some of these elders “labor in the word and doctrine” (1 Timothy 5:17, *KJV*), that is, in preaching and teaching—activities we today associate with pastoral ministry.

“Double honor” (verse 17, *KJV* literally translating the original Greek) is rightly interpreted by the *NLT* as both payment and respect. Ministers who do their work well should be respected and remunerated by the congregation. Paul supported this principle by an Old Testament passage (Deuteronomy 25:4) and a direct quote from Jesus (Luke 10:7). We must support our pastors today in their vital service.

Paul wanted to help Timothy establish corrective measures. These measures should not be initiated by a single, unsubstantiated charge, but when “two or three witnesses” (an Old Testament principle) corroborated the accusation, public intervention was required. The Assemblies of God (along with many other church fellowships) still follow Paul’s guidance today, adhering to firm, biblically based guidelines for pastors who stray from the teaching of Scriptures. The fellowship of ministers is designed to hold one another accountable and ensure that everyone matures and learns from the redemptive disciplinary process.



Resource Packet Item 2: Jesus and Paul on Discipline

Distribute the worksheet and allow time for students to read the Scriptures and list the disciplinary steps described by Jesus and Paul. Then discuss the questions together.

Discuss

? In what ways can a congregation show respect for their pastor’s ministry?

□ Further Qualifications

Titus 1:5–9



Say: Paul described the qualifications of elders to both Timothy (working in an established Christian community in Ephesus) and Titus (working among new converts on the island of Crete). The list he gave Titus was similar to the one in 1 Timothy 3:1–13 with a few differences, including that recent converts were not excluded from serving. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

While Timothy was working with an existing group of elders, Titus was charged with the initial appointment of leaders. Titus was completing the work he had begun alongside Paul on the island of Crete. After leaving him there, Paul wrote to encourage him, give guidance, and provide clear qualifications for the appointees.

The “blameless life” (Titus 1:6, NLT) corresponds to the life “above reproach” in 1 Timothy 3:2 (NLT) and the overarching description is filled out by the following qualifications. The first is still marital faithfulness, but the reference to children appears next here. The children “must be believers who don’t have a reputation for being wild and rebellious” (Titus 1:6, NLT). As in 1 Timothy, leading one’s own household well is required for “a manager of God’s household” (verse 7, NLT).

In verse 7, the terminology shifts from “elder” to “bishop” (KJV) or “church leader” (NLT). Such a leader must not be “arrogant or quick-tempered . . . a heavy drinker, violent, or dishonest with money” (NLT). These are either identical to or synonymous with the earlier passage’s prohibitions. Verse 8 lists six things, again largely identical to or parallel to 1 Timothy, that such a leader must be: “a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate” (KJV). The NLT more accurately translates the second quality as loving “what is good.”

Finally, the church leader “must have a strong belief in the trustworthy message he was taught; then he will be able to encourage others with wholesome teaching and show those who oppose it where they are wrong” (verse 9, NLT). A firm inner conviction and faith in the gospel message enables the minister to fulfill the important responsibilities of exhortation, encouragement, and defense of the truth.

Discuss

- ? Why is it important for Titus to be appointing solid leadership in these churches? Why are these standards still important today?
- ? When you think of all the things pastors do, what do you consider their most important responsibility? Which qualifications are most important in that task?



Part 3—Exhortations for Deacons

□ The Men

1 Timothy 3:8–10,12–13

Say: Paul also describes requirements for deacons, although he doesn’t describe the specific tasks for this ministry role. Let’s take a look at his comments regarding qualifications. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Greek word *diakonos*, from which we derive our word *deacon*, describes one who gets something done “at the behest of a superior” as an “assistant to someone”³ and is used frequently in the New Testament to refer to service and ministry. It is translated “servant” in Mark 9:35 and 10:43 (NLT). Paul used it to describe both himself and his ministry associates.

In this context, following Paul’s qualifications for bishops or overseeing ministers, the deacons seem to be ones who help these ministers. Just as with the descriptions of other church leaders, Paul was most concerned with the kind

3. William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 230.

of people they must be and said little about specific duties. “In the same way” (1 Timothy 3:8, NLT) introduces a similar list of standards for this new category of ministering servants.

Again, several of the qualifications are identical to or synonymous with those for bishops and elders, including faithfulness to one’s wife, a household in order, not given to much wine or greed, and a respectable life above reproach. The deacons must not be “double-tongued” (verse 8, KJV), what we might call speaking out of both sides of one’s mouth (“have integrity,” NLT). They must be committed to their faith (the mystery of gospel faith, no longer hidden but revealed in Christ) and keep a clear conscience.

Those who would be deacons must be examined and their lives found to meet the standards Paul set forth. The text does not indicate who would conduct the examination; presumably these criteria were observable by the whole church. Deacons who served well would receive respect from others and more confidence in their faith.

Discuss

- ? Does your church have deacons or board members? What are their responsibilities?
- ? Do Paul’s qualifications still serve a purpose today?

□ The Women

1 Timothy 3:11



Say: We’re isolating a single verse for discussion because it gives us an opportunity to consider an important matter of interpretation. As one may notice from the NLT footnote, “their wives” has an alternate translation listed: “women.” We’ll look more closely at this verse and what it suggests. [Please note: the interpretation presented here is the meaning defended in the Assemblies of God position paper titled “The Role of Women in Ministry”⁴ and by many New Testament teachers and scholars. However, the biblical argument for women as ministers does not depend on the interpretation of this single disputed passage.] (Share your highlights from the following text.)

“In the same way” is a very good translation of the beginning of this verse in Greek. Paul frequently used this phrase to introduce a parallel category. Greek does not have a feminine noun—such as *deaconess*—corresponding to the masculine *dia-konos* of verse 8; if it did, that would be what we might expect after “in the same way.” Instead, Paul uses the word *gynaiikes*.

In Greek, the words *man* and *woman* are the same words as *husband* and *wife*. When these words are used, it is always the context which determines whether the author means an adult male or a husband, or an adult female or a wife. (Remember, it was generally expected that an adult male was a husband and an adult female, a wife.)

The word *their* is not actually used in verse 8 in the original Greek; it was added in English to clarify what translators interpreted as the correct understanding of this passage. This is a quite common practice in translation. Possibly, Paul was *not*

⁴ “The Role of Women in Ministry,” Assemblies of God (USA), accessed November 8, 2022, ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/The-Role-of-Women-in-Ministry.

referring to “their [the male deacons’] wives” but to “women” who, like their male counterparts in ministry duties, have certain standards they must meet. If so, the women deacons are to be “respected” (verse 11, *NLT*)—the same Greek word, in its feminine form, that headed the list in verse 8 for the male deacons. “Not slanderers, sober” (verse 11, *KJV*) parallels “not double-tongued, not given to much wine” in verse 8 (*KJV*), though the word “sober” in verse 11 (*KJV*) can describe a more generalized self-control as the *NLT* suggested. Finally, these women in ministry are to be “faithful in all things” (*KJV*), a reference perhaps prompting Paul to resume his requirements for male deacons, specifically be “faithful” to one wife (verse 12).



Resource Packet Item 3: Women in Ministry

Distribute the worksheet. Then read it together and discuss the questions about the role of women in ministry.

Discuss

- ? Does this interpretation of verse 11 seem plausible to you? Why or why not?
- ? In what ministry capacities are women serving in your church?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: God intends for His church to be cared for by people of integrity. Pastors should be respected and compensated for their work. A leader who fails must submit to an appropriate disciplinary process aimed at redemption. God will gift people for His mission, their lives bearing witness to those outside the church.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Implement one concrete idea for providing support to leaders in your church.
- Discuss with your household how you can more faithfully display God’s character together.
- Honestly evaluate your speech, temper, finances, use of alcohol, and self-control.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Good Character Required for Leaders. Exodus 18:13–24

Tuesday:

Remove Barriers from the Past. Judges 6:24–32

Wednesday:

God Vindicates Falsely Accused Leaders. Amos 5:10–17

Thursday:

The Lord Selects His Laborers. Matthew 9:35 through 10:4

Friday:

Recognize and Support Emerging Leaders. Galatians 2:1–10

Saturday:

Follow and Imitate Faithful Leaders. Hebrews 13:1–8

June 30, 2024

LESSON

5

Spiritual Practices for Christian Leaders

Study Text

1 Timothy 4:7–8, 15–16;
2 Timothy 2:19–26; 3:13–17

Central Truth

Christian leaders must live as a holy example to all.



Key Verse 1 Timothy 4:16

Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt save both thyself, and them that hear thee (KJV).

Keep a close watch on how you live and on your teaching. Stay true to what is right for the sake of your own salvation and the salvation of those who hear you (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will reflect on the characteristics of exemplary Christian leadership.
- Students will value biblical preaching and teaching.
- Students will set goals for training in godliness.

Introducing the Study

Say: The Scriptures we'll be exploring today encourage us to think about the example we set for others. If spiritual practices for Christian leaders are intended to set a holy example to all, then these are matters important for us all. Let's begin by getting our imaginations warmed up.

Opening Activity—Athletic Training

Ask: What kinds of training do athletes (professional or amateur) engage in? Find an example online of a typical training schedule for an Olympic athlete. Share the example with the class.

Say: Most of us aren't professional athletes, but there is a kind of spiritual training we all need to practice to strengthen our relationship with God and fulfill His purpose. Like athletic training, our spiritual training requires emotional, spiritual, and even physical energy. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Today's passages will inspire us toward godly living, lifelong growth in God's Word, and interpersonal ministry. These urgent truths transcend time and place, and we will hear Paul's challenge to Timothy addressing us today. Perhaps Paul was drawing upon the Psalmist's words from many centuries earlier: "How can a young person stay pure? By obeying your word . . . I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:9,11, NLT).

Scripture Reading

King James Version

1 Timothy 4:7. But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness.

8. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

2 Timothy 2:19. Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

20. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor, and some to dishonor.

21. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.

1 Timothy 4:15. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.

16. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

2 Timothy 3:14. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them;

15. And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

16. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

17. That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

2:22. Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

23. But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.

24. And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,

25. In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

26. And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

New Living Translation

1 Timothy 4:7. Do not waste time arguing over godless ideas and old wives' tales. Instead, train yourself to be godly.

8. "Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come."

2 Timothy 2:19. But God's truth stands firm like a foundation stone with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and "All who belong to the Lord must turn away from evil."

20. In a wealthy home some utensils are made of gold and silver, and some are made of wood and clay. The expensive utensils are used for special occasions, and the cheap ones are for everyday use.

21. If you keep yourself pure, you will be a special utensil for honorable use. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work.

1 Timothy 4:15. Give your complete attention to these matters. Throw yourself into your tasks so that everyone will see your progress.

16. Keep a close watch on how you live and on your teaching. Stay true to what is right for the sake of your own salvation and the salvation of those who hear you.

2 Timothy 3:14. But you must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you.

15. You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus.

16. All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.

17. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.

2:22. Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts. Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts.

23. Again I say, don't get involved in foolish, ignorant arguments that only start fights.

24. A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people.

25. Gently instruct those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people's hearts, and they will learn the truth.

26. Then they will come to their senses and escape from the devil's trap. For they have been held captive by him to do whatever he wants.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Say: Earlier in this unit we saw that false teachers were plaguing the church at Ephesus. They were very interested in myths and speculative arguments about origins. Timothy, by contrast, was to have nothing to do with such godless pursuits; rather, he must be training for godliness. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

“Godless ideas and old wives’ tales” (1 Timothy 4:7, *NLT*) were Paul’s evaluation of the false teachings in that age of deception. We are familiar with the phrase “old wives’ tales.” Even in Paul’s day it was a common derogatory phrase used to denounce something as inaccurate and untrue. Like Timothy was taught, church leaders today should not waste time on such meaningless discussions.

Paul prescribed a much better use of our energies: “Exercise thyself rather unto godliness” (*KJV*). The imagery is of athletes, whom Paul described as being “disciplined in their training . . . to win a prize” (1 Corinthians 9:25, *NLT*). Using the athletic image to describe applying oneself to being godly, Paul said physical training “profiteth little” (1 Timothy 4:8, *KJV*) although it “is good” (*NLT*). It has some value, but by comparison, training for godliness is much more valuable. Paul had told the Corinthians, who were familiar with athletic competitions on the scale of the Olympics, “They do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible” (1 Corinthians 9:25, *KJV*). Much more is at stake in spiritual exercise than physical. Godliness promises “benefits in this life and in the life to come” (1 Timothy 4:8, *NLT*).

What does “training for godliness” mean? Athletes exercise self-control in saying no to what harms, hinders, or does not help their ability to compete. They also devote many hours to practicing proper form, strengthening key muscles, and acquiring the endurance they need. Similarly, Christians who want to grow in godliness must avoid some activities and devote themselves to others. Athletes constantly make every effort to grow in their grasp of the sport: reading, studying, watching game film, learning from past performances, and seeking to exceed prior accomplishments. What would happen if we gave such attention to our walk with the Lord?

Discuss

- ? For any athletes or former athletes in the room, what can you tell us about the physical training that athletic excellence demands?
- ? What can we learn from this athletic imagery to train for godliness? What activities should we avoid and to what activities should we devote ourselves?



Say: Picking up on the need to say no to certain things while we’re training for godliness, let’s take a look at Paul’s command to keep ourselves pure. It’s important to remember that personal purity for its own sake is not our ultimate goal. Instead, the purpose of our sanctification is to be “ready for the Master to

use for every good work” (2 Timothy 2:21, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul had just concluded a strong warning against faith-destroying false teaching and its proponents, calling out two of them by name (see 2 Timothy 2:17–18). He had painted a bleak picture, likening the spread of this teaching throughout the church to the spread of gangrene throughout the body. But with a word of contrast—“nevertheless” (verse 18, KJV)—he reminded Timothy of the sure foundation of God’s truth that prevails despite any discouraging outlook.

The image is of a sturdy structure relying on a well-placed foundation stone, sealed with two ringing inscriptions. The first describes God’s sovereign affirmation of His people: “The LORD knows those who are his” (verse 19, NLT). This is a quotation from Numbers 16:5, during a tumultuous time when Korah led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron, but God acted on behalf of His true servants.

The second inscription states, “All who belong to the LORD must turn away from evil” (2 Timothy 2:19, NLT; see Leviticus 24:16, Isaiah 52:11, Psalms 34:14, Proverbs 3:7). The wording makes it clear that the evil we must avoid includes wicked actions or the quality of wickedness, not people.

Finally, Paul illustrated the contrast between those who keep themselves pure and those who do not by likening them to honorable and dishonorable “vessels” (KJV) or “utensils” (NLT) in a household. Paul’s readers could easily grasp this difference, leading them to aspire to be honorable instruments the Master would use for noble purposes. All Christians, especially leaders, need to be open to the sanctifying and purifying work of God’s Holy Spirit—turning away from sin and keeping themselves pure for the Master’s use.



Resource Packet Item 1: Avoid Evil

Distribute the worksheet and read the passage together. Then discuss its relevance to the Scripture passages used in today’s lesson.

Discuss

- ? “The LORD knows those who are his” (2 Timothy 2:19, NLT). How does this assurance make you feel? Does this “inscription” seal the foundation of your life? How can you walk more confidently in this truth?
- ? What disciplines, practices, or habits have you found helpful in keeping yourself pure? How does purity prepare one to be used by God?



Part 2—Commit to Study and Doctrine

□ Be a Lifelong Learner

1 Timothy 4:15–16

Say: When we accomplish a goal, it’s so rewarding to put our feet up and rest on our laurels. But Paul challenged Timothy not to have this kind of mentality when it comes to Scripture. Our study of God’s Word can never exhaust its riches, so we should be diligent, lifelong learners. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In 1 Timothy 4:13–14, Paul had encouraged Timothy to keep publicly reading Scripture, exercising his spiritual gift in preaching and teaching. He followed that with additional emphasis on the importance of sustained devotion to these matters.

Then Paul told him, “Meditate upon” (verse 15, *KJV*) or “Give your complete attention to” (*NLT*) these things. In Timothy’s day, but even more so in ours, many distractions dilute our focus. The study, prayer, and meditation required to bring God’s message to people are not as visible as other tasks and might easily be neglected. Yet they must take priority. They are fundamental for every believer as we share the gospel with the world.

Such preparation will pay off: “Everyone will see your progress” if you “throw yourself into” those tasks (verse 15, *NLT*). The goal is not personal recognition as a great preacher or teacher. Jesus said the hypocrites who strive for such accolades may receive that reward, but they forfeit God’s reward which is so much better (Matthew 6:1–21). No, the goal is salvation for oneself and others! Those who are called to, charged with, and anointed by the Spirit for preaching and teaching have an enormous responsibility to guard their lives and their teaching. But all of us must continually draw closer to God by regularly immersing ourselves in Scripture and listening to the Spirit.



Resource Packet Item 2: My Bible Study

Distribute the worksheet, and allow a couple of minutes for students to do the self-evaluation. Then discuss the ideas on the last half of the page. Consider sharing some of the study tips from “Directing Students toward Individual Study” on pages 8–9.

Discuss

- ? Think about your schedule yesterday. Did anything receive your complete attention? What does it look like when you throw yourself into an activity?
- ? How can your church ensure that its preachers and teachers are able to give themselves wholly to the tasks Paul listed in these verses?

Be Faithful to Scripture

2 Timothy 3:14–17



Say: All learning must remain grounded in the Word of God. The Scriptures are the foundation for salvation and for growing in faith and practice. They are God-breathed! They bring us into God’s presence and form us into the kind of people He intended us to be. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The false teachers Paul warned against were enamored with speculation, myths, and anything that pleased people’s “itching ears” (2 Timothy 4:3). By contrast, Timothy was to be anchored in the certain truth of God’s Word. The goal is to continually advance in understanding the Bible—the standard by which any claim to truth must be evaluated.

Timothy had received instruction in God’s Word from trustworthy teachers, beginning with his mother and grandmother and culminating with the apostle Paul. He was not to deviate from this foundation but “remain faithful” to it (3:14, *NLT*).

The verb Paul uses is the one Jesus used in John 15:4–5 to tell His disciples to remain in Him, the True Vine. The Scriptures bear witness to Jesus; to abide in Him, we must abide in them.

In stating, “All Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Timothy 3:16, *NLT*), Paul may have coined a new word, which literally means “God-breathed.” (There are no certain appearances of the term in Greek literature prior to this reference.) Combining the Greek words for “God” and “Spirit, wind, or breath,” Paul’s term may rightly bring to one’s mind the account of God “[breathing] the breath of life into the man’s nostrils” (Genesis 2:7, *NLT*). Having also been breathed into existence by God, the Scriptures are alive and powerful (Hebrews 4:12).

