

DAILY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE
SPRING 2023



PARABLES OF KINGDOM TRUTHS

Stories Jesus Taught

PORTRAITS OF SALVATION

Snapshots of Grace from Scripture

GOD, OUR JUDGE AND KING

How God Leads His People

**GOD'S
WORD**
FOR LIFE



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God's Word for Life



GWFLIFE



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Series 1:

Parables of Kingdom Truths

1.1	March 5	The Two Debtors	8
1.2	March 12	My Part in the Kingdom of God	16
1.3	March 19	The Father Is Waiting	24
1.4	March 26	For a Season	32

Series 2:

Portraits of Salvation

2.1	April 2	Once Lost . . . Now Found	40
ES	April 9	Witnesses of the Resurrection	48
2.2	April 16	Covered by the Blood	56
2.3	April 23	You Must Be Born Again	64
2.4	April 30	Welcome to the Family	72

Series 3:

God, Our Judge and King

3.1	May 7	God Brings Victory	80
3.2	May 14	Gideon and the Strength of Honesty	88
3.3	May 21	Samson's Cry	96
3.4	May 28	Help to Understand God's Call	104

***ES** indicates Easter Sunday.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

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EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor in Chief:
Robin Johnston

Associate Editor, Curriculum:
Lee Ann Alexander

WRITERS:

Gayla Baughman, Terry Baughman,
LJ Harry, Chris Paris, Ron Wofford

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GETTING STARTED

The first page of each week’s material will help you to become familiar with the Truth about God, Truth for My Life, Focus Verse, and Lesson Text to be used in your Sunday school class or small group setting.

MARCH 5, 2023


1.1

TRUTH ABOUT GOD
God forgives our sins.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE
I will express my love for Jesus because He forgives my sins.

SERIES 1: PARABLES OF KINGDOM TRUTHS

THE TWO DEBTORS



FOCUS VERSE: Luke 7:47
Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

LESSON TEXT: Luke 7:36-50

SG
TEACHING OUTLINE

LESSON
1.1

Lesson Title: The Two Debtors

Icebreaker: What is your most prized possession?

I. JESUS TAUGHT IN PARABLES

- A. The Woman with the Alabaster Box
- B. The Parable of the Debtors
- C. Simon's Response
- D. Gratitude for God's Forgiveness
 - » Why do you think Simon was more focused on the woman's heinous sin rather than his own?
 - » What does extravagant worship look like in our day? Would a simple raised hand and song have been enough for the woman to show her gratitude to God?

II. THE POWER OF LOVE AND FORGIVENESS

- A. The Woman's Act of Love
- B. All Have Sinned
 - » How would we view sin differently if we saw it through God's eyes?
- C. No Sin Is Too Big for God to Forgive
- D. I Will Express My Love for Jesus Because He Forgives My Sins
 - » How do you express your love for Jesus for His forgiveness?

Prayer Focus
Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to forgive us of our sins and give us humility
- For God to help us worship Him with a thankful heart for all He has done for us

9

SMALL GROUP
TEACHING OUTLINE

The second page provides a Small Group (SG) Teaching Outlines so you can follow along with the main points of the lesson if you choose to bring your Daily Devotional Guide to church. The outline also includes the lesson’s discussion questions so you can be prepared for discussion if you meet in small groups.

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Luke 7:36-50

In each Gospel we read an account of a woman anointing Jesus' feet (Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, Luke 7:36-38, John 12:1-11). Opinions differ on whether the Gospel authors were recording different perspectives of the same event or multiple occurrences of women anointing Jesus' feet. However, the consensus is that women anointed Jesus' feet three times. The first time was by an unnamed woman while Jesus was dining at Simon the Pharisee's home (Luke 7:36-38). The second was by another unidentified woman while Jesus ate at Simon the leper's house (Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9). The final time was by Lazarus's sister, Mary of Bethany (John 12:1-11).

Luke introduced the woman in his account as a sinful woman. While Luke did not explain the nature of this woman's sins, it is feasible to believe this woman may have been a prostitute due to her moral status being public knowledge. The Pharisee with whom Jesus was dining was disgusted by this woman and even more revolted that Jesus would allow her to touch Him.

It was customary to clean guests' feet or have a servant or member of your household clean guests' feet. In Judea, during the Greco-Roman era, people wore sandals and traveled on dirt roads. Household members washed guests' feet upon their entering the house to maintain the cleanliness of the home. Hosts also offered guests oil for their feet as a sign of hospitality and a preventive health measure. This woman saw the need to wash Jesus' feet because Simon the Pharisee did not wash, request a member of his household to wash, or even provide Jesus water to wash His feet (Luke 7:44-46). Although Simon the Pharisee presented himself as a proper religious man, he treated Jesus in a way then considered shameful, while a prostitute treated Jesus as an honored guest.

Jesus offered a parable on debt cancellation, which presented Simon with a window into the woman's world. While Simon could understand the logic behind Jesus' parable, he could not empathize with this woman's emotional experience upon receiving forgiveness. Instead of celebrating this event, Simon's scorn for Jesus grew. Rather than empathizing with the woman's pain and hope, Simon's contempt for her grew. While treating Jesus shamefully, Simon basked in his pride and showered Jesus and this woman with contempt and disgust.

JESUS OFFERED A PARABLE ON DEBT CANCELLATION, WHICH PRESENTED SIMON WITH A WINDOW INTO THE WOMAN'S WORLD.

10

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

The third page of each lesson will give you a “high level” Biblical Overview of the Lesson Text. The content will explore the text, its background, and any other pertinent information to help you better understand the setting, purpose, and message of the text.