The Bible pulses with God-given life. All of it is profitable. All of it is useful. The *NLT* nicely personalizes the four simple functions of the Word: “to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right” (2 Timothy 3:16). The minister of the Word is tasked with “rightly dividing” God’s Word (2:15, *KJV*), assisting the community of believers in being shaped by the living Word. The goal is that all of God’s people are prepared and equipped to do every good work. Timothy held that role and responsibility in Ephesus, and our pastors, teachers, and church leaders carry the same call today: to train the body of Christ to brightly shine the light of truth in this dark world.

Discuss

- ? On average, how much time do you spend in Scripture each week? What adjustments (if any) might the Holy Spirit be leading you to make?
- ? Can you give specific examples of each of the four functions of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16, *NLT*) operating in your own life? Which of these might you currently need?



Part 3—Disciplines Complementary to Leadership

□ Disciplines for Maturing

2 Timothy 2:22–23

Say: Paul instructs Timothy to “flee also youthful lusts” (2 Timothy 2:22, *NLT*), a phrase some of us have heard repeated often throughout our lives. While sexual sins are certainly to be avoided, and Paul wrote often about that kind of immoral behavior, the “youthful lusts” he is referring to here may not have been primarily sexual in nature. Let’s take a closer look. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Earlier in this chapter, Paul warned against useless fighting over words and “worthless, foolish talk that only leads to more godless behavior” (2 Timothy 2:16, *NLT*). We saw in lesson 1 how false teachers and their pointless, destructive fascinations can lead people from the truth. Verse 23 comes right back to that peril: “Again I say, don’t get involved in foolish, ignorant arguments that only start fights” (*NLT*). Could these be the youthful desires Paul was referring to in verse 22—the immaturity of stubborn argumentativeness and infatuation with the latest spiritual fads?¹

1. Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, New International Biblical Commentary, Vol. 13 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 263–264.

Paul commanded Timothy to “pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace” (verse 22, NLT) “with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (KJV). Note the parallel to 1 Timothy 6:11 where Paul also referred to fleeing from evil and pursuing righteousness, faith, and love. The list in 1 Timothy included “gentleness” whereas the one in 2 Timothy replaces the word with “peace,” a similar idea. These are stalwart, mature Christian virtues. They are not glamorous, provocative, or controversial but basic to being part of the family of God.

Timothy was encouraged to pursue godliness in community with others who would also worship the Lord in purity of heart. We should seek that kind of companionship; it is the proving ground of genuine faith. Peace isn’t really peace in the biblical sense unless it is found in a community. The challenges that inevitably arise from pursuing peace in community are Paul’s next topic.

Discuss

- ? One of Paul’s main concerns in the pastoral epistles is the danger of false teachings. Is there any modern challenge that poses a comparable threat to the church? How do Paul’s words equip us to meet the challenges of our day?
- ? How can we “call on the Lord with pure hearts” (2 Timothy 2:22, NLT)? In what way is this related to David’s prayer in Psalm 51:10?
- ? How important is repentance in maintaining a pure heart?



Resource Packet Item 3: Call on the Lord

Distribute the worksheet, assign each Scripture to an individual or small group, and then discuss the results together. If time is a factor, encourage students to complete the worksheet at home.

Disciplines for Mentoring

2 Timothy 2:24–26



Say: Since discipleship happens in community, Christian leadership involves people skills. In fact, every Christian needs to learn how to cooperate and pursue peace with other believers. Christ “makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love” (Ephesians 4:16, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The word translated “servant” in 2 Timothy 2:24 means “slave” or “bond servant.” Slaves are “duty-bound . . . to their owners or masters, or those to whom total allegiance is pledged.”² In this case, we belong to Jesus—body and soul. Paul commonly refers to himself as a slave of Christ, and his wording here in verse 24 points back to verse 21 and the concept of being fit for the Master’s use.

When people work together, disagreements and conflicts occasionally arise, but the Lord’s servant must handle them in a noncombative manner, seeking peace. As servants of Christ, we “must not quarrel” (verse 24, NLT). Instead, we should be “kind” (NLT; “gentle,” KJV) to all.

2. William Arndt, et al. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 260.

The Lord's servants must also be able to teach. Here is where the disciplines of study and meditation come into play. The "how-to" of teaching is helpful in terms of communication skills and being able to think on one's feet, but more critical is the solid knowledge of biblical truth that only comes with study and waiting on the Holy Spirit.

The Lord's servants must also be patient with difficult people. We must gently instruct (or possibly correct) those who "oppose the truth" (verse 25, *NLT*). The verbs Paul used in this sentence are rare, so we understand less about their full meanings than we do for more common words, but it is clear that God's servants must deal gently with opposition in hopes of bringing others to the point of repentance. Ideally God "will give them repentance" (*KJV*), and they will come to know the truth and be delivered from the enemy's deception. This may not always be the outcome, but we must do our part, speaking the truth in love with redemptive purpose. We can leave the results to God.

Discuss

- ? How does a quarrelsome disposition affect the presentation of the gospel?
- ? Why is it important to be gentle when correcting those who oppose you?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: God desires people to be transformed and display distinctive characteristics and behaviors that bear witness to Him. As the Spirit works within us, conforming us to Jesus' image, we grow in purity, dive deeply into the Word, and lead others to grow too.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Write down "workout goals" to guide your training in godliness each day this week.
- Invite another believer to join you in one of these goals.
- Select a topic you would like to learn more about in Scripture, and then seek resource recommendations from a pastor, teacher, or other leader.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Keep Vows of Consecration.
Numbers 6:1–8

Tuesday:

Seek Wisdom and Understanding.
Proverbs 8:1–11

Wednesday:

Prioritize Body and Mind
Disciplines. Daniel 1:8–19

Thursday:

Establish Undistracted Seasons
of Prayer. Mark 1:29–39

Friday:

Develop and Maintain Ministerial
Friendships. 1 Corinthians 16:10–18

Saturday:

Continue in God's Perfect Love.
1 John 4:7–21

July 7, 2024

LESSON

6

Exemplify Faithful Christian Service

Study Text

1 Timothy 4:9–13; 2 Timothy 2:11–16; Philemon 8–16

Central Truth

Christian servants teach by both word and deed.



Key Verse 1 Timothy 4:10

Therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe (KJV).

This is why we work hard and continue to struggle, for our hope is in the living God, who is the Savior of all people and particularly of all believers (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will be able to describe Paul's continual focus on Christ.
- Students will be transparent with one another in their struggles.
- Students will disciple (or be disciplined by) fellow believers in evangelism and Christian decision-making.

Introducing the Study

Say: Basketball superstar Charles Barkley once made an infamous commercial in which he declared, “I am not a role model.” His point was that dunking a basketball didn’t make him someone kids should emulate. However, many felt he was excusing poor behavior and avoiding real responsibility. As God’s people, we *are* meant to be role models, showing the world what it looks like to follow Jesus.

Opening Activity—Role Models

Ask: Who are some current role models in today’s world? Who has served as a role model in your life?

Say: Paul told the Corinthians, “You should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1, NLT). It is a Christian’s responsibility to speak and act in a way that shows others how to follow Jesus. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul’s instructions for Timothy—by way of the Holy Spirit’s inspiration—continue to speak to us today. Timothy had been a firsthand witness to much of Paul’s life and ministry, and Paul’s actions clearly spoke as loudly as his words. We must also live as conscientious examples for fellow believers, honestly sharing our struggles and victories. This is how the DNA of faith is passed from generation to generation.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

1 Timothy 4:9. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance.

10. For therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe.

11. These things command and teach.

12. Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

13. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

2 Timothy 2:11. It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him:

12. If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us:

13. If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

14. Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers.

15. Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Philemon 8. Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient,

9. Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

10. I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds:

11. Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me:

12. Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels:

13. Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel:

14. But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.

15. For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever;

16. Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?

1 Timothy 4:9. This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it.

10. This is why we work hard and continue to struggle, for our hope is in the living God, who is the Savior of all people and particularly of all believers.

11. Teach these things and insist that everyone learn them.

12. Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity.

13. Until I get there, focus on reading the Scriptures to the church, encouraging the believers, and teaching them.

2 Timothy 2:11. This is a trustworthy saying: If we die with him, we will also live with him.

12. If we endure hardship, we will reign with him. If we deny him, he will deny us.

13. If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny who he is.

14. Remind everyone about these things, and command them in God's presence to stop fighting over words. Such arguments are useless, and they can ruin those who hear them.

15. Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth.

Philemon 8. That is why I am boldly asking a favor of you. I could demand it in the name of Christ because it is the right thing for you to do.

9. But because of our love, I prefer simply to ask you. Consider this as a request from me—Paul, an old man and now also a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus.

10. I appeal to you to show kindness to my child, Onesimus. I became his father in the faith while here in prison.

11. Onesimus hasn't been of much use to you in the past, but now he is very useful to both of us.

12. I am sending him back to you, and with him comes my own heart.

13. I wanted to keep him here with me while I am in these chains for preaching the Good News, and he would have helped me on your behalf.

14. But I didn't want to do anything without your consent. I wanted you to help because you were willing, not because you were forced.

15. It seems that you lost Onesimus for a little while so that you could have him back forever.

16. He is no longer like a slave to you. He is more than a slave, for he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Say: Paul acknowledged that Christian life and ministry involve hardship and struggle, yet his letters convey a profound sense of joy. His most famous joy-filled epistle, the letter to the Philippians, was penned from a Roman prison where he contemplated the possibility of execution. Paul lived out the principle he shared with them: “To live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21, *KJV*). Being open and honest about our struggles is an important part of being an example to fellow believers. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The trustworthy saying in 1 Timothy 4:8—that “training for godliness” (*NLT*) promises benefits “in this life and in the life to come”—led Paul to reflect on the hard work and struggles that were part of his own training. In 2 Corinthians 11:22–33 he detailed a long list of hardships he had undergone in his ministry. His was not an easy road, and he explicitly invited Timothy and other ministry associates to join him in suffering.

But Paul clearly understood his purpose, which gave meaning to his suffering. God had called him to declare the good news of salvation, especially to the Gentiles. Every mile he walked and every rejection he experienced were worthwhile if he “might by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22, *KJV*) from the bondage of sin. Considering himself to have been the worst of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15), Paul knew the life-transforming salvation of God and was desperate to see others receive the same blessings. “This is why we work hard and continue to struggle” (4:10, *NLT*).

The living God is “the Savior of all people” and “particularly of all believers” (verse 10, *NLT*). Paul wanted to move people from the first category to the second, because while Jesus is indeed the only Savior, God’s desire is that all would come to Him for salvation (2:4). God is patient and “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9, *KJV*). Paul felt keenly both the responsibility and the privilege of sharing in that ministry of reconciliation as an ambassador of Christ.

Like Paul, we must put our hope in the living God. This hope puts every present suffering into heavenly perspective. We still struggle, but sharing those struggles with fellow believers helps both us and them. Despite the inevitability of hard work and difficulty in this world, we can have hope because of who God is and all He’s done.

Discuss

- ? Paul told Timothy, “This is why we work hard and continue to struggle” (1 Timothy 4:10, *NLT*). What was the “this” he was referring to? What is the reason in your own life?
- ? What struggles have you faced with the Lord’s help that you could share to encourage others? Have others been genuine and real in sharing their struggles with you? If so, what effect did that have on you?



Resource Packet Item 1: Paul's Hardships

Distribute the worksheet and read the passage it references. Then discuss the questions together or encourage students to answer them on their own.



□ Live, Love, Lead by Example

1 Timothy 4:11–13

Say: Paul instructed Timothy to be an example others could follow. We should strive to live exemplary lives as well. The goal is for all of God's people to become the kingdom of priests He intends, embodying His character so the world can see the light of His love and truth. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Teaching is more than transferring information. Explaining doctrine to someone isn't enough; we must put it into practice. Paul modeled faith and service for Timothy, and he insisted that Timothy do the same for others.

Timothy was a relatively young man. This Greek term translated "youth" could refer to anyone up to the age of forty, but it was most commonly used for people under thirty. Since Timothy had joined Paul's ministry team in Lystra before AD 50, perhaps in his mid-teens, and this letter was written in the early 60s, he may have been around thirty. Timothy did not yet merit the status granted by the culture to older individuals, but Paul encouraged Timothy not to let that deter him. Instead, he should exercise leadership in the community and set an example for all to follow.

Paul challenged Timothy—and God charges us—to be an example "in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity" (1 Timothy 4:12, NLT). There were plenty of deceptive religious examples in Timothy's day, just as there are today. Instead of giving in to foolish arguments, Timothy's speech was to "be gracious and attractive" (Colossians 4:6, NLT). His behavior should align with the true message of the gospel so he could be a conduit for God's love. And his faith had to be strong and true, translating into a life of purity (1 John 3:3). So must ours.

Until Paul arrived, Timothy's tasks were to "focus on reading the Scriptures to the church, encouraging the believers and teaching them" (1 Timothy 4:13, NLT). In that era, literacy was low and access to manuscripts was limited, so public reading was the only way for many people to encounter Scripture. As Timothy carried out his mission, they would hear the Word of God and be instructed in it.

Discuss

- ? What ministry role would someone of Timothy's age likely be filling in a modern-day church?
- ? Paul told Timothy, "Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young" (1 Timothy 4:12, NLT). In what ways might we be guilty of looking down on younger ministers? Why?
- ? What is the difference between exhortation and teaching? How do both relate to the reading of the Scriptures?



Say: The believer’s primary example is that of Christ Jesus himself. Paul gave a memorable, poetic description of what it means to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and be held by His faithfulness. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

All of Paul’s New Testament letters are Christocentric (meaning Jesus Christ was at the center of them). Being “in Christ” is the essence of what it means to be a Christian. It has been suggested that this theme comes from Paul’s initial encounter with Christ when he heard the words, “Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:4, NLT). Reflecting on that Damascus Road event, the concept that persecuting Christians meant persecuting Jesus himself took firm root in Paul’s theology. He understood a Christian’s life is to be completely “in Christ” in a dynamic sense. The trustworthy saying in this passage reflects this reality.

“If we die with him we will also live with him” (2 Timothy 2:11, NLT). Similarly, Paul reminded the church in Rome that “when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death . . . we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives” (Romans 6:3–4, NLT).

“If we suffer, we shall also reign with him” (2 Timothy 2:12, KJV). Paul had told the Romans that we are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Romans 8:17, KJV). The Christian life is partaking in the life of Jesus; we are “joint-heirs” with Him—both in what He had to endure and in the glory to come in His kingdom.

“If we deny him, he also will deny us” (2 Timothy 2:12, KJV). This comes directly from the warning of Jesus himself, that “whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:33, KJV).

“If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny who he is” (2 Timothy 2:13, NLT). Paul, always aware of the faithfulness of the Lord in his own life, chose to conclude this trustworthy saying on a positive note. Our hope of salvation is grounded in the very character of God.

Discuss

- ? Did the final sentence of the trustworthy saying surprise you? What might be the significance of the way Paul changes the pattern in that final line?
- ? How does our suffering change when seen in the light of Jesus’ suffering? What meaning does it acquire?



Resource Packet Item 2: Trustworthy Sayings

Distribute the worksheet and read the Scripture passages. Then answer the questions and work together as a class to write your own “trustworthy saying.”



Say: The false teachers in Ephesus wanted to engage others in useless battles over words. Timothy was to shut down these vain arguments, and instead pour his energy into studying God's Word in order to correctly handle the gospel message. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Timothy was to keep reminding people of the kind of faithful endurance in Christ Paul emphasized in his trustworthy saying (2 Timothy 2:11–13). Along with this, he was to confront those who were causing problems in the church. Their “word-fighting” was not only useless, but it was damaging, leading people into speculative, mythical nonsense. Those who listened would be dragged down to spiritual ruin. Paul's word choice—“Command them in God's presence to stop” (verse 14, NLT)—shows the serious danger of such pointless arguments and the division they cause.

Paul's command to “study to shew thyself approved” (verse 15, KJV) often leads people to think he was specifying research or other methods of acquiring knowledge in order to interpret Scripture well. Although that's a good idea, it is not Paul's point. English word meanings have changed since the King James Version was translated, and “work hard” (NLT) captures Paul's meaning more accurately than the overly specific “study” (KJV).

The aim of this hard work—whatever form it may take—is to “present yourself to God and receive his approval” (NLT). Such a good worker has no reason to be ashamed, and they are equipped for “rightly dividing” (KJV) or “correctly explaining” (NLT) the word of truth, which Ephesians 1:13 defines as “the gospel of your salvation” (KJV). Salvation is the centerpiece of the gospel, and with its eternal consequences, it is the most important message for us to be able to explain correctly. Working hard toward that ability certainly includes “study” (in our sense of the word), but it is not limited to that.

Discuss

- ? What is comparable in our own day to the useless and speculative “word-fighting” Paul sought to prohibit? What is its effect on those exposed to it? What should be done to rid the church of it?
- ? How can a believer “work hard” to receive God's approval? Why is this important since we are accepted already by God “in Christ,” on the basis of His saving work?



Part 3—Commit to Disciple Fellow Believers

Say: Jesus called His first disciples with the words, “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!” (Matthew 4:19, NLT). All of Jesus' followers should know how to bring people to Him. And we should model and teach evangelism to others, encouraging them to grow in this area. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Because Philemon and his church were intimately acquainted with Onesimus's story, Paul didn't include all the details we might want to know. We do know Onesimus, Philemon's slave, had likely wronged Philemon in some way—perhaps stealing from him—and then ran away. Onesimus may have sought Paul out and come to him for counsel, even requesting that he act as a mediator with Philemon.

We also know Paul led Onesimus to the Lord: "I became his father in the faith while here in prison" (Philemon 10, NLT). Onesimus, whose name was common for a slave and meant "useful," had become useful on another level. When Paul made this play on words in verse 11, he was not implying Onesimus was someone to be used; rather, he was explaining that coming to know Jesus had brought real change and imparted true worth to Onesimus's life.

Paul wrote this letter on behalf of Onesimus to Philemon and the church that met in his house, probably in the city of Colossae. Whatever the prior relationship and conflict between Philemon and Onesimus, they were now brothers in the Lord (verse 10). Paul never overtly questions why Philemon didn't lead Onesimus to the Lord, but by setting this example of "fishing for people," Paul challenged Philemon and his church to do better. He sent Onesimus back to face Philemon so that Onesimus could repent and Philemon could show kindness.

Discuss

- ? How should Paul's method of handling Onesimus be an example for us?
- ? What are some ways we can show the kind of radical forgiveness and hospitality that Paul asked Philemon to show?

□ Appeal to Philemon as a Brother

Philemon 13–16



Say: You've probably heard the saying, "Give someone a fish and you feed them for a day; teach them to fish and you feed them for a lifetime." This sums up the way Paul disciplined Philemon. He did not merely want to get Philemon to *act* like a Christian in this situation; he wanted to teach Philemon how to *think* like a Christian. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul had made plain in Philemon 8–9 that his authoritative position gave him warrant to command Philemon's obedience, but he preferred to make it a request. Paul reiterated that he wanted Philemon to want to comply, not to be compelled (verse 14). Verse 13 implies that Paul wanted Onesimus to join his missionary efforts, working alongside him while he continued to minister from prison. If Philemon would allow this, it would be like Philemon himself was helping Paul.

Verses 15 and 16 indicate Paul's heart for reconciliation between these men who were now brothers in Christ. This was a new relationship, transformed by the gospel and infused with God's love. The King James Version follows the Greek quite well in verse 16, declaring Onesimus "a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord." It suggests that this brotherhood should not be confined to the spiritual, but should make a difference in the daily, practical world. It seems Paul desired not only Philemon's consent to allow

Onesimus to work with Paul, but for Onesimus to be free, as well: “He is no longer like a slave to you” (verse 16, NLT). Their working relationship needed to change.

Paul did not compel Philemon’s obedience. Rather, he embodied the gospel of Jesus Christ, demonstrating what it would look like if Philemon continued to learn and grow, becoming more mature and Christlike. This experience would change both Onesimus and Philemon. The fact that the church preserved this letter suggests that the outcome was indeed positive. There can be incredible benefits to the Kingdom when believers exhort one another to follow Jesus wholeheartedly.



Resource Packet Item 3: The Rest of Onesimus’s Story

Distribute the worksheet and have students consider how God might use them to bring someone to Jesus and change the trajectory of their life.

Discuss

? In what ways do you relate to Philemon? To Onesimus? To Paul?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: God desires for us to be living examples to fellow believers, acknowledging the struggles we face and guiding others to meet their own challenges. Jesus’ suffering gives meaning to our struggles, and His resurrection gives us life. As we follow Him faithfully, we should continually teach and learn from one another so that the Kingdom continues to grow.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Identify three believers who you know are following your example as you follow Jesus.
- What is one way you could be a better example for those three people?
- Begin each day this week with the prayer, “Conform my life to Yours today, Jesus!”

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Will You Commit to Discipleship?
1 Kings 19:11–21

Tuesday:

Will You Remain Faithful?
2 Kings 2:1–9

Wednesday:

Will You Choose to Disciple Others?
2 Kings 2:10–18

Thursday:

Will You Follow Me?
Mark 8:27–36

Friday:

Do You Understand My Example?
Matthew 26:26–35

Saturday:

Will You Follow My Direction?
John 21:15–23

July 14, 2024

LESSON 7

Examples of Christian Mentoring

Introducing the Study

Study Text

1 Timothy 5:1–4; 2 Timothy 2:1–2;
Titus 2:1–15

Central Truth

God uses a variety of relationships in churches to produce change in His people.



Key Verse

Titus 2:7–8

In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that cannot be condemned (KJV).

You yourself must be an example to them by doing good works of every kind. Let everything you do reflect the integrity and seriousness of your teaching. Teach the truth so that your teaching can't be criticized (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand the mentoring relationship and its importance.
- Students will embrace a vision for the church as a family of believers learning and growing together.
- Students will care for widows and others in need and speak out against injustice.

Say: Today we'll be looking at mentoring relationships, discussing why and how they are important. In his book, *The Mentor Leader*, former NFL coach Tony Dungy says mentoring involves “shaping, nurturing, empowering, and growing. It’s all about relationships, integrity, and perpetual learning. Success is measured in changed lives, strong character, and eternal values rather than in material gain, temporal achievement, or status.”¹ When we foster these kinds of relationships in the church, everyone in the family of God benefits.

Opening Activity—Mentors and Mentees

Ask: If you've ever been a mentor or a mentee, would you tell us about your experience?

Say: Mentoring relationships can be valuable in many areas of life. In the church family, such relationships are intended to nurture Christian growth. Although the Bible doesn't include the word *mentor*, Paul both described and modeled mentoring in his pastoral letters. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Mentoring is a relatively new concept, although it is built on ancient principles and practices. It usually involves an older, more experienced individual guiding a younger person's growth, learning, and development. Old Testament examples include Moses and Joshua, Eli and Samuel, Elijah and Elisha, and Mordecai and Esther. In the New Testament, Paul mentors Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, who then learn to mentor others.

1. Tony Dungy, *The Mentor Leader* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2010), xviii.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

1 Timothy 5:1. Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren;

Titus 2:1. But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine:

2. That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience.

6. Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded.

7. In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity,

8. Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.

1 Timothy 5:2. The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity.

3. Honor widows that are widows indeed.

4. But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God.

Titus 2:3. The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things;

4. That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children,

5. To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.

Titus 2:11. For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

12. Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;

13. Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ;

14. Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

15. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.

New Living Translation

1 Timothy 5:1. Never speak harshly to an older man, but appeal to him respectfully as you would to your own father. Talk to younger men as you would to your own brothers.

Titus 2:1. As for you, Titus, promote the kind of living that reflects wholesome teaching.

2. Teach the older men to exercise self-control, to be worthy of respect, and to live wisely. They must have sound faith and be filled with love and patience.

6. In the same way, encourage the young men to live wisely.

7. And you yourself must be an example to them by doing good works of every kind. Let everything you do reflect the integrity and seriousness of your teaching.

8. Teach the truth so that your teaching can't be criticized. Then those who oppose us will be ashamed and have nothing bad to say about us.

1 Timothy 5:2. Treat older women as you would your mother, and treat younger women with all purity as you would your own sisters.

3. Take care of any widow who has no one else to care for her.

4. But if she has children or grandchildren, their first responsibility is to show godliness at home and repay their parents by taking care of them. This is something that pleases God.

Titus 2:3. Similarly, teach the older women to live in a way that honors God. They must not slander others or be heavy drinkers. Instead, they should teach others what is good.

4. These older women must train the younger women to love their husbands and their children,

5. to live wisely and be pure, to work in their homes, to do good, and to be submissive to their husbands. Then they will not bring shame on the word of God.

Titus 2:11. For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people.

12. And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God,

13. while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed.

14. He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds.

15. You must teach these things and encourage the believers to do them. You have the authority to correct them when necessary, so don't let anyone disregard what you say.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)

Part 1—Men Mentoring Men

□ Men of Different Ages

1 Timothy 5:1; Titus 2:2,6



Say: It's clear that Paul took family relationships very seriously. His letters usually addressed the churches as “brothers and sisters,” reinforcing the reality that all believers are adopted into God's family. As children of God, we have been grafted into a family unit that embodies love, acceptance, forgiveness, and growth. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul instructed Timothy not to let anyone look down on him because of his youth, but he was still instructed to show deference for older people—both men and women. He was a spiritual leader in the church, but that authority was not to be wielded without proper respect. Instead of rebuking them harshly, he should treat them as he would treat his parents (1 Timothy 5:1). Even when people need correction, the virtues of gentleness and kindness are still in order.

Paul gave Titus greater detail about the kinds of qualities that should be encouraged, particularly focusing on the older men who would set the example for the younger (Titus 2:2). They must be “sober” (NLT) or moderate with regard to alcohol or, more broadly, “exercise self-control.” (The Greek word could mean either.) They must be worthy of respect, as both male and female deacons were to be (1 Timothy 3:8,11).

Older men must also live wisely. The Greek term points to being prudent, thoughtful, and self-controlled. They should have sound (wholesome and true) love, patience, and faith—a quality frequently emphasized in the pastoral letters.

In Titus 2:6, Paul spoke about younger men. They must also live “wisely” (NLT). The verb used here refers to being prudent with an emphasis on self-control: “be reasonable, sensible, serious, keep one's head.”² It may be inferred that such young men will grow and become wise as they follow the example and guidance of older men and church leaders.

Discuss

- ? What habits and practices cement the loving environment in healthy families? How can the church nurture a strong, positive family environment?
- ? Why is it important for Christians to be able to “keep their head” and live wisely and prudently in this world? Who exemplifies that quality for you?



Resource Packet Item 1: A Great Mentor

Distribute the worksheet and read the characteristics of a great mentor. Add your own ideas, and then discuss the questions together.

□ Embodying Wholesome Teaching

Titus 2:1,7–8



Say: When our walk matches our talk, we can have a powerful witness—sharing the message not just with our words, but with our actions. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

2. William Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 986.

Framing the passage that provides guidelines for older and younger members of the church are Paul's instructions for Titus himself. Titus was to "promote the kind of living that reflects wholesome teaching" (Titus 2:1, *NLT*). It is true that actions speak louder than words, but words are necessary too. These verses demand that words and actions line up, creating an integrated witness that will reinforce the truth of the message. Ministers of the gospel, along with all Christians called to bear witness for the Lord, cannot say one thing and do another.

This author was grateful to parents whose talk and walk did not diverge. What was said and done in gatherings of the church had to be consistent with life at home, in the neighborhood, and in the community throughout the week. Nothing else could have spoken so clearly to their children of the authenticity and truth of their faith. Even today, followers of Christ are called to bear that kind of witness.

When Titus set an example for the believers, his good works would spur them on to love and good deeds (verse 7). This collective integrity would shame those who opposed their teaching (verse 8). Ideally, in Paul's consistently redemptive framework, this shame would lead to repentance and acceptance of the truth, and God's good news would march ever forward, transforming lives and entire communities.

Imagine a world in which the wholesome, healthy, sound teaching of Scripture permeates every relationship and situation! That is why we pray, as Jesus taught us, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10, *KJV*). All of Paul's exhortations, inspired by the Holy Spirit, nurture speech and actions aimed toward that ultimate purpose.

Discuss

- ? Did you come to the Lord due to someone's words or their actions? Which of these has more directly influenced your growth in the Lord?
- ? Do you model consistency? Do your coworkers see the same "you" that your fellow church members see?



Part 2—Women Mentors and Widows

□ Care for Widows

1 Timothy 5:2–4

Say: In 1 Timothy 5:2–4, Paul continued the analogy of the family with respect to Timothy's treatment of older and younger women. Timothy was instructed to treat older women like he would his mother and younger women as he would his sister: "with all purity" (verse 2, *NLT*). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

This word *purity* highlights one of the several ways in which Timothy was to be an example to the believers (1 Timothy 4:12). It was also a quality particularly called for in this relationship; in context, Paul may have been specifically referring to "chastity."

Widows were a group of women to whom Timothy was to give special care. Particularly those who are "widows indeed" (1 Timothy 5:3, *KJV*)—those who are truly alone and have "no one else to care for" them (*NLT*)—are to be honored, which includes caring for them materially.

In ancient times, widows were among the most needy members of society. Women had few options but to rely on men for support. The Law demonstrated the heart of God for widows: Israel was commanded to care for them (see Deuteronomy 10:18; 14:29). James 1:27 describes caring for widows and orphans (another at-risk population) as “pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father” (KJV).

Paul made clear that those who have the primary responsibility for a widow’s care are her children and grandchildren. This kind of respect and honor pleases God and is directly connected to the family members’ own godliness. (The word translated “nephews” in the King James Version, which occurs only once in the New Testament, refers to those born of or descended from someone. “Grandchildren” [NLT] is a better translation.)

Widows without such descendants to care for them are to be cared for by the church family. The command for Timothy and the church to “honor” them, using the same term as the fifth commandment (Exodus 20:12), makes clear that these widows should receive the same treatment and care as biological parents are entitled to receive.

Discuss

- ? Share some ways you have seen families do a good job of caring for their aging relatives. What does this communicate to others?
- ? Our society has programs in place to help provide for widows, so what should be the church’s role in their care?

□ Women of Different Ages

Titus 2:3–5



Say: Paul instructed Titus regarding the qualities he should encourage among older and younger women—just as he had earlier done concerning the men in the church. What he implied about the men’s relationships, he prescribed for the women’s: the older were to teach and the younger were to learn. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Titus was to teach the older women to exhibit God-honoring behavior. They were not to be slanderous, falsely accusing others. Paul had warned Timothy that slander would be common in the last days (2 Timothy 3:3). Nor were these older women to be heavy drinkers, as we have also seen in other lists for church leaders. “Instead, they should teach others what is good” (Titus 2:3, NLT).

Older women were to encourage and instruct their younger counterparts in good and wise living; younger women were to love their husbands and children. Rather than supporting any cultural assumption that women of this age must be married, there is some evidence that false teaching in the first century was subverting God-given marital and childbearing roles (1 Timothy 4:3; 5:14), so the older women’s good teaching and faithful example was especially critical. The admonition for the younger women to “live wisely” (Titus 2:5, NLT) is among the most frequent in the pastoral letters.

Operating the household was a primary responsibility of women in that culture (see 1 Timothy 5:14). Older women were encouraged to teach younger women “to

work in their homes, to do good, and to be submissive to their husbands” (Titus 2:5, NLT). The function of a Christian household hinges on respect, flowing from complete relational transformation by the power of the Holy Spirit. The testimony of such a household keeps the gospel from being disparaged and contributes to a good reputation and witness before outsiders (see 1 Timothy 3:7; 5:14).



Resource Packet Item 2: The Gospel Unhindered

Distribute the worksheet and allow a few minutes for students to read and process the information. Then discuss the questions together.

Discuss

- ? How have cultural changes affected the application of Paul’s instructions for women to be “keepers at home”?
- ? In what ways might you be able to learn from people farther along in their walk with Christ?



Part 3—Encourage Good and Pure Behavior

□ This Evil World

Titus 2:9–12

Say: We live in a world filled with evil prejudice, but we can rise above injustice through the power of the Holy Spirit. In Paul’s time, slavery was a demeaning reality, although it wasn’t racially based. In this portion of his letter to Titus, Paul offered guidance for how Christian slaves should “live in this evil world” (Titus 2:12, NLT). Titus could be instrumental in mentoring people for whom physical freedom was not an option. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Christian slaves were to be submissive (the same term used regarding young wives in Titus 2:5), working to please their masters. They were not to talk back or steal but demonstrate goodness and trustworthiness. Why? So they would “make the teaching about God our Savior attractive in every way” (verse 10, NLT). Believing slaves could serve as examples and mentors to others.

The grace of God brings salvation to all who accept Christ. While that position will last throughout eternity, all earthly roles are temporary. Paul encouraged those trapped in degrading power structures to keep their eyes fixed on eternal things. “Are you a slave? Don’t let that worry you—but if you get a chance to be free, take it. And remember, if you were a slave when the Lord called you, you are now free in the Lord. And if you were free when the Lord called you, you are now a slave of Christ” (1 Corinthians 7:21–22, NLT).

It is not that unjust systems like slavery are insignificant or shouldn’t be opposed! Throughout Scripture, God acted—and commanded His people to act—on behalf of the oppressed. Christian voices, like Paul’s, must be at the leading edge of opposition to injustice in every form and in every era.

The world is held captive to Satan, but in Christ we are free. Our mission is to embody the good news by turning away from sin and living “in this evil world with

wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God” (Titus 2:12, *NLT*). Instead of being consumed with our own rights and entitlements, Paul would have us focus on seeing God liberate others through the salvation of their souls.

Discuss

- ? What cultural practices or life circumstances can sometimes distract us from accomplishing God’s work in our communities?
- ? What should be the role of Christians in responding to injustice in our world?



Resource Packet Item 3: You’re the Mentor

Distribute the case studies and divide the class into small groups. Assign one case study to each group to discuss. After a few minutes, ask them to share their thoughts with the class, and then discuss the best course of action.

□ Looking Forward with Hope

Titus 2:13–15



Say: What sustains followers of Christ as they struggle to be a light in this dark world? “Looking for that blessed hope” (Titus 2:13, *KJV*)! This unshakable hope is a key quality to pass on to those in our sphere of influence. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Our blessed hope is the great future awaiting us when Jesus Christ returns in glory. If Peter, James, and John were in awe at the transfiguration of Jesus, imagine the splendor of His coming on the clouds with heavenly hosts of angels.

Strengthened with this future hope and living presently in Christ’s victorious, liberating power, His followers grow as He purifies us. We are “a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14, *KJV*). It’s interesting how words change over time! Today we might wonder, “Why does God want us to be odd, strange people?” But in 1611 (when the King James Version was created), the word *peculiar* carried a meaning closer to the original Greek word, which means “chosen” or “special.” It is the same word used in the Greek translation of Exodus 19:5, where God says, “You will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth” (*NLT*).

As Jesus’ very own people, we must be “totally committed to doing good deeds” (Titus 2:14, *NLT*). Jesus commanded us to be “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14–16). When the world sees our good deeds, they will start to understand who our Father is and will praise and glorify Him. Titus was instructed to “teach these things and encourage the believers to do them” (Titus 2:15, *NLT*). Paul reminded Titus of his calling and responsibility to lead, exhort, and correct the people under his care.

Discuss

- ? Given the current state of this world, what encouragement do you find in these verses? What do you think it will be like to live in the fully realized kingdom of God?
- ? According to verse 14, what has Jesus done for us, and what were His purposes? How does your life reflect these truths?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Paul's friends and coworkers have been our mentoring companions the past few weeks. Let's continue that relationship for years to come, returning to these texts again and again and asking the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to new people we can reach and new ways He can use us. May we fan into flame the gifts God has given us. May we courageously live for Jesus, truly living as God's special people in this present age.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Plan a tangible way to help a widow or other potentially vulnerable person in your neighborhood or church family.
- Ask God to open doors that will place you in a mentoring relationship in your church, either as a mentor or a mentee.
- Prayerfully evaluate your stance on societal injustices, inviting the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Mentoring through Tragic Seasons. Ruth 1:14–22

Tuesday:

Godly Friends Mirror the Redeemer. Job 19:19–27

Wednesday:

The Spirit Guides All Ages. Joel 2:21–29

Thursday:

Women Participate in Christ's Work. Luke 7:44 through 8:3

Friday:

Allow Christ to Transform Your Group. Acts 16:5–15

Saturday:

Be Encouraged by Biblical Examples. Hebrews 11:32 through 12:2

Non-Davidic Psalms

We usually think of King David as the author of the Book of Psalms. After all, he wrote some of the most familiar—including Psalm 23, Psalm 51, and Psalm 139. However, many different authors contributed to this biblical songbook—and all of them were writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

This unit explores a few psalms written by authors other than King David, also called “non-davidic psalms.” Their truths are woven throughout all of Scripture, making them part of the beautiful tapestry of God’s Word. ▼ *(To learn more about the authors of the Book of Psalms, play the video available at RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult.)*

The following lessons focus on the nature of God and the relationship we can have with Him day by day. You’ll notice that many of the psalms we study have both a prophetic function and an immediate function for those who would use them in worship.