DAILY DEVOTION

The remaining pages will guide you through your week of personal devotion and study. You are encouraged to complete the Bible Reading plan for each day and explore a portion of the text with the help of a section of Biblical Insight on that part of the text. Next is a Daily Devotion to read and a prompt to reflect and pray about the principles presented.

THE TWO DEBTORS

DAY 1

Luke 7:36-38

³⁶ And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat.

³⁷ And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment,

³⁸ And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

Biblical Insight

When this “sinful woman” learned that Jesus was eating at Simon the Pharisee's home, she knew she had to see Jesus and express her devotion to Him. Perhaps this woman had encountered Jesus' teaching and determined she would do anything to receive forgiveness. This perfume may have been the only valuable thing she had. Perhaps she had been paid by a wealthy client with this perfume. Either way, she brought something of great value and poured it on Jesus' feet. What do we have of great importance to bring to the feet of Jesus?

Daily Devotion

In 1917, New York banker and baseball team owner, Morton F. Plant, exchanged his six-story Fifth Avenue mansion for a pearl necklace as a gift for his young wife. At the time, pearls were more valuable than diamonds. The double-stranded, natural, South Sea pearl necklace was worth \$1 million (equivalent to almost \$20 million today), and the mansion was assessed at \$925,000. It was a comparable trade.

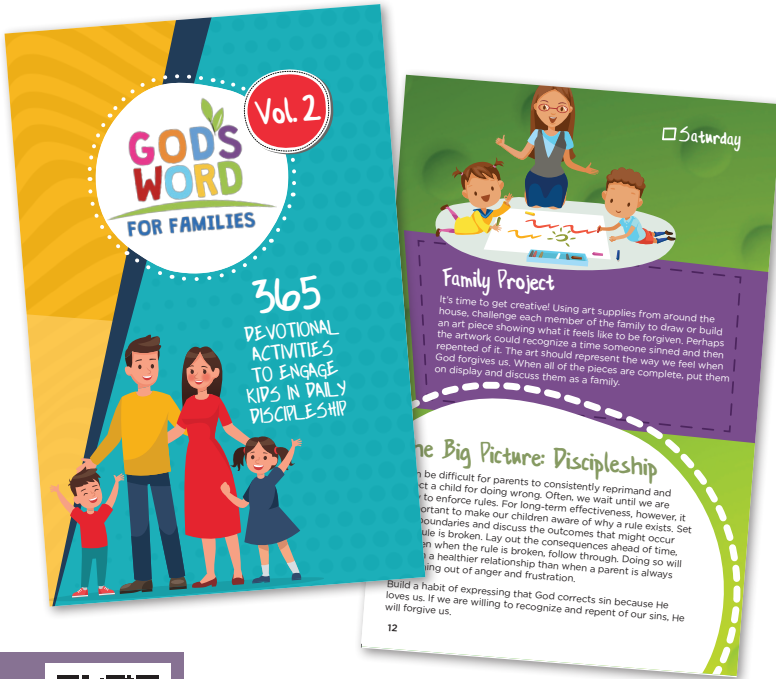
A few years later, Mikimoto Kōkichi's invention of cultured pearls caused the prices of natural pearls to crash. After Mrs. Plant's death in 1956, her pearl necklace, once worth \$1 million, sold for just \$165,000. What seemed like a good exchange in the moment did not withstand the test of time.

The world will try to barter with us and, at first glance, it may seem like a comparable trade. Looks can be deceiving. When we exchange a relationship with God for the things of the world, we are exchanging something of great value for something that will inevitably depreciate. There is no comparison.

Reflection and Prayer

» What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?

GOD'S WORD FOR FAMILIES



SCAN TO
PURCHASE



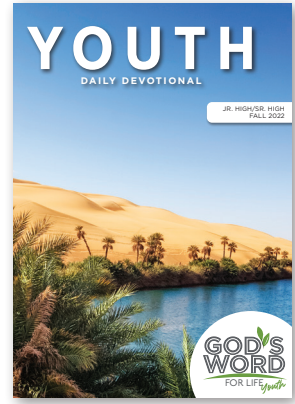
God's Word for Families is a wholly Apostolic discipleship tool designed to help your entire family grow in relationship to God and each other. By exploring a biblical passage from Sunday to Saturday, daily ten-minute activities use a variety of learning styles to engage family members to hear God's voice. Tap in to God's plan for your family by committing to daily discipleship with *God's Word for Families*.

Weekly Overview:

- Sunday — Introduction to the Bible Passage
- Monday — "Why?"
- Tuesday — Analytic Learning
- Wednesday — Worship
- Thursday — Real-life Application
- Friday — Discussion
- Saturday — Family Project

YOUTH DAILY DEVOTIONAL

God's Word for Life equips every age level of the church to study Scripture daily. This resource for youth (ages 12-18) provides a daily Bible passage connected to the week's lesson and a corresponding devotion. Each day ends with a final challenge to apply the message of God's Word with both junior high and senior high options.



PODCAST



The God's Word for Life Podcast presents portions of Scripture with fresh insight and urges adults to think deeply about how the Bible impacts their lives. Each week episodes will encourage listeners to engage with God's Word through reflection and prayer, further develop their personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and live out God's Word in their lives.

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SERIES 1: PARABLES OF KINGDOM TRUTHS

Jesus taught some of His best lessons through parables, or stories with a spiritual application. This series will take a close look at four of those parables: the Two Debtors, the Talents, the Prodigal Son, and the Rich Man and Lazarus. As we look into these sacred stories