“Come, everyone! Clap your hands! Shout to God with joyful praise!” (Psalm 47:1, NLT). The unit opens with a lesson on the Messiah’s universal reign as prophesied in Psalms 45 and 47, both written by the descendants of Korah. We can have joy and peace in the assurance that He will reign in eternity and we can be part of His kingdom.

“The Lord, the Mighty One, is God, and he has spoken” (Psalm 50:1, NLT). Lesson 9 looks at Psalm 50, which was written by Asaph and celebrates the transcendence and sovereignty of God. Our relationship with Him cannot exist apart from these facets of His character. When we recognize and acknowledge His utter uniqueness and holy power, we cannot help but praise Him.

“How good it is to be near God!” (Psalm 73:28, NLT). The next two lessons cover Psalms 73 (written by Asaph) and 84 (written by the descendants of Korah). Both psalms highlight the confidence we can have in God and the blessings of living in His presence. Whatever difficulties we face, His presence brings peace and comfort.

“From beginning to end, you are God” (Psalm 90:2, NLT). Lesson 12 looks at Psalm 90, which was written by Moses, and observes the contrast between our own mortality and the eternal existence of God.

“Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty” (Psalm 91:1, NLT). In Lesson 13, we conclude the unit by returning to the concept of God’s presence and the refuge He offers. The unknown author of Psalm 91 paints a beautiful word picture of what it’s like to live under God’s shadow.

July 21, 2024

LESSON

8

The Messiah's Universal Reign

Introducing the Study

Say: Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He has conquered death, hell, and the grave and has been given all power and authority. However, what does it truly mean when Christians say that Jesus is Lord? Sometimes it's easier for us to quote Scripture and repeat church concepts than to identify the practical ways Jesus is Lord in our everyday lives.

Opening Activity—Jesus Is Lord

Ask: In what specific areas should Jesus be Lord of your life? Through what behaviors should His lordship be demonstrated?

Say: It's important for Christians not to simply say that Jesus is Lord but to show His lordship in their thoughts and actions. Jesus doesn't have a merely religious lordship. Instead, He is Lord over all creation and every part of a Christian's life. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The promise of a Messiah, or Savior, was something the Jewish people had been waiting on since God's promise to Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:15). God's promise was that He would bring hope and a Kingdom unlike any other. His rule would be full of justice and mercy and would bring the sinful world back into alignment with God. Although the Messiah's first arrival may not have happened the way the Jews expected, Jesus is coming again to establish a physical kingdom on earth, and those who worship Him now will live with Him forever.

Study Text

Psalms 45:1–8; 47:1–9

Central Truth

The Lord Jesus Christ will rule in truth and justice over all the earth.



Key Verse Psalm 47:2–3

For the Lord most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth. He shall subdue the people under us, and the nations under our feet (KJV).

For the Lord Most High is awesome. He is the great King of all the earth. He subdues the nations before us, putting our enemies beneath our feet (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand the love of Jesus through His lordship.
- Students will evaluate the areas of their lives that they have not allowed Jesus to rule.
- Students will choose to submit and worship Jesus out of love and appreciation.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Psalms 45:1. My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer.

2. Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever.

3. Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty.

4. And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things.

5. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; whereby the people fall under thee.

6. Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre.

7. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

8. All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad.

Psalms 47:1. O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph.

2. For the LORD most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth.

3. He shall subdue the people under us, and the nations under our feet.

4. He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom he loved. Selah.

5. God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet.

6. Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises.

7. For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding.

8. God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness.

9. The princes of the people are gathered together, even the people of the God of Abraham: for the shields of the earth belong unto God: he is greatly exalted.

New Living Translation

Psalms 45:1. Beautiful words stir my heart. I will recite a lovely poem about the king, for my tongue is like the pen of a skillful poet.

2. You are the most handsome of all. Gracious words stream from your lips. God himself has blessed you forever.

3. Put on your sword, O mighty warrior! You are so glorious, so majestic!

4. In your majesty, ride out to victory, defending truth, humility, and justice. Go forth to perform awe-inspiring deeds!

5. Your arrows are sharp, piercing your enemies' hearts. The nations fall beneath your feet.

6. Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever. You rule with a scepter of justice.

7. You love justice and hate evil. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you, pouring out the oil of joy on you more than on anyone else.

8. Myrrh, aloes, and cassia perfume your robes. In ivory palaces the music of strings entertains you.

Psalms 47:1. Come, everyone! Clap your hands! Shout to God with joyful praise!

2. For the LORD Most High is awesome. He is the great King of all the earth.

3. He subdues the nations before us, putting our enemies beneath our feet.

4. He chose the Promised Land as our inheritance, the proud possession of Jacob's descendants, whom he loves. *Interlude*

5. God has ascended with a mighty shout. The LORD has ascended with trumpets blaring.

6. Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises!

7. For God is the King over all the earth. Praise him with a psalm.

8. God reigns above the nations, sitting on his holy throne.

9. The rulers of the world have gathered together with the people of the God of Abraham. For all the kings of the earth belong to God. He is highly honored everywhere.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Part 1—Majesty of the Messiah-King

□ Glory to the King

Psalm 45:1–5

Say: Psalm 45 is considered a royal psalm, since it was intended to be used during a royal wedding. During the exile, this psalm was read with hope for the restoration of the Davidic dynasty as promised. Through the lens of this hope, the writer of Hebrews applied this psalm to Jesus directly, quoting Psalm 45:6–7. (See Hebrews 1:8–9.) As we talk about this psalm, think about how it applies to the readers before and after Jesus came to earth. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The author of Psalm 45 was a member of the musical guild called the sons (or descendants) of Korah. He began by recognizing the king's good looks and gracious words, noting how God had blessed the king. This complimentary introduction quickly highlighted the responsibilities bestowed upon a king by God. The author called for the king to take up his weapons and "ride out to victory, defending truth, humility, and justice" (verse 4, *NLT*). A primary function of the king was to bring about the justice of God upon His enemies and rule the people in righteousness.

The king's ability to fight for God's people enabled him to bring peace and prosperity to the nation. His battles were intended to defend truth, humility, and justice. He is then described as bringing the nations beneath his feet (verse 5). This victory is not for the king's glory but the glory of the God he serves. Just as the king's victory would bring prosperity to the people, his victories over other nations would align them with the will of God. The overall purpose of the king was to bless God's people and do His will among the nations.

The blessings given to the king mentioned by the author of this psalm could be connected to kings of the line of David. The kings of this lineage received a special anointing through David, who asked that his house continue forever before God (2 Samuel 7:29). The Psalmist may have been addressing this anointed line of kings and charging the reigning king to rule with the same qualities David possessed.

Discuss

- ? In what ways have you been blessed by following godly leaders?
- ? What are ways that you can bless others through your leadership?



□ Jesus Is King

Psalm 45:6–8

Say: In Hebrews 1:8–9, the author quoted from this psalm and identified its subject as Jesus. As a King from the line of David, Jesus fulfilled the promises made to David that his throne would be established forever (2 Samuel 7:16). The Psalmist used poetic expressions to describe this great Son of David. His vivid imagery brings to mind the glory of the Messiah. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Psalmist first recognized that the throne ultimately belongs to God. However, Jesus, being the Son of God and redeeming sacrifice, has earned the right to sit on the throne. The representation of His authority and righteousness is depicted by mentioning his “scepter of justice” (Psalm 45:6, NLT; see Hebrews 1:8). Jesus rules as an eternal King who truly upholds all of the laws of God. The Psalmist furthered this description by saying that the king loves justice and hates evil. Due to His desire for righteousness, God has anointed Him more than anyone else. Jesus establishes and maintains His eternal rule through His righteousness and justice, bringing all nations under himself and aligning with God’s laws forever and ever.

The reference to His robes, spices, and music (Psalm 45:8) affirmed that He is being celebrated for His greatness. It may seem harsh to view Jesus as a ruling king that brings nations beneath Him, but looking at His character and this poetic description, it is clear that His people love Him. Jesus is a King full of mercy and grace and righteousness and justice. Submitting to His leadership brings blessing and hope for an eternal future. Jesus is the perfect King for all eternity.

Discuss

- ? Do you see this psalm applying only to Jesus or to all God-ordained kings from the line of David? Why or why not?
- ? What are the benefits you experience daily by following Jesus as the King of your life?



Resource Packet Item 1: Identify the Prophecy

Distribute the worksheet and assign each row to a different individual or small group. After a few minutes, discuss the answers together.

Part 2—Messiah’s Reign over the Nations

□ A Call to Praise

Psalm 47:1–2



Say: Psalm 47 was also written by a member of the sons of Korah. It’s a prophetic psalm with now-and-later significance, calling the people to worship God the Father but also pointing forward to a celebration of Jesus as the King of kings. The command to worship Him is given to all nations of the earth, not just a select few. As the idea of Jesus’ kingship is explored throughout the psalm, it’s clear that the reason for rejoicing is God’s faithfulness. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Psalm 47:1–2, “everyone” (NLT) is commanded to praise God, showing that Jesus’ victory and kingship are universal. The apostle Paul wrote that at the mention of Jesus’ name, every knee would bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord (Philippians 2:10–11). Regardless of race, nationality, ethnicity, or any other construct that may divide people, Jesus is sovereign over all. Those who have chosen Him as their Lord should “shout to God with joyful praise” (Psalm 47:1, NLT) because they are allowed to participate in His victory. Praising God reminds His people that every victory belongs to Him and every blessing comes from Him.

Psalm 47:2 explains the reason for the rejoicing. God is described as the Most High. The Psalmist's words are translated into two English words with similar meanings: "Most High" and "great"—meaning "awesome" and "feared." It is awe-inspiring to know that God loved humanity enough to give His Son as a sacrifice; it is humbling to know that He has power to bring righteous justice to all creation.

Discuss

- ? What attributes of God cause you to want to praise Him?
- ? How does praising God readjust your focus on Him?



□ What Has He Done for You?

Psalm 47:3–4

Say: The apostle Peter charged believers to be ready at any time to explain the reason for their hope in Jesus (1 Peter 3:15). It's often a personal testimony, not a well-crafted sermon, that initially draws people to Jesus. The people of this world are looking for something to believe in that's powerful, impactful, and authentic. And testimonies are powerful. In fact, they're one of the tools believers use in the Book of Revelation to defeat the accuser (12:11). The author of Psalm 47 next reviewed some of the awesome things God had done for His people, so that they would be reminded of their reason to praise. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Psalm 47:3, the Psalmist reminded all of Israel that God "subdues the nations before us, putting our enemies beneath our feet" (NLT). Israel was very small compared to the countries they had defeated. But by obeying God, they defeated the many inhabitants of Canaan, who had been initially described as giants (Numbers 13:33). The Psalmist then reminded Israel that the land of Canaan was given to them as an inheritance because of the promises God made to Jacob (Psalm 47:4). These reminders showed Israel that God was mighty enough to conquer their enemies and mindful enough to fulfill His promises.

Christians have the same promises in Jesus. Our enemies—death, hell, and the grave—were brought under subjection to Christ, making a pathway for a new life for those who believe in Him. His defeat of sin and gift of the Holy Spirit empowers Christians to take new territory in His name. Just as Israel was reminded of their reasons to praise God, Christians should also remember the testimonies of countless people who have been given new life through Christ.

Discuss

- ? Why did you decide to accept Jesus into your life as Lord and Savior?
- ? What victories has God won in your life?



Resource Packet Item 2: King Jesus

Distribute the worksheet, and encourage students to read it at home for personal reflection or as a family devotion.



Say: Days before His crucifixion, Jesus said, “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself” (John 12:32, NLT). These words that indicated “how he was going to die” (verse 13, NLT) also bring to mind Old Testament imagery of God ascending in His glory and drawing every eye to himself. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

After an interlude, Psalm 47 resumes with, “God has ascended with a mighty shout. The Lord has ascended with trumpets blaring” (verse 5, NLT). The ark of the covenant represented God’s presence, and it was carried before the Israelites when they marched into battle, signifying that God went with them. In an act of worship after the temple was completed, the ark was carried up Mount Zion and placed in the Most Holy Place of the temple. Whether they were entering into battle or worship, the one true God was to be lifted above all others. The same is true of Jesus. He was raised on the cross and then ascended into the heavens after His resurrection. Jesus was lifted up, bringing eternal victory for all who believe in Him. There’s no greater reason to praise God.

The Psalmist called again for his audience to shout and sing praises to the King (Psalm 47:6). However, this exclamation carried greater intensity, using A-B-A-B poetic form, alternating back and forth between the parallel ideas of lordship and praise. We are to “sing praises to God” and “sing praises to our King” (NLT)—which aligns with the descriptions of Jesus given in the New Testament.

In Revelation 19:16, Jesus is given the titles, “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” (KJV). He has ascended and will be crowned above all other rulers. Jesus is also part of the Godhead. Beyond Jesus’ references to being one with the Father, the apostle Thomas outright calls Jesus, “my Lord and my God” (John 20:28, NLT). When a person comes to the knowledge of Jesus as both Lord and God of their life, the natural response should be praise.

Christians must understand all aspects of who Jesus is in their lives. He is not only the Messiah, the Great Teacher, or the Friend of sinners. He is also our God, our Master, and the just and righteous Lord. Jesus deserves the highest praise anyone can give because He is all these things and more. Because “God is the King over all the earth,” we should “praise him with a psalm” (Psalm 47:7, NLT).

Discuss

- ? Do you sometimes only recognize a few aspects of who Jesus is based on your current need? Explain why.
- ? What can Christians do to remind themselves that Jesus is more than our Savior, but also our God?



Say: When Jesus was physically lifted on the cross, He became victorious over sin. Jesus' victory fulfilled many prophecies and paved the way for all people to be drawn to Him—both then and now. God has truly put all things under the authority of King Jesus—the only One who is worthy to be praised (1 Corinthians 15:27). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Psalmist finishes his call to worship by declaring that God is the ruler of all, reigning over all nations and their kings from His holy throne (Psalm 47:8). “All the kings of the earth belong to God. He is highly honored everywhere” (verse 9, NLT).

The victory that Jesus accomplished was not just for the descendants of Abraham, but for all people. He exercises His authority to reign over all the nations of the earth not with the cruel authority of a dictator, but with perfect love and justice. His leadership and ultimate rule are for the benefit of everyone who follows and loves Him. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus provided salvation while also conquering every power on earth and making a way for anyone to be reconciled to God. Because of all Jesus has done in obedience to God,

God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9–11, NLT)

When we consider the full measure of who Jesus is and all He has done, our response should be to praise Him with everything we have.

Discuss

- ? When you first understood how Jesus suffered for your sake, how did that knowledge impact your thoughts and behaviors?
- ? Explain a few ways that Jesus can be “lifted up” in your life.



Resource Packet Item 3: Ways to Praise

Distribute the worksheet, and encourage students to take it home and work on it through the week.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Jesus was not simply a sacrifice offered in our place. He is the Son of God, Savior of the world, and soon-coming King. We must remember that His lordship doesn't only relate to the areas of our lives we see as religious, but He should be Lord over every part of who we are. One day, when every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord, how blessed we will be to have chosen Him now. We truly owe Jesus everything. What better response than to worship and serve Him as our Lord?

Ministry in Action

- Evaluate whether Jesus is Lord over every area of your life.
- Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and the victory He has provided.
- Seek opportunities every day to share Jesus' love with others.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Christ's Victory over Satan
Foretold. Genesis 3:13–15

Tuesday:

Futility of the Nations' Opposition.
Psalm 2:1–12

Wednesday:

The Father Gives the Son
Dominion. Daniel 7:13–14

Thursday:

Jesus Identifies Himself as
Messiah. Matthew 26:62–65

Friday:

Jesus' Warning to Be Ready.
Luke 21:34–36

Saturday:

Jesus' Glorious Return.
Revelation 19:11–16

July 28, 2024

LESSON

9

The Transcendent and Sovereign God

Study Text

Psalms 50:1–23

Central Truth

Almighty God is sovereign, transcendent, and worthy of all glory and praise.



Key Verse

Psalms 50:1

The mighty God, even the Lord, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof (KJV).

The Lord, the Mighty One, is God, and he has spoken; he has summoned all humanity from where the sun rises to where it sets (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand that God is the creator, judge, and ruler of all things.
- Students will evaluate their inner motives to ensure they serve with the right heart.
- Students will choose to serve God out of thanksgiving and worship.

Introducing the Study

Say: Some believe that the ends justify the means when it comes to their service to God. They think it doesn't matter why they do something as long as it helps. Many religious habits are performed weekly without concern for their true purpose. However, motivation matters. God, as the Creator of everything, judges the actions of His followers by the intent of their hearts.

Opening Activity—Religious Habits

Ask: What activities in your life would you classify as religious habits? What is the purpose behind them, and do you have a Scripture to support them? Example: Praying before a meal. Jesus showed an example of giving thanks before eating (Matthew 14:19, Matthew 15:36); Paul also followed this example (Acts 27:35).

Say: Christians must evaluate their actions and why they do them to ensure that their motives are correct. Though something may seem good, it's essential that we ask if it's biblical and if the motivation is right. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Israel's religious practice of sacrifice had fallen into the trap of repetition and had become almost a mindless act of worship. Though they may have felt that the act of sacrifice was enough, God made it clear that the condition of their hearts was more important than their sacrifice. God sees beyond the outward appearance of a person's actions and can see into the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). Christians must remember that they, too, are susceptible to this folly. As Israel learned, religious practices that do not engage the heart are unacceptable to God.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Psalm 50:1. The mighty God, even the LORD, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof.

2. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined.

3. Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him.

4. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people.

5. Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.

6. And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself. Selah.

7. Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God.

8. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before me.

9. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds.

10. For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills.

11. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine.

12. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof.

13. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?

14. Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High:

15. And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.

16. But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?

17. Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee.

21. These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.

23. Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.

New Living Translation

Psalm 50:1. The LORD, the Mighty One, is God, and he has spoken; he has summoned all humanity from where the sun rises to where it sets.

2. From Mount Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines in glorious radiance.

3. Our God approaches, and he is not silent. Fire devours everything in his way, and a great storm rages around him.

4. He calls on the heavens above and earth below to witness the judgment of his people.

5. "Bring my faithful people to me—those who made a covenant with me by giving sacrifices."

6. Then let the heavens proclaim his justice, for God himself will be the judge. *Interlude*

7. "O my people, listen as I speak. Here are my charges against you, O Israel: I am God, your God!

8. I have no complaint about your sacrifices or the burnt offerings you constantly offer.

9. But I do not need the bulls from your barns or the goats from your pens.

10. For all the animals of the forest are mine, and I own the cattle on a thousand hills.

11. I know every bird on the mountains, and all the animals of the field are mine.

12. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for all the world is mine and everything in it.

13. Do I eat the meat of bulls? Do I drink the blood of goats?

14. Make thankfulness your sacrifice to God, and keep the vows you made to the Most High.

15. Then call on me when you are in trouble, and I will rescue you, and you will give me glory."

16. But God says to the wicked: "Why bother reciting my decrees and pretending to obey my covenant?

17. For you refuse my discipline and treat my words like trash."

21. "While you did all this, I remained silent, and you thought I didn't care. But now I will rebuke you, listing all my charges against you."

23. "But giving thanks is a sacrifice that truly honors me. If you keep to my path, I will reveal to you the salvation of God."

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Part 1—The Power of the Almighty

□ The Mighty One

Psalm 50:1–2

Say: God is kind, merciful, loving, and caring toward His children. These attributes are a special blessing that believers are allowed to enjoy through a relationship with Him. However, Christians can quickly become so comfortable with that relationship that they forget to whom they are speaking. God is also just, holy, and righteous. In Psalm 50, the psalmist Asaph reminds all of Israel—and anyone else who may be reading—that this is the all-powerful God who speaks to the nations. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalm 50 begins with a powerful statement of who God is. He is described as the Mighty One and God the Lord, the One who calls all people from all over the earth. These statements of absolute authority declare that God has no equal. He is the only One with the power and authority to call and judge the world. God's people must remember His authority when they come before Him in prayer. The Psalmist was intentional with his word usage in the first verse. God is first called *El*, claiming He is the one God. He is then called *Elohim*, a more general term for spiritual beings. However, it is followed up by *YHWH*, which references the name God used to identify himself to Moses. Combining these two, God declares that He is the “I AM” of spiritual beings. He is more than a great spiritual being; He is the *only* God of the covenant.

God decided to allow His holy presence to stay with His people in Jerusalem. Though God has all power, He is also the embodiment of perfection. The Psalmist describes Him as shining from Zion, also known as Jerusalem. Though God is all-powerful and above all others, He chooses to be with His people and remember His promises. Because of His presence, His people are described as “the perfection of beauty” (verse 2). His presence directly affects those around Him. Through His people, others can see the perfection of God shine. This wording reminded God's people that they represented a God of such immense power and beauty that they were forever changed. Christians must also remember that as carriers of God's Spirit, they have become that representation, and in one sense, we are the new Zion housing God's presence and showing His beauty.

Discuss

- ? Have you had a time in your relationship with God when you got too comfortable and forgot who He truly is? How did you deal with it?
- ? How can Christians show God's beauty in such a dark world?



Resource Packet Item 1: Who Is God?

Distribute the worksheet and assign one Scripture passage to each person (or small group). Have them report on the descriptions they find, and then ask everyone to share other characteristics of God.



Say: Though God is full of peace, love, and mercy, He is also full of righteousness and justice, and He will not ignore the world's wickedness. Because He is above all and the source of all goodness, He is the only one qualified to judge. The references to God coming to the earth in person to judge are echoed in the account of Jesus' return in the Book of Revelation. Jesus will return in power to judge His people and the wicked of this world. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus was sent to the earth as a substitutionary sacrifice for the world's sins. His first appearance was one of humility and servitude. When He returns to the people of this world in the last days, He will return as the Judge. Those who have not received Him as the perfect sacrifice will be judged. The Psalmist used the concepts of a devouring fire and mighty tempest to describe His return (Psalm 50:3). A devouring fire burns up the wickedness and a mighty tempest destroys all that stands in His way.

He then called to the heavens and the earth to be witnesses of the judgment of His people. These are signs of the universal judgment that all in the earthly and heavenly realms will witness. Verse 5 states that God will call to himself the faithful who made a covenant with Him through sacrifice. This statement can be applied to the Psalmist's original audience, Israel—who were justified in the law of Moses through sacrificial offerings—and to Christians today—who are justified through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

In the last days, a time of judgment will destroy the wicked. Though the righteous will escape eternal punishment, they are also judged for their actions while on the earth. God is righteous, and all will be judged based on the standards of Jesus. The author ends this section of the psalm with a statement that sums up its entire meaning and which is echoed by the apostle Paul, who said that “every tongue [will] declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:11, NLT): “Then let the heavens proclaim his justice, for God himself will be the judge” (Psalm 50:6, NLT).

Discuss

- ? How should the knowledge of Christ's soon return affect how Christians live?
- ? What can Christians do to be prepared for Christ's return daily?

Part 2—Fear the Almighty



Say: Sacrifices were made to bridge the gap between God and man as a result of sin. This process was a blessed gift, allowing people a way to reconnect with their Creator. However, as with all things, people exerted their control over the blessings of God to claim them as their own. Israel had begun to offer sacrifices as an attempt to appease or satisfy God like many of their

pagan neighbors and used sacrifices to secure blessing or stay judgment. This manipulation did not go unnoticed by God. Christians must also be sure their prayers and service to God are motivated by a spirit of love. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Psalm 50, God's first judgment against Israel is not focused on their actions but on the intent of their hearts. God focused on the true righteousness of their purpose for sacrifice and not the objects themselves. In verse 8, God clarified that He was not rebuking them for their sacrifices because they offered them constantly. He explained in verse 9 that He did not need their bulls or goats. This statement would have been jarring for Israel, as they had been instructed to offer such sacrifices to atone for sin. He explained that He is the owner of "the cattle on a thousand hills" (verse 10, NLT). God was not rejecting their sacrifices because of what they were, as He already owned them—and more—but He was rejecting the heart with which they were giving sacrifices.

Christians must remember that they can offer nothing to God that He has not already provided. Paul explained that it is God who supplies the means and desire to give, which should then be turned into thanksgiving to Him (2 Corinthians 9:10–11). Christians should be careful that their gifts to God do not become the focus of their worship. Instead, they should focus on the Giver of those gifts.

Discuss

- ? Have you ever knowingly or unknowingly used prayer or service to attempt to manipulate God into giving you what you wanted?
- ? List ways Christians can ensure God is the central focus of their worship.



Resource Packet Item 2: Healthy and Unhealthy Fear

Distribute the worksheet, read the Scriptures, and answer the questions. You may want to assign the questions to individuals or small groups and have them share their answers with the class.



A God without Need

Psalm 50:12–15

Say: God made it clear to Israel that the sacrifices offered to Him were not because He needed them. As one psalm states, "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him" (Psalm 24:1, NLT). All of the sacrifices and riches offered to God belonged to Him first. Israel had lost the purpose and meaning behind their gifts to God and had begun to provide gifts simply out of habit. Christians can easily find themselves in the same position, offering their service with the expectation of receiving blessings as payment. The warning and promise God gives to Israel should also be on the minds of Christians. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Israel had become so accustomed to offering habitual sacrifices that they had lost the meaning behind them. These ritualistic sacrifices were intended to teach them

the effects of sin but also to allow them to show the intent of their hearts. God made it clear in Psalm 50:12–13 that He did not need the meat to eat or the blood to drink and was not dependent on these sacrifices to live. So what did God truly want from Israel? The critical piece missing in Israel’s sacrifices of this time was their hearts. God did not need the gifts but wanted them to show their love and thanksgiving for Him and what He had done for them.

The matter of the heart’s intent is at the center of God’s concern, especially in regard to giving. The apostle Paul wrote, “You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don’t give reluctantly or in response to pressure. ‘For God loves a person who gives cheerfully’” (2 Corinthians 9:7, NLT). Christians must remember that their acts of service and giving are not the final intent but should be the effects that come from love and thankfulness to Him. God promises those who give with their hearts and substance that He will deliver those who call upon His name in the day of trouble (Psalm 50:15).

Discuss

- ? How can something as important as giving to God become a thoughtless habit?
- ? What are the relationship dangers that come with this habit?

Part 3—Glorify the Almighty

□ God Brings Charges

Psalm 50:16–21



Say: Everyone has a point when enough is enough. God had come to that point with Israel and their empty sacrifices. They performed all manner of lip service by reading the Law, mouthing the words, and listening as it was read to all of the people. However, this type of service without meaning is not enough for God. God explained to the prophet Samuel that He doesn’t see things the way people see them. We judge by outward appearances, but “the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7, NLT). God makes His accusations clear and details the wrongs of His people. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

God made it clear to Israel that they would be blessed if they followed His commands. God promised that if they would fully obey Him and carefully keep all His commands, He would set them above all the world’s nations (Deuteronomy 28:1). This promise also came with the responsibility of representing His name to the world. However, Israel took these promises and blessings for granted and became hypocritical. God directly asked the wicked among them what right they had to recite His Laws and covenant. They were accused of hating discipline, keeping company with adulterers, and allowing their mouths free rein for evil (Psalm 50:17–19). These accusations stemmed from their lack of reverence for God’s laws and their heartless repetition. They even believed God was like them, thinking He didn’t care (verse 21).

We can easily become unaware of thoughtless actions when something becomes so repetitious. Many people couldn’t tell you what they had for breakfast, let alone

describe their drive to work that day. Repetition may build habits, but habits can become meaningless without a purpose. Many Christians may go to church, pay tithes, and bless their meals simply out of repetition, yet completely forget their meaning and purpose. Whether through giving or service, worship to God should come from the love we have in our hearts for our Creator and Father, rather than obedience to religious habits.

Discuss

- ? What are some religious habits that Christians may take for granted?
- ? Do you have any religious habits that have lost meaning in your life?



Resource Packet Item 3: Glorify God

Distribute the worksheet and encourage students to take it home for reflection during their personal or family devotional time.



□ Keep to the Path

Psalm 50:22–23

Say: God laid out His case before Israel, detailing His position as the Creator of all, ultimate Judge, and lacking nothing. Despite being omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, God still longed for love from His people’s hearts and explained how His people were serving Him in action alone. At the end of Psalm 50, God made one last declaration to His people who were divided in their hearts. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

After summarizing His qualifications to be the ultimate Judge and laying the charges before His people, God clearly explained what would happen to those who forget His ways. In a severe final word, God draws on sacrificial imagery from earlier in the psalm to tell the Israelites that He will tear *them* apart—just as they tore their sacrifices apart—if they continue to forget Him and fail to repent. At that point, no one will be able to help them (Psalm 50:22). This warning, harsh as it may seem, is intended to illustrate the importance of a relationship with God. He warns His people not to forget who He is and what He has done. As necessary as obedience is, understanding the nature and heart of God is crucial to true worship.

The last verse of this chapter shows a shift in God’s focus. He continues using the theme of sacrifice to address with the same intensity those who are following His laws appropriately. Thanksgiving, offered from a person’s heart and manifested in their actions, is a sacrifice “that truly honors [God]” (verse 23, *NLT*).

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told His followers, “Let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father” (Matthew 5:16, *NLT*). God-honoring behavior demonstrates the Father’s goodness and draws other people to Him. God says, “If you keep to my path”—which, as this psalm explains, means offering repentance, fidelity, and praise from a thankful heart—“I will reveal to you the salvation of God” (Psalm 50:23, *NLT*).

As Christians, we must always remember that God is keenly aware of our motives and the heart behind all we offer to Him. Simply checking the church

attendance box is not enough. He desires to know and love each of us on a deep and personal level.

Discuss

- ? How important is it for Christians to check their motives when serving God?
- ? What are ways that Christians can refocus themselves on their relationship with God?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: The center of the matter of worship is our heart. We represent God through our words and how we serve and worship Him. If we are worshipping to be seen by people, we have abandoned the purpose for which we were called. We are called to be salt and light to the world, meaning we should look, act, and sound different in a positive way. Our difference is not in our religious practices but in the impact of a genuine relationship with God. He has offered the greatest gift in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ because of His love for each one of us. Because of this gift, we can show our love for Him by obeying His commands with joy, knowing that we serve a good and compassionate God.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Evaluate your motives in worship and service to God to ensure your heart is right.
- Remember that God does not need our sacrifices because He is the Creator, Author, and ultimate Judge of all things.
- Seek opportunities to serve God daily to offer a true sacrifice of thanksgiving.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

God the Creator.
Genesis 1:1–2,31

Tuesday:

The Glory of God Displayed.
Exodus 24:16–18

Wednesday:

God Praised for His Greatness.
1 Chronicles 29:11–13

Thursday:

God's Sovereignty and
Transcendence Proclaimed.
Acts 17:24–28

Friday:

God's Unsearchable Wisdom and
Knowledge. Romans 11:33–36

Saturday:

The Grandeur of God's Throne.
Revelation 4:1–6

August 4, 2024

LESSON 10

Perplexed, Yet Confident in God

Study Text

Psalms 73:1–28

Central Truth

Christians receive hope and guidance from God during troubling and perplexing times.



Key Verse Psalm 73:28

It is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works (KJV).

As for me, how good it is to be near God! I have made the Sovereign Lord my shelter, and I will tell everyone about the wonderful things you do (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand that God's timing is always perfect, regardless of circumstances.
- Students will evaluate their thoughts and emotions concerning perplexing situations in their lives compared to God's Word.
- Students will seek God's presence to gain His perspective on these confusing times.

Introducing the Study

Say: A common understanding of justice is that bad things should happen to bad people and good things, to good people. Despite how simple this seems, this principle is rarely how the world works. This lesson focuses on how to deal with the question, “Why do good things happen to bad people?” As you go through this lesson, try to put yourself into the place of the Psalmist and imagine what emotions he could have been processing.

Opening Activity—Defining Justice

Ask: What is your definition of justice? What is the role of grace in justice?

Say: When God hands out justice, it is often tempered with grace. Observers sometimes think He should have acted sooner and with greater force. When Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, God's judgment was delayed until Lot and his family could be spared. Sometimes it appears that God is doing nothing to judge the wicked, but God's perspective and timing are always perfect. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalms 73 deals with a wide range of emotions, such as guilt, anger, resentment, and hope. The psalmist Asaph struggled, thinking his good deeds were not enough, then was confused and angry that the wicked seemed to be blessed. His emotions are conveyed vividly through his visual examples, and readers can walk through his thought process as they read. While studying this chapter, try to understand the words from the perspective of a man who is perplexed and exasperated and seeking God for answers to one of life's tough questions.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Psalm 73:1. Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.
2. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.
3. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
4. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm.
5. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.
6. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment.
7. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish.
8. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily.
9. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth.
10. Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them.
11. And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?
12. Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.
13. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.
14. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.
15. If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children.
16. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me;
17. Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.
18. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction.
19. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors.
20. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.
21. Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins.
22. So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.
23. Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand.
24. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.

New Living Translation

Psalm 73:1. Truly God is good to Israel, to those whose hearts are pure.
2. But as for me, I almost lost my footing. My feet were slipping, and I was almost gone.
3. For I envied the proud when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness.
4. They seem to live such painless lives; their bodies are so healthy and strong.
5. They don't have troubles like other people; they're not plagued with problems like everyone else.
6. They wear pride like a jeweled necklace and clothe themselves with cruelty.
7. These fat cats have everything their hearts could ever wish for!
8. They scoff and speak only evil; in their pride they seek to crush others.
9. They boast against the very heavens, and their words strut throughout the earth.
10. And so the people are dismayed and confused, drinking in all their words.
11. "What does God know?" they ask. "Does the Most High even know what's happening?"
12. Look at these wicked people—enjoying a life of ease while their riches multiply.
13. Did I keep my heart pure for nothing? Did I keep myself innocent for no reason?
14. I get nothing but trouble all day long; every morning brings me pain.
15. If I had really spoken this way to others, I would have been a traitor to your people.
16. So I tried to understand why the wicked prosper. But what a difficult task it is!
17. Then I went into your sanctuary, O God, and I finally understood the destiny of the wicked.
18. Truly, you put them on a slippery path and send them sliding over the cliff to destruction.
19. In an instant they are destroyed, completely swept away by terrors.
20. When you arise, O Lord, you will laugh at their silly ideas as a person laughs at dreams in the morning.
21. Then I realized that my heart was bitter, and I was all torn up inside.
22. I was so foolish and ignorant—I must have seemed like a senseless animal to you.
23. Yet I still belong to you; you hold my right hand.
24. You guide me with your counsel, leading me to a glorious destiny.

(Note: Only representative verses for the lesson are printed on the Scripture Reading page.)



Part 1—A Righteous Person’s Dilemma

□ Comparison Takes Hold

Psalm 73:1–3

Say: Comparison is dangerous and causes people to lose perspective on their lives. They focus so intently on what others have that they minimize or even forget what they have. The Psalmist struggled with the idea that those whom he viewed as wicked were seemingly being blessed. Such comparison is dangerous and often leads to doubt and depression. We must be keenly aware of what our thoughts are focused on, because they can lead us down a path God did not intend for us. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalm 73 begins with the proper declaration of God’s goodness, which is where the conversation should have ended. However, the Psalmist continued to look further at himself compared to the wicked people around him. In only two verses, the Psalmist’s words go from the goodness of God to his own faults and envious thoughts about the wicked (verses 2–3). Christians should never use comparison to gauge themselves or their relationship with God. Paul wrote about Christians comparing themselves to others in his letter to the churches in Galatia: “Pay careful attention to your own work, for then you will get the satisfaction of a job well done, and you won’t need to compare yourself to anyone else” (Galatians 6:4, *NLT*). The standard of comparison for Christian lives is God’s Word. It details how we should live. The Holy Spirit also helps guide us into a deeper relationship with Him.

The Psalmist had forgotten God’s character because his focus was on his own failures and comparison with those around him. People can easily draw a false conclusion from only viewing outward appearances. Christians must remember that it is God who judges, and He alone can see the inner workings of a person’s heart.



Resource Packet Item 1: Comparison

Distribute the worksheet and take a few minutes to work through it. Then encourage students to reflect on the questions at the bottom of the sheet.

Discuss

- ? What are some dangers Christians face when they fall into the trap of comparison?
- ? How could a negative self-image impact how a Christian views God?



□ Perceived Blessings of the Wicked

Psalm 73:4–12

Say: As the saying goes, “The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.” From the outside, the Psalmist could only see that the wicked appeared blessed and problem-free. Such feelings of jealousy and frustration are common for people who fall into the trap of comparison. We must be aware of this trap and be careful how we judge the perceived rewards of others. The apostle Paul tells the believers in Galatia that God’s justice cannot be mocked and that each person will reap whatever they have sown

(Galatians 6:7). Christians must not judge based on the outward appearances of a situation but should trust in God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Filled with envy and resentment, the Psalmist listed what he saw as the blessings and lack of justice for the wicked around him. Through his jealous eyes, he observed that they did not feel any pain until death and did not have the troubles other people had (Psalm 73:4–5). In each of his accusations, the Psalmist compared the issues of good people to the perceived lack of difficulties of the wicked. This comparison caused him to overstate his description of their blessings. He described them as having strong and healthy bodies and not having the problems others had. He claimed they even spoke evil and boasted against the heavens (verse 9). They seemingly did all these wicked things and yet enjoyed life while their riches multiplied (verses 11–12).

Comparison blinds people to the reality of what is happening. To the Psalmist, wicked people were receiving all the benefits of riches and health while doing whatever evil thing they desired. Such comparison and self-pity will lead to a wrong image of who God is and distorted self-evaluation. God's thoughts and ways are much higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8–9). In the time of Abram, the Amorites were a wicked people that God had not yet judged. He explained it to Abram by saying, "The sins of the Amorites do not yet warrant their destruction" (Genesis 15:16, NLT). God's plans are beyond the understanding of His people and require faith in His character and trust in His timing.

Discuss

- ? Have you responded similarly to the Psalmist when comparing your life to those who seem to be living a better life?
- ? Share a time when you had to trust God's timing and you saw Him come through.

Part 2—Transition to Hope

□ From Wrong Assumptions

Psalm 73:13–14



Say: The Psalmist's thoughts about the wicked prospering alone were not enough. He went a step further and began to evaluate himself in comparison to the pedestal he had put the wicked on. The more he thought about the injustices, the more his mind spiraled into every negative thought. After listing every outward perceived blessing of the wicked, he then turned inward and began to judge his own actions. Christians must be keenly aware that comparison will often give a false image of others and a negative view of ourselves. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Although the source of the Psalmist's difficulty came from his perception of the wicked's circumstance, his actual struggle came from how he internalized and evaluated the situation. When we perceive injustice around us, it can make just actions feel pointless. In a world where it seems that wickedness is being promoted and

celebrated, one might ask whether it is worthwhile to stand for justice. Focusing on the lack of punishment for the wicked caused the Psalmist to question whether his attempts to keep his heart pure and actions innocent were worthwhile (Psalm 73:13). He evaluated his day from this perspective and felt he only had daily trouble and pain (verse 14).

This feeling of futility is not lost on modern-day Christians. The current state of the world seems to be ever-increasing wickedness. The world has become so depraved that sins are paraded around in the street and celebrated as good, while those who attempt to uphold godliness are mocked and hated. Christians must understand that perception and reality are two very different things. Though righteousness may seem futile by today's standards, the Word of God has examples and reminders to encourage believers. As wicked as these days may seem, we must remember that during the rule of the evil Roman Empire, the Church grew exponentially. We are wise to remember these words from Proverbs, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek His will in all you do, and He will show you which path to take" (Proverbs 3:5–6, NLT).

Discuss

- ? Discuss a time when you were so frustrated with injustices that you, like the Psalmist, felt no benefit in keeping your heart pure.
- ? What Scriptures give you hope when you are discouraged?



□ To Right Thinking

Psalm 73:15–22

Say: The slippery slope of comparison often leads to one of two places: self-destruction or an awakening revelation. Many in this situation pull away from friends, family, and church due to these negative feelings. Thankfully, in the case of the Psalmist, he awoke to a revelation. After his thoughts spiraled almost out of control, he finally made his way to the place where clarity is found: God's presence. The first and most important step to transition from confusion to hope is to enter into God's presence. "The Lord says, 'I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you'" (Psalm 32:8, NLT). When believers are confused, hurt, or in need of counsel, God's presence is the only place to be. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

After opening up his thoughts and feelings to the Lord, the Psalmist wisely admitted that saying these things to other people would have been wrong (Psalm 73:15). He understood that he was speaking from a place of hurt. He had done his best to understand the age-old question, "Why do the wicked prosper?" This question still confounds people today. Some things in life are beyond human perspective. At these times, we need to seek God's counsel in His presence.

Once the Psalmist entered the sanctuary, he could finally understand the situation from God's perspective (verses 16–19). The wicked seem to prosper, but their destruction comes swiftly and often publicly. Examples abound of celebrities

who seemed untouchable, yet with one decision lost all of their influence. Having entered God's sanctuary, the Psalmist was able to see this truth. God also showed him that his heart had become bitter (verses 21–22). Christians can quickly become consumed with the injustices around them, which can cause them to become hardened and bitter. However, entering God's presence can help the godly gain perspective and heal the hardness of a bitter heart.



Resource Packet Item 2: In God's Presence

Distribute the worksheet and divide the class into two groups, assigning one half of the worksheet to each. Allow a few minutes for students to answer the questions, and then discuss them together.

Discuss

- ? How should our perspectives change when we enter God's house?
- ? Discuss a time when you were struggling and things changed when you entered God's presence.

Part 3—The Promise of Lifelong Guidance

□ Corrected Perspective

Psalm 73:23–26



Say: Upon entering the sanctuary, the Psalmist's attitude and thinking were quickly corrected. He went from questioning the futility of purity to being humbled before God. This drastic change aligned his thinking and corrected his perspective. Focusing on our problems can make them seem almost impossible to overcome. However, focusing on God's plans can give us the strength to climb any mountains that rise before us. With a corrected perspective, the Psalmist began to remind himself that the promises of God do not change. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

After realizing how foolishly he had been acting, the Psalmist made a very bold and comforting statement: "Yet I still belong to you" (Psalm 73:23, NLT). Despite being confused at the prosperity of the wicked and questioning the futility of righteousness, the Psalmist knew he still belonged to God. He was reminded that his questions, confusion, and even frustration did not separate him from God.

We can also be comforted in the realization that God is not angry at us when we ask Him questions. James encouraged us by saying, "If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking" (James 1:5, NLT). The Psalmist continued to remind himself that God would guide him with His counsel and lead him to a destiny filled with glory (Psalm 73:24). The wisdom and counsel of God always lead to a pathway of hope.

Christians should learn from the end of this chapter and take the perspective of the Psalmist. He knew that all he needed was God (verse 25). He understood that everything in his life might fail, including his health and spirit, but God would be the true strength in his heart (verse 26). Christians may become weakened and down-trodden trying to solve all the problems around them. However, understanding that

God will never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), that wisdom and strength can be found in His presence, and that God is for us can rebuild our confidence and boldness to stand firm in His goodness.



Resource Packet Item 3: Living by God's Perspective

Distribute the worksheet, read the Scriptures, and discuss ways to apply God's perspective to our own situations.

Discuss

- ? What are the benefits of reminding yourself of the truths about God even when you don't feel like it?
- ? Share about a hard time when God gave you strength.



□ Supreme Justice

Psalm 73:27–28

Say: Having taken a journey through the emotions of a righteous person in an evil time, the Psalmist came to two conclusions that shaped his understanding: God will destroy those who abandon Him, and it is good to be near God. These two statements brought clarity and finality to the ever-evolving emotions and thoughts of the Psalmist. Christians must also come to a decisive position regarding their belief in God. Jesus declared, “Anyone who isn't with me opposes me, and anyone who isn't working with me is actually working against me” (Matthew 12:30, NLT). Christians must decide whom they will serve. Will we follow the path of the wicked and pursue easy riches? Or will we follow God and stand up against darkness? (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Once the Psalmist gained a godly perspective about his situation, he understood that the wicked seem to be living an easy life of riches that would ultimately end in their destruction. The author of Proverbs stated, “There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death” (14:12, NLT). The path the wicked chose was one of convenience and leisure; this would have seemed like the right path to a sinful mind. However, all who abandon God and His laws are subject to His judgment at the end of the age (Psalm 73:27). The Psalmist's final declaration was that it was good to be near God, that God was his place of safety, and that he would tell everyone of the great things God did (verse 28).

Regardless of the world's oppression, injustice, or sin, Christians have a security and a promise that can always be a reminder that in the end, God wins. God is the ultimate Victor and will be the Judge of all things. No power on the earth can overcome the supreme justice of God. The apostle Paul asked, “If God is for us, who can ever be against us?” (Romans 8:31, NLT). We must remember that we are not to fight against people, because the true fight is against principalities, powers, and the forces of darkness behind people's evil actions (Ephesians 6:12). Keeping these facts in mind, we need not be discouraged by the evil around us. Instead, we must remember that we serve the God who always wins and is guiding our path.

Discuss

- ? Share a time when God shifted or corrected your perspective about the world around you.
- ? How does your knowledge of God's ultimate victory affect your decisions now?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Life is full of complicated and messy situations that we all try to understand. However, some things can't be reasoned out with our limited understanding. Trying to do this will only result in confusion, frustration, and depression. Christians must depend on God as their source of wisdom, understanding, and hope. In God's presence, we can find the fullness of joy, the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, and a godly perspective to guide and deliver us. Only when we view world events through the lens of God's Word can we truly begin to understand and realize that our steps, no matter how difficult, are ordered by God.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Schedule regular times throughout your week to enter God's presence privately and lay your needs before Him.
- Make a list of God's promises of protection and guidance throughout Scripture.
- Reach out to other believers going through challenging and confusing times, and share a testimony of how God has brought you through.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Judah Turns to God for Help.
2 Chronicles 20:5–15

Tuesday:

Hope in the Lord. Psalm 31:19–24

Wednesday:

Song of Confidence in God.
Isaiah 26:1–4

Thursday:

Comforting Words of Jesus.
John 14:1–3

Friday:

Singing in Jail Ends Well.
Acts 16:25–34

Saturday:

God's Grace Is Sufficient.
2 Corinthians 12:6–10

August 11, 2024

LESSON 11

The Blessing of God's Presence

Study Text

Psalms 84:1–12

Central Truth

The presence of God brings blessing to His children.



Key Verse Psalm 84:4

Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah (KJV).

What joy for those who can live in your house, always singing your praises. *Interlude* (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will recognize the differences between Old Testament believers and New Testament believers when it comes to entering God's presence.
- Students will appreciate the joy of longing for the presence of God.
- Students will commit to seeking God's presence and respond to His presence through loving obedience to Him.

Introducing the Study

Say: God made humans to be social beings. We are emotionally, spiritually, and even physically healthier when other people—valued friends and family, and even acquaintances and strangers—are present in our lives.

Opening Activity—Choose Your Company

Ask: If you could spend a day with anyone, past or present, whom would you choose? How would you spend that day? Why?

Say: There are many ways to answer this question. Some may choose a famous person from the past that they admire or find interesting. Others may go with a beloved relative or friend that they miss. Such an experience would be quite exciting for some. For others, it might be a letdown, especially if it were a famous person who failed to live up to expectations. Many might find it to be a wonderful day with someone they especially cherish. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Spending time with others can surely be special for us. And as much as we might enjoy being with someone famous, the best times together happen with those closest to us. This is especially true for Christians, as we have the great pleasure and privilege of spending time with God. As we move through its twelve verses, we find that Psalm 84 is a great reminder of why this is true. Written by a member of the descendants of Korah, these are the words of someone who longs to be near to God. Through the course of some marvelous poetry, we discover why this is so. God has enriched our lives with numerous blessings. He favors us, hears us, consoles us, and protects us. As we move through this psalm, think about specific ways that your life is blessed when you are in the presence of God.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

Psalms 84:1. How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts!

2. My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.

3. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God.

4. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. *Selah.*

5. Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them.

6. Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools.

7. They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.

8. O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. *Selah.*

9. Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed.

10. For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.

11. For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.

12. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.

Psalms 84:1. How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of Heaven's Armies.

2. I long, yes, I faint with longing to enter the courts of the LORD. With my whole being, body and soul, I will shout joyfully to the living God.

3. Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow builds her nest and raises her young at a place near your altar, O LORD of Heaven's Armies, my King and my God!

4. What joy for those who can live in your house, always singing your praises. *Interlude*

5. What joy for those whose strength comes from the LORD, who have set their minds on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

6. When they walk through the Valley of Weeping, it will become a place of refreshing springs. The autumn rains will clothe it with blessings.

7. They will continue to grow stronger, and each of them will appear before God in Jerusalem.

8. O LORD God of Heaven's Armies, hear my prayer. Listen, O God of Jacob. *Interlude*

9. O God, look with favor upon the king, our shield! Show favor to the one you have anointed.

10. A single day in your courts is better than a thousand anywhere else! I would rather be a gatekeeper in the house of my God than live the good life in the homes of the wicked.

11. For the LORD God is our sun and our shield. He gives us grace and glory. The LORD will withhold no good thing from those who do what is right.

12. O LORD of Heaven's Armies, what joy for those who trust in you.



Part 1—Longing for God’s House

□ How Lovely Is Your Dwelling Place

Psalm 84:1–2

Say: We often focus on the psalms as a source of beautiful lyrics for praise and worship songs. And this is indeed true. However, the Book of Psalms also instructs us, rebukes us, challenges us, and exhorts us. Psalm 84 is a good example of that final category, exhorting us to revisit our priorities and respond by cultivating a deeper longing for God’s presence. (Share your highlights from the following text.)



Resource Packet Item 1: Types of Psalms

Distribute the information sheet and discuss it, emphasizing the variety of themes displayed in Psalms.

Psalm 84 is a good example of how music, especially in the Book of Psalms, can be used to instruct God’s people on doctrine, theology, and Scripture itself. This psalm takes the form of a song affirming the blessing of God’s presence.

When writing, “How lovely is your dwelling place” (verse 1, *NLT*), the Psalmist is referring to Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem (see verse 2). This was the dwelling place of God on earth in the Old Testament. As such, the temple was a profoundly special place to those followers of God. Israelites would go there to offer sacrifices of praise, thanksgiving, repentance, and cleansing. Yet we must catch the basic point of this psalm: The Psalmist is not so much exalting in the thought of entering a building as much as entering God’s presence. The title “LORD of Heaven’s Armies” affirms the Lord’s sovereignty and power in all the earth.

The desire for His presence, rather than a building, clarifies these first two verses. The temple is “lovely” (verse 1, *NLT*) because God is there. The Psalmist longs to go to the temple because he longs for God’s presence. He will “shout joyfully” and “with [his] whole being” (verse 2, *NLT*) because he is in God’s presence.

We see this idea of yearning or longing for God throughout the Psalms, perhaps most vividly in Psalm 42, which uses the image of a parched and starving person in search of provision. Yet this vivid terminology serves a higher purpose than just beautiful expression. It teaches believers—then and now—that feelings of desire, joy, and wonder are commonplace as we seek His presence.

Of note, verse 1 begins rather uniquely in Hebrew, with the expressive question, “What?” It serves as an exclamation of glory, as if to say, “What is this? It is the most lovely and beloved place that one could be.” (The *New Living Translation* captures this by stating, “How lovely . . .”) Then in the verses that follow, the Psalmist proceeds to describe the many reasons this is true.

Discuss

- ? How would you describe the experience of being in God’s presence?
- ? Why is it important to see things like going to church as a matter of seeking God’s presence rather than traveling to a building?



Say: We've probably all heard that famous saying from the world of real estate: "The value of a house depends on three main factors: location, location, location." Everyone has a favorite place to be when life is hard and we need rest. In Psalm 84:3–4, the Psalmist made a similar observation with regard to the temple. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Psalmist pondered God's great creation as he exclaimed in verse 3: "Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow builds her nest and raises her young at a place near your altar" (verse 3, NLT). This is a reference to the birds that built their nests in the area of the courtyard of the temple, near the altar. These birds had opportunity to be close to God's presence through the course of daily living, as they cared for themselves and raised their young. The Psalmist saw them as privileged, in a sense, because they were always close to God.

The Psalmist's words remind believers today of a wonderful reality that we enjoy: We don't need to travel to a building to be in the presence of God. The apostle Paul wrote: "Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16, NLT; see also 1 Peter 2:4–5). Through Christ, Christians have the privilege—and the responsibility—of forming the dwelling place of God. In our fellowship and brotherhood together as the Church, and even in our own individual lives, we experience the close, personal presence of God.

In Psalm 84:4, the focus moves from birds to people. Specifically, the Psalmist points out the great privilege of those who live in the temple environs. This would include the priests and Levites who did the work of the temple. For them, the presence of God was not visited only on special occasions, but it was an ongoing reality of life. Words and acts of praise were their livelihood. To the Psalmist, such a life might be best described as incomparable joy—an interesting highlight, given that priests and Levites often dealt with matters of sin and impurity among the people. Yet their existence was marked with joy.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think the Psalmist focused on joy as the description of one who lived continuously in the presence of God near the temple?
- ? What should be the identifying marks of our lives as people who have the privilege of existing in God's presence on a daily basis?

Part 2—Blessed in God's House



Say: Psalm 84 takes a bit of a turn in verse 5, expressing the imagery of the world outside of the temple and the great contrast between that world and life in and around the temple. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalm 84:5–6 describes the joy and anticipation that would fill pilgrims from all around the nation of Israel as they made their journey to the fall festival that is the Feast of Tabernacles. This was the last of the three major Jewish feasts celebrated each year (along with Passover and the Feast of Pentecost). It was held for one week during the month of Tishri (roughly bridging September and October). The Feast of Tabernacles, also called the Feast of the Ingathering (see Exodus 23:16, *KJV*), celebrated the harvest of grain and fruit. In this sense, it was a general celebration of thanksgiving to God for His great provision and care for His people through the year. Their toil in the fields and vineyards, while difficult, had been greatly blessed by God.

It is no surprise, then, that the Psalmist described the travelers as “blessed” (Psalm 84:5, *KJV*). This word, so common to the Old Testament, describes someone who enjoys a heightened state of joy and happiness as a result of the kind acts of God bestowed upon their lives. Here in Psalm 84, the term *blessed* takes on an even fuller meaning. The pilgrims had been blessed by God’s kindness and mercy through the year, and now they would find the great added blessing of entering into His presence at the temple.

Verse 6 mentions the Valley of Baca as part of their journey. The word *Baca* is derived from a word meaning “weeping.” A real valley in Israel, “the Valley of Weeping” (*NLT*) is a dry, arid, and difficult place that would be transformed by the autumn rains. The picture, then, is one of provision, symbolizing the marvelous blessings of God. Because of His mercy and kindness, His children had not been left in a dry, difficult place through the year. Instead, He had replenished the land with rain, and in doing so, refreshed their hearts with joy.

What a marvelous picture of God’s blessing in the lives of believers today. We experience His provision and blessing day after day. Yet the time of praise and worship in His presence is not confined to a festival that follows a days-long journey to a particular site. We have opportunity to praise Him in His presence at any time.

Discuss

- ? What are some ways Christians can celebrate God’s blessings?
- ? Describe in specific terms how God has blessed you in the past. How did you respond to these blessings? How did you show your gratitude?



□ A Place of Refreshing and Strength

Psalm 84:7–8

Say: Psalm 84:7 is an excellent example of how the Book of Psalms so eloquently articulates the realities of life in our fallen world. We face challenges, disappointments, dangers, and fears. Yet, for the believer, there is hope to be found in God—and refreshing to be found in His presence. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalm 84:7 recognizes that God’s people sometimes need more strength. This is symbolized in the journey from the furthest regions of Israel to the temple in Jerusalem. As they go, they are burdened with the provisions needed to get them there

and home again. They encounter obstacles to climb or avoid. In addition, travel in the ancient Near East was dangerous—unpredictable weather, wild animals, and violent robbers all posed a potential threat. Yet verse 7 declares, “They will continue to grow stronger” (NLT). The very anticipation of arriving in Zion and worshipping in God’s presence would strengthen their hearts. As they felt weak, they could meditate on His greatness along the way. Each step brought them closer to that moment they would appear before God at the temple.

Verse 8 then proceeds to describe the moment when the pilgrims arrived in Jerusalem. We immediately notice the third reference to the “LORD God of Heaven’s Armies” (NLT; see also verses 1,3). This phrase appears frequently in the Old Testament and is more familiarly translated “LORD of Hosts.” The word translated “Hosts” is, in fact, the word for “armies.” Therefore, this title for God takes on special meaning here. God often does battle for us, just as He gives us strength for battle or delivers us from evil forces we battle. This is a common theme in the Book of Psalms (see 18:34,39; 21:9; 24:8; 55:18).

The pilgrims, then, have experienced the blessings of God’s strength and refreshing through the challenges of the journey to Jerusalem. As a result, they can say with confidence as they approach His presence: “O Lord . . . hear my prayer” (verse 8, NLT). Yet we must not lose sight of the parallelism in this verse. The very next phrase is: “Listen, O God of Jacob” (NLT). This repeats the previous line, but here the Psalmist invokes God’s covenant promises by mentioning Jacob the patriarch. The message of this verse is clear: God is mighty. God hears His people. And His people have the assurance that His blessings of strength and help will continue because He is faithful to His promises.

What can we learn from the example of these pilgrims? First, they clearly did not take the presence of God lightly. His presence was something to be greatly desired and deeply cherished. How much more might that be so for us, who have the privilege of dwelling continually in the presence of God? Second, they clung to the precious truths they knew about God. He is mighty on behalf of His people, and His blessings are tied to His irrevocable promises. Yet we have an added sense of hope as New Testament Christians. We enjoy these blessings all the more, because God’s presence is a constant and enduring reality.



Resource Packet Item 2: Count Your Blessings

Distribute the worksheet and encourage students to fill it out during the week. Next week, begin the class session with a time of testimony, inviting students to share the blessings they identified as well as talk about what they might have learned from spending a week recording their blessings.

Discuss

- ? How can we avoid taking the blessings of God lightly, and instead truly appreciate all that He has done and is doing for us?
- ? What are some of the privileges and joys of knowing that we dwell in God’s presence continually? How might that reality also be sobering to us?



Part 3—Good Comes to the Righteous

□ It Is Better to Dwell with the Lord

Psalm 84:9–10

Say: Psalm 84:9 continues the prayer of the pilgrims that began in verse 8.

However, we do well to keep in mind the great words of exaltation that came before. The prayer is a kind of capstone to the psalm, and as such, it restates the important points that have already been spoken. Take note of the themes and emphases that are repeated in verses 9–12. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalm 84:9 begins with intercession for the king. The Psalmist asks God to “look with favor upon the king, our shield!” (NLT). The king was God’s appointed leader of the people, the one responsible for protecting the nation through wise choices and the use of military might if needed. The prayer, then, asked for God’s favor (protection, blessing, and success) to rest upon this human leader.

Then the prayer continued, “Show favor to the one you have anointed” (NLT). We see on many occasions in the Old Testament that God’s chosen king for His people is anointed, which conveys God’s intended favor and blessing upon the individual as the man who would lead the nation (see 1 Samuel 10:1; 16:13; 1 Kings 1:39). This anointing, done with oil, was very much a spiritual reality. The king would receive power, strength, and wisdom from the Lord as he sought the Lord’s presence. This divine favor and provision would be crucial to leading the nation.

The psalm moved again into exaltation for the presence of the Lord. While the words of verse 10 are a familiar refrain, its full meaning must not be lost. In Scripture, the number 1,000 denotes fullness and completion. The message is that it is a greater privilege to be in God’s presence even for a moment than to be anywhere else in this world for a lifetime. Similarly, it is better to take the posture and position of a humble servant (“gatekeeper,” NLT) in God’s presence than to spend one’s temporal life enjoying momentary pleasures in the midst of the wicked.

Discuss

- ? How much priority should Christians place on praying for their spiritual leaders? Their secular leaders? What should we pray for each?
- ? What are some specific reasons why it is better to seek out and live in God’s presence than to enjoy the pleasures of sin while we’re in this world?



□ God Is Our Sun and Our Shield

Psalm 84:11–12

Say: Psalm 84:10 sets the stage for the triumphant words of the Psalmist in verses 11–12. All of the blessings mentioned in this passage come only to the righteous. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalm 84:11 begins, “God is our sun and our shield” (NLT). Once again, we see the promise of God’s protection, this time joined by a symbol of provision: the sun. Just as the sun provides the light and heat necessary for life, provision, and prosperity,

God provides for His people. He promises that He “will withhold no good thing from those who do what is right” (NLT).

The psalm ends with yet another reference to the “LORD of Heaven’s Armies” (verse 12, NLT). This great God we serve—the One who is sovereign over all powers of the earth—promises blessing upon blessing to those who trust in Him.



Resource Packet Item 3: The Power of a Song

Discuss the worksheet, encouraging students to reflect on it during the week.

Discuss

- ? In what ways does God bring joy into our lives?
- ? What do you think it means to say that “God is our sun”?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Take time this week to examine the priority you place on giving undivided attention to God and spending time in His presence. To what extent do you live in His presence, even amid the thoughts and concerns of the day? Pray that God will help you begin to cherish His presence anew.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Find time each day this week to seek God in intercession for others in a place where you are entirely undistracted from His presence.
- Remind a fellow Christian facing a struggle that he or she can find hope and help in God’s presence. Then pray with that person.
- Pray for someone this week who has strayed from the presence of God.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Abraham Hosts the Lord.
Genesis 18:1–10

Tuesday:

Joshua Lingers in God’s Presence.
Exodus 33:8–11

Wednesday:

David Delights in God’s House.
Psalm 27:4–6

Thursday:

Jesus Teaches in the Synagogue.
Luke 4:16–21

Friday:

A Miracle at the Temple.
Acts 4:1–10

Saturday:

Spiritual Gifts for the Church.
1 Corinthians 12:27–31

August 18, 2024

LESSON 12

Human Mortality and God's Eternality

Study Text

Psalms 90:1–17

Central Truth

Though people are mortal, they can have everlasting life through Jesus Christ.



Key Verse

Psalms 90:2

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God (KJV).

Before the mountains were born, before you gave birth to the earth and the world, from beginning to end, you are God (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will examine the contrast in Scripture between fragile, temporary human life and God's eternal existence.
- Students will appreciate the importance of setting personal priorities according to godly values, which extend beyond this temporal world.
- Students will establish a regular practice of praising God for His gift of everlasting life.

Introducing the Study

Say: Setting and maintaining good priorities can be one of life's biggest challenges. We know what we ought to pursue, and we can certainly discern what matters most. Yet the preoccupations and distractions of the moment catch our eyes—and snag our hearts—more often than we may like, or even admit.

Opening Activity—Top Priority

Ask: What are some of the highest priorities in your life? What are some things of low priority that might become a distraction from what is important? Most Christians will identify their faith as top priority, as well as family, career, and friendships. Distractions can include the crises of the moment, as well as a desire for status, material things, and relationships.

Say: The things that deserve our highest priority can often be easy to recognize. These are the things that matter the most and for the longest time. Above all, for the Christian, these things transcend our temporary, mortal life and will matter in eternity. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalms 90 is a reality check for followers of God. In its verses, we are reminded of our own mortality and the temporary nature of this life. The Psalmist also reminds us of the eternity of God: "Before the mountains were born, before you gave birth to the earth and the world, from beginning to end, you are God" (verse 2, NLT). Clearly, the things that should matter to us are what matters to God. As you study these verses, think about your priorities. Ask God to help you "number your days" and maintain an eternal perspective.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

New Living Translation

Psalm 90:1. Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.

2. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.

3. Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men.

4. For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.

5. Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up.

6. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth.

7. For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled.

8. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.

9. For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told.

10. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

11. Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath.

12. So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

13. Return, O LORD, how long? and let it repent thee concerning thy servants.

14. O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

15. Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil.

16. Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children.

17. And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.

Psalm 90:1. Lord, through all the generations you have been our home!

2. Before the mountains were born, before you gave birth to the earth and the world, from beginning to end, you are God.

3. You turn people back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, you mortals!"

4. For you, a thousand years are as a passing day, as brief as a few night hours.

5. You sweep people away like dreams that disappear. They are like grass that springs up in the morning.

6. In the morning it blooms and flourishes, but by evening it is dry and withered.

7. We wither beneath your anger; we are overwhelmed by your fury.

8. You spread out our sins before you—our secret sins—and you see them all.

9. We live our lives beneath your wrath, ending our years with a groan.

10. Seventy years are given to us! Some even live to eighty. But even the best years are filled with pain and trouble; soon they disappear, and we fly away.

11. Who can comprehend the power of your anger? Your wrath is as awesome as the fear you deserve.

12. Teach us to realize the brevity of life, so that we may grow in wisdom.

13. O LORD, come back to us! How long will you delay? Take pity on your servants!

14. Satisfy us each morning with your unending love, so we may sing for joy to the end of our lives.

15. Give us gladness in proportion to our former misery! Replace the evil years with good.

16. Let us, your servants, see you work again; let our children see your glory.

17. And may the Lord our God show us his approval and make our efforts successful. Yes, make our efforts successful!



Part 1—Our Everlasting God

□ God without Beginning or End

Psalm 90:1–2

Say: Psalm 90 explores the stark contrast between our eternal God and our own temporal and corruptible lives in this world. Verses 1–2 are a fitting opening to this discussion. As we study, we do well to recognize the big picture in this psalm. It describes God as everlasting and mighty as well as personal and involved in our lives every moment. This is the character of our loving God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)



Resource Packet Item 1: The Names of God

Distribute the information sheet and discuss its content. Emphasize how God's names teach us what He is like and how He relates to us.

It is important to note that Psalm 90 was written as a prayer by and from Moses. This great prophet and leader directed God's people on what should have been a relatively short journey from Egypt to Canaan—perhaps a couple of months. But because of the unbelief of the people (see Numbers 13–14), it became a difficult, forty-year ordeal of wandering in the desert. Amid those difficult days and years, Moses called upon the Lord for help and encouragement. As he sought God, he recognized the need for a new perspective—a perspective that brought focus to the lives of the people and their understanding of God.

There are three sections to Psalm 90, with the first consisting of verses 1–2. In verse 1, Moses begins the prayer with the invocation, “Lord.” Here, “Lord” is the Hebrew word *Adonai*, which means “my Lord” or “my King.” Moses recognizes and declares that the true God is the real ruler and sovereign authority over the people. The Lord alone is worthy of their trust, and in the verses that follow, Moses expressed why this is.

Verse 1 sets the tone for the entire psalm: “Through all the generations you have been our home!” (NLT). The Israelites were in the midst of enduring a generation of wandering in the desert. It was a transient life. Yet they were not homeless. Despite the circumstances, God was dwelling with them. This points to the eternal existence of God. Certainly, the people were suffering for a generation. But they could find a permanent dwelling place in God.

Verse 2 reinforces that point. The expression, “before the mountains were born” (NLT), is a direct reference to creation. Then Moses used beautifully poetic terminology to describe God as the One who “gave birth to the earth and to the world” (NLT). What imagery could be more intimate and caring than that of a mother and a newborn child. Moses' words pointed to a sense of relationship and established that God is the sole maker of the universe. He is without beginning and without end.

Discuss

? How is our understanding of God affected by the knowledge that He has no beginning and no end?

? In what ways is it meaningful and helpful to see God described as “giving birth” to all creation?

□ Not Subject to Time

Psalm 90:3–4



Say: Many believers are familiar with James 4:14: “Your life is like the morning fog—it’s here a little while, then it’s gone” (NLT). These are wise words regarding the priorities of the believer. Psalm 90:3–4 is similar, yet far more blunt. In this sense, the psalm causes the believer to take a sober look at the reality of his or her life. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalm 90:3 begins a section of the psalm that focuses on human mortality and divine wrath. This sobering passage begins by stating plainly that God is responsible for matters of life and death. God determines when the individual will return to dust, just as Scripture declares (see Genesis 3:19; Ecclesiastes 3:20). Death is God’s prerogative, and human beings have no power or authority to change that reality.

Furthermore, God is timeless. “For you, a thousand years are as a passing day, as brief as a few night hours” (Psalm 90:4, NLT). The declaration that a thousand years is to God like a brief passage of time is found in the New Testament as well, in 2 Peter 3:7–9. This reference includes a word of comfort concerning God’s promises, yet it also refers to judgment of sin. Thus, Psalm 90 and 2 Peter both remind us of the sovereignty of God over everything—including our life and our future.

Psalm 90 serves to remind God’s people that their situations, just like their lives, are temporary. But God is eternal, and He holds the events of human lives in His hands. This truth is a kind of “two-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12, NLT). It is a word of encouragement, since God has made great promises to His people. Yet it is also a sober word of warning to walk with God and avoid the kind of rebellion that placed Israel in the desert for forty years. The verses that follow will explore the latter point. Yet Moses’ prayer will conclude with a word of hope and exhortation.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think people often fear their own mortality?
- ? How can the description of our mortality in Psalm 90 impact our view of God?

Part 2—Human Frailty and Sinfulness

□ Sovereign over Life and Death

Psalm 90:5–6,10



Say: Psalm 90:5–6, like other portions of the psalm, use quite intense and vivid terminology. This serves an important purpose, however, as it reminds us of God’s sovereignty over our lives. As we examine these verses, it is good to keep God’s authority as well as His mercy in view. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

“You sweep people away like dreams that disappear” (Psalm 90:5, NLT). The terminology here is almost unsettling. Moses is describing life that exists for a moment

and then is swept away by God. Scholars have noted that the comparison of sleep to human life is enlightening. Human beings are in a kind of “sleep” that dulls them to the reality of life’s fleeting existence. We don’t know how to number our days, and so we must be taught (verse 12). We fail to realize that life is like a withering blade of grass. We want to live as if tomorrow is guaranteed (see Proverbs 27:1; James 4:13–14).

Moses expressed this reality with a vivid illustration in Psalm 90:5–6: People are like grass that springs up in the morning. It blooms and flourishes, but by evening it is dry and withered. In the desert, small twigs of grass can begin to grow. But before long the intense heat will cause them to wither and ultimately die. It is the same with human life. We live day by day under the certain sentence that the end of life is inevitable. A person often lives to be seventy years old, or even eighty. Yet that life is brief and filled with hardship before the end of life comes (verse 10). Only God is in control of these matters. We are subject to Him and cannot alter His will by our own strength or resolve.

This was no doubt a very stirring prayer and message to a generation of people wandering the desert because of their own lack of trust in God. Yet it can speak to us today as well. Unless we are alive at the return of Christ, all of us are destined to die. It is sheer arrogance to live as if this is not reality. Thus, our proper response is to recognize God’s authority in all things and live under His lordship. Ultimately, this is what distinguishes the people of God from the unbelieving, wicked world. We are all destined to die. But as the verses that follow make clear, it is of greatest importance that we reject sin and live in trust of the Lord.

Discuss

- ? In what ways is it comforting to know that God is in total control over all matters of our mortality?
- ? How might these verses impact the way that you view life and death?



□ Aware of Our Sins

Psalm 90:7–9,11

Say: Sin is an unpopular topic in our world and an uncomfortable topic within the church. Yet it has a direct impact upon how we view and respond to issues of life and death. Psalm 90 approaches this topic in a very direct manner. And it is worthy of our examination. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

On multiple occasions, Israel’s sin had provoked God’s wrath as they traveled from Egypt to the Promised Land (see Exodus 32; Numbers 25). He knew their rebellion, unfaithfulness, murmuring, idolatry, and unbelief. They may have become unaware of sin, apathetic toward it, or felt that they had kept it secret. But all sin is fully exposed under the bright light of God’s presence.

The overarching point of Psalm 90:7–9 is this: Life under the wrath of God is a bleak and difficult life filled with trouble. Wrongs are exposed, resulting in guilt and regret plaguing one’s conscience. This transient, temporary existence is soon

exposed for its toil and emptiness. The mortal life, lived under God's wrath, is not a good life.

Verse 11 then echoes earlier verses in contrasting human weakness and fall-
enness with the sovereignty of God. For the wicked, that sovereignty is seen in
His anger, reaching a level that mere mortals cannot comprehend. The second
half of verse 11 is challenging to scholars: "Your wrath is as awesome as the fear
you deserve" (NLT). It might be best understood as a question: "Who can under-
stand God's wrath fully enough to fear and reverence Him to the degree that He
deserves?" The answer is, "No one." This is a sobering thought, since people have
felt God's wrath throughout history. Yet this is only a small portion of His full
wrath. As a result, we cannot revere Him to the extent that He deserves.

This passage reminds us that God's Word can be difficult and sobering. Some-
times it drives us to our knees in tearful prayer rather than to our feet in exuber-
ant worship. Yet for the believer, the hard passages do not stand alone. Although
Exodus 32 described God's wrath, not long thereafter God reminded Moses of His
grace at the second giving of the covenant after the golden calf incident: "The LORD
passed in front of Moses, calling out, 'Yahweh! The LORD! The God of compassion
and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness'"
(Exodus 34:6, NLT). We are weak and vulnerable in our mortality. But our eternal
God seeks to bestow love, mercy, and blessing upon us. And He is patient with us.
His anger against our sin is not forever when we cry out to Him. As we move into
the closing verses of Psalm 90, we see that Moses turned his focus from wrath to
blessing as he sought a restoration of the people to the presence of God.



Resource Packet Item 2: Death and the Christian

Distribute the worksheet and complete it individually or as a class. Then dis-
cuss the questions together. Note the contrast between the sober reality of death
that accompanies our mortality and the great promises that we enjoy because we
serve an eternal God.

Discuss

- ? What is the right way for Christians to react when they realize that they
have sinned? What is the wrong way? Why?
- ? What is the right way for Christians to react when they see sin in the lives of
others? What is the wrong way? Why?

Part 3—God Rewards Kingdom Work

□ He Teaches Us to Live Wisely

Psalm 90:12–15



Say: The Christian life must be marked by learning from God. As we ponder
our own mortality and vulnerabilities, this becomes more and more obvious.
Our understanding of life and faith is limited. But as Moses expressed in his
prayer, we can turn to God for direction, wisdom, and strength. (Share your
highlights from the following text.)

Psalm 90:12 is Moses' prayerful response to the sobering description of God's wrath and our brevity of life. In a fallen world, the brevity of life is often shrugged off with calls to "make the most of it and enjoy ourselves while we are here." But Moses reminds us that we have something to learn from the brevity of life. These lessons, given by God, will make us wise and teach us to walk wisely. At the root of these lessons is a realization that we must value each one of our days, using each one according to the priorities of God, not our own desires.

This change of priority is borne out in the prayers of verses 13–15. Verse 13 is a humble request for mercy: "O Lord, come back to us! How long will you delay? Take pity on your servants!" (NLT). Those who pray this repentant prayer recognize that their own sinful acts have led to their distance from God, and they need His pity—His loving mercy—to find restoration into God's presence once again.

Verse 14 carries the desires of verse 13 forward into a proper human response to God. The people of Israel had been unsatisfied with God. Despite His merciful acts in delivering them from Egypt and setting the Promised Land before their eyes, they were prone to desire returning to that place of bondage (see Number 14:3) or adopting the false gods of Egypt as their own (see Exodus 32:1). What a contrast from the humble prayer of Psalm 90:14, that specifically sought to find satisfaction in God's "mercy" (KJV) or "unfailing love" (NLT) and desired to "sing for joy to the end of our lives" (NLT). This is the essence of repentance, for it not only admits sin and turns to God, but also seeks restored intimacy and fellowship with God. The previous verses of Psalm 90 make it clear that God's wrath is a fearsome thing. But Moses' prayer went beyond a request to avoid wrath. True repentance will, by definition, lead one to seek God's presence, and true restoration will make that a reality.

Psalm 90:15 is a prayer for full reversal from the status of the past. The people had suffered great misery as a result of their sinfulness and failure to appreciate their own mortality. But now Moses cried out for gladness and joy that would lift them up to heights comparable to the depths they had suffered. Similarly, he prayed that the wasted years of the past would give way to good years of joy in God's presence in the future.



Resource Packet Item 3: Famous Last Words

Distribute the worksheet, and review the last recorded words of certain biblical figures. Then discuss the questions together.

Discuss

- ? What lessons can you learn by considering the brevity of your own life?
- ? In what ways is the Christian life a reversal of the sinful life?



□ May We See God Work Again!

Psalm 90:16–17

Say: While we often recall the miraculous stories of the Old Testament, the history of the Church is also filled with examples of God doing great things. God has always been at work among His people, and He can do great things today. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The conclusion of Moses' prayer in Psalm 90:16–17 is fitting for God's people throughout time. The Israelites no longer saw God's great works—in part because they were no longer looking. God had delivered them and was leading them. Now they needed to see and appreciate His glory, power, and goodness.

The prayer concludes with a desire to know they were back in good relationship with God. The future would be difficult as they traveled the desert and eventually entered Canaan. They needed God's help and presence to succeed. They were only mortal, but success and blessing would come if the eternal God was on their side.

Discuss

- ? How have you seen God's work in your life?
- ? What do you think it means to be approved of God?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Psalm 90 records Moses' prayer for the transformation of a people—from being lost and facing wrath to seeking God's presence. We all need such a transformation. Yet it is not momentary. As we live this mortal life, we must seek God daily, longing for His eternal presence.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Find a way to become involved in evangelism, whether in your own community or through missions. Pray that many will find their way into the presence of the eternal God.
- Pray with someone dealing with the painful reality of life in a mortal, temporary world—especially the loss associated with death and sickness. Ask God to bring comfort and hope to those suffering.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

The Eternal "I AM."
Exodus 3:13–15

Tuesday:

The Brevity of Life. Job 7:6–9

Wednesday:

The Weariness of Life.
Ecclesiastes 4:1–3

Thursday:

Jesus Declares His Eternality.
John 8:51–58

Friday:

Christ's Obedience and Exaltation.
Philippians 2:5–9

Saturday:

Godly Perspective of Life.
James 4:13–15

August 25, 2024

LESSON 13

The Refuge of God's Presence

Study Text

Psalms 91:1–16

Central Truth

The presence of God is a place of refuge, strength, and deliverance for the believer.



Key Verse

Psalm 91:1

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty (KJV).

Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will examine what Psalm 91 teaches us about the presence of God, particularly how our lives are impacted by His presence.
- Students will prioritize God's presence by seeking Him and coming to know Him better through His Word.
- Students will trust God to be our refuge, protector, and deliverer amid the challenges of life.

Introducing the Study

Say: People often talk about how hectic and chaotic the world is today. Some argue that the very technology that was created to make life easier has done the opposite. So now people are taking social media breaks and personal internet blackouts. Yet the struggles of life are nothing new. They have always left people feeling overwhelmed and in need of a place of refuge.

Opening Activity—What's Your Refuge?

Ask: *Where do you go or what do you do to find refuge in your life?* Examples could include hobbies, solitary walks, or time with friends.

Say: When life gets hard, we all find our own ways of dealing with stress. For the Christian, this undoubtedly includes time with the Lord as we find our refuge in Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalm 91 contains one of the most familiar and comforting passages in all of Scripture for those who need a place of refuge, rest, and safety. This psalm is about the loving care provided by a sovereign God for His children. As you study, note how the security God provided the Psalmist is not beneath him, but above him. This is an important distinction. God is not just an anchor to hold us steady in a battle. He shields us, covers us, and holds us safe from the dangers of a chaotic and fallen world. This is a great source of comfort in those moments when we feel overwhelmed and outmatched. Psalm 91 reminds us that our God will give us rest.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Psalm 91:1. He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

2. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.

3. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.

4. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

5. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day;

6. Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday.

7. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.

8. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked.

9. Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation;

10. There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.

11. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

12. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

13. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.

14. Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name.

15. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him.

16. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.

New Living Translation

Psalm 91:1. Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

2. This I declare about the LORD: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him.

3. For he will rescue you from every trap and protect you from deadly disease.

4. He will cover you with his feathers. He will shelter you with his wings. His faithful promises are your armor and protection.

5. Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night, nor the arrow that flies in the day.

6. Do not dread the disease that stalks in darkness, nor the disaster that strikes at midday.

7. Though a thousand fall at your side, though ten thousand are dying around you, these evils will not touch you.

8. Just open your eyes, and see how the wicked are punished.

9. If you make the LORD your refuge, if you make the Most High your shelter,

10. no evil will conquer you; no plague will come near your home.

11. For he will order his angels to protect you wherever you go.

12. They will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.

13. You will trample upon lions and cobras; you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet!

14. The LORD says, "I will rescue those who love me. I will protect those who trust in my name.

15. When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue and honor them.

16. I will reward them with a long life and give them my salvation."



Part 1—God Is Our Refuge

□ Find Rest in Him

Psalm 91:1–3

Say: In Matthew 24, Jesus answered the disciples’ question about signs of His return. His response was sobering. The world will be an increasingly difficult and challenging place for God’s people, filled with tribulation, temptation, and even persecution. Many fellow believers around the world have found this to be true. However, as Psalm 91 reminds us, we do not face such struggles on our own. God is our refuge in every situation. We need to find our rest in Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalm 91:1–3 repeatedly uses what is called “poetic parallelism,” a feature found throughout the Book of Psalms. A parallelism repeats an important point in similar terms for emphasis. When we see it, we can better interpret what the Bible is saying. Rather than try to pinpoint and decipher small distinctions between terms, we should see them as emphasizing one overall meaning of the terms.

Here, parallelism reinforces a key truth about our relationship with God. Note the pairs of terms: shelter/shadow; refuge/safety; rescue/protect. The message of the Psalmist is clear: God takes care of His people. His shelter is always over us, like a comforting shadow that protects us from a blazing heat. He is a refuge to which we can run for safety. And when the inevitable dangers of life threaten us, He can rescue us into His protective care.

We must be careful not to miss a larger point here. These verses remind us that we need God’s protection. The dangers of life—whether physical or spiritual—are very real and often are more than we can handle. Therefore, we must resist the urge to take on these battles alone and submit ourselves to the care that God so loves to bestow upon His children.

The end result of His care and protection is rest (verse 1). Take a moment to ponder how this idea of rest fits into the promises of the remainder of this passage. The term *rest* here refers to a safe dwelling place that a traveler will enjoy for the night or for as many nights as needed. As we travel through this sometimes hostile world, may we find our protection, safety, deliverance, and rest in the Lord.

Discuss

- ? Look for more examples of poetic parallelism in the rest of Psalm 91.
- ? How would you describe what it means to find rest in the Lord?



□ Look to Him for Peace

Psalm 91:4–6

Say: One great beauty of Psalms is the book’s ability to describe even the harshest challenges of life in vivid, relatable terms. Psalm 91:4–6 is a fine example. The Psalmist addresses fears from within and dangers from without. Through it all, we find refuge and shelter in the Lord. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The great imagery of this psalm continues in verses 4–6. Throughout the Old Testament, and especially in Psalms, we see God described using the characteristics of a person or an animal. In verse 4 (NLT), He is depicted as having the qualities of a bird caring for its young. To “cover you with His feathers” and “shelter you with His wings” conveys a sense of warmth and security. This is confirmed in the third phrase of the verse: “His faithful promises are your armor and protection” (NLT).

Verses 5–6 remind the reader of how life “under his wings” is different from life on our own. The Lord gives us peace in this fearful world. Following the Lord does not mean that all dangers and struggles fade into the background. We will encounter reasons to be afraid. We may be opposed or even shunned and mocked for our faith. This might even mean loss or sacrifice for some.

In a similar way, the situations of life can be fearful. The word translated “disease” in verse 6 (NLT) can refer to sickness that threatens the body or pestilence that threatens one’s livelihood. Such problems certainly qualify as disaster. Yet they need not engulf us in fear—not because of our own stamina, resolve, or positive attitude, but because of the loving presence and care of our Lord. As His followers, it is our great joy to find peace and rest that only He can give.



Resource Packet Item 1: Describing the Creator

Distribute the worksheet and discuss it together. Note the significance of the Bible using human and animal terminology to describe God for the purpose of better understanding His nature.

Discuss

- ? What are some of your favorite Scriptures where God is described using human or animal characteristics? What can we learn from this description?
- ? Describe a time when God brought supernatural peace into your life.

Part 2—God Is Our Protector

□ Protection from the Wicked

Psalm 91:7–10



Say: Opposition to the people of God takes many forms in our world. Some believers face hostility that threatens their property, livelihood, and even their well-being. For most of us, the hostility is less apparent. The Psalmist reminds us that we need not fear those who threaten us. Rather, we can trust God’s protection. As a result, we might even recognize opportunities to minister to those who mean us harm. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In the Old Testament, the number 1,000 is often used to signify a huge amount or an amount beyond calculation. And so, the scene in Psalm 91:7 depicts an overwhelming degree of danger: “Though a thousand fall at your side, though ten thousand are dying around you . . .” (NLT).

Many believers can relate to the picture painted by these verses. As God’s people, we sometimes feel as if our enemies are beyond counting or our trials are beyond comprehension. We might find ourselves wanting to close our eyes in

despair to the world around us. But God said, “Just open your eyes, and see how the wicked are punished” (verse 8, NLT). This is an invitation to recall that God not only protects His people, but also judges evildoers and ultimately dispenses with all evil in the end—whether sickness, injustice, suffering, persecution, or countless other calamities a believer might face. In fact, Scripture reminds us of this a number of times (see Deuteronomy 32:43; Proverbs 20:22; Romans 12:17–21; 1 Peter 3:8–12). The willingness to leave our enemies in God’s hand is part of what it means to live by faith and trust Him.

This is the promise of Psalm 91:9–10. Note how these verses refer back to the earlier portion of the psalm, as a kind of an “if–then” statement. If God’s people will make God their shelter and refuge in the ways described before these verses, then they can enjoy the blessings of the promise of verse 10.

Verse 10 can be a difficult passage to understand: “No evil will conquer you; no plague will come near your home” (NLT). At first glance, this seems to say that a believer will not experience adversity or difficulties. But we know that is not what this means simply on the basis of the previous verses, as well as many other passages of Scripture (see Psalm 40:17; Isaiah 43:19; John 16:33; 2 Timothy 3:1–14). Enduring the trials of this world victoriously is a matter of perspective. We have the hope of God’s abiding presence every day. In the same way, we are assured that one day all of these troubles and evils will be judged and destroyed. Yet we will not taste the wrath of God that will fall upon evil. Instead, we will enjoy the glory of His presence.

Discuss

- ? Psalm 91:7–10 can be a difficult and sobering passage. Life as a follower of God will not be easy, even though some may claim that we can live above or without trouble. How would you respond to someone who claims that adversity and difficulty will not come to those who trust in the Lord?
- ? How do you endure the hard times that come as a result of this evil world?



Protected by His Angels

Psalm 91:11–12

Say: You may recall hearing people talk about your “guardian angel” while you were growing up. This isn’t just a fairy tale used to comfort children. The angelic realm is a reality. Psalm 91:11–12 describes how ministering angels can come to the aid of God’s people in times of need. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Angels are described and discussed throughout Scripture, literally from Genesis to Revelation. The term *angel* normally refers to a supernatural, heavenly being who functions either as God’s messenger or as an agent to carry out His will. Psalm 91:11–12 records one of Scripture’s most comforting and detailed descriptions of how angels are involved in the lives of human beings. Angels are sent by God to protect His people from evil and harm.

As noted earlier in the psalm, God brings protection for His people—and in verse 11, we find that this protection can take the form of angelic workers serving

on our behalf. Similarly, they will “hold you up with their hands so you won’t even hurt your foot on a stone” (verse 12, *NLT*). This again reminds us of how the trials of life can leave us feeling weary and vulnerable to dangers and obstacles (spiritual or otherwise). In times like these, God sends ministering angels to come alongside us.

We might recall that Satan used the promise of these verses in a negative way while tempting Jesus (see Luke 4:9–11). This forms a twofold explanation of and reminder about the promise of Psalm 91:11–12. First, it is not a promise to be taken lightly or trifled with. We ought not recklessly put ourselves into unnecessarily risky situations under the assumption that God will protect us. We must remember that we are accountable to Him and under His care. Second, this is a promise restricted to those who obey and follow the Lord. If we follow the way of sin, we make ourselves vulnerable to all kinds of dangers, including spiritual dangers. But as we trust Him, we find incredible comfort in knowing that there are angels among us, doing His work on our behalf.



Resource Packet Item 2: Angels among Us

Have students complete the worksheet as a class, discussing the questions and Scriptures together.

Discuss

- ? What is the boundary between trusting God for protection and taking His protection for granted, thereby acting recklessly?
- ? Describe a time when you sensed that God may have sent angels to help you or someone close to you.

Part 3—God Is Our Deliverer

We Are Active Participants in His Deliverance

Psalm 91:13



Say: Too often, God’s love is viewed as an exclusively New Testament truth.

However, God has always expressed His love for His people, exhorting us that our relationship with Him is built upon both love and trust. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalm 91:13 stands out as unique in this psalm. The preceding verses largely focus on God’s protection and preservation. In this verse, however, God’s people were put on the offensive. This was made possible by the elevated position of safety created by the ministering angels. Yet it is, in fact, the believer who will “trample” and “crush” (verse 13, *NLT*; note the parallelism in this verse). Lions and serpents represent the threat of mortal danger and the power to end life. They also attack suddenly from hidden places, adding to the threat (see Jeremiah 25:38; Ecclesiastes 10:8). Yet they can be put down by the person of faith.

It is also noteworthy that Satan is compared to both of these creatures in the New Testament (see 1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:9). Psalm 91:13, then, paints a picture of great victory over evil for the believer. He or she has endured the trials noted in the previous verses and can also share victory over the enemy by God’s grace and power.

As believers, we are privileged to be active participants in God’s preserving and empowering acts done on our behalf. Note the strong parallels between Psalm 91 and Romans 8:35–39. Nothing can separate us from Christ’s love—“neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love” (verse 38, NLT). Why? Because “in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” (verse 37, KJV).

Discuss

- ? In what ways are sin and evil like the threat of lions and snakes?
- ? What are some ways we live out the promise that we are “more than conquerors” through Christ?



God Is Attuned to His People

Psalm 91:14–16

Say: Have you ever been frustrated because you were explaining something important and those around you were distracted and not listening? Thankfully, God has promised to always listen to us in those important times—and in the less important times too. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Up to this point in Psalm 91, the Psalmist has encouraged God’s people. But beginning in verse 14, God himself speaks. His words are those of a loving, caring Father who takes great pleasure in rescuing and protecting His children—those who love Him and trust in His name.

In verse 15, God restates the great promises of this psalm with a key addition: “When they call on me, I will answer” (NLT). This is followed by a fourfold assurance: to be with them in trouble, to rescue and honor them, to reward them with long life, and to give them salvation.

The first sentence in verse 15 is key, and it has a twofold meaning: God expects us to call on Him, and God expects us to listen and respond to Him. To call on Him means more than prayer; it involves trust and surrender in difficult times. Yet this also points to a great privilege. God is attuned to us. He hears our prayers and our cries. When we talk to Him, we can know that He will listen and that He cares about what we have to say. As a result, God “will reward [us] with a long life and give [us His] salvation” (verse 16, NLT).



Resource Packet Item 3: God, Your Deliverer

Distribute the worksheet, and discuss it in class. Invite students to share their own testimonies.

Discuss

- ? Why is it important to remember that God offers His promises specifically to “those who trust in my name” (Psalm 91:14, NLT)?
- ? Why might we choose not to call out to God with certain needs?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Take time to examine your relationship with God. Are you calling out to Him during the difficult times? Or are you trying to take matters into your own hands as you walk with Him? Ask God to help you renew your trust in Him and to prepare you for challenges to your faith in the future.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- One way God provides refuge to us is through the care and ministry of fellow believers. This week, identify a brother or sister you can help during a difficult time.
- Spend time together as a class praying for each other, asking for God's grace to endure whatever difficulties may come.
- Pray that God will open doors for you to proclaim Christ as a source of refuge to unbelievers. Think about how you might interject your own testimony of God's care into your words.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Song of Victory. Exodus 15:1–3

Tuesday:

God Our Strength and Refuge.
2 Samuel 22:31–34

Wednesday:

Confidence in God Results in Victory. 2 Chronicles 20:5–15

Thursday:

Jesus Promises His Abiding Presence. Matthew 28:18–20

Friday:

Christ Provides Peace and Access.
Romans 5:1–5

Saturday:

Reason to Rejoice in the Lord.
Philippians 4:4–7

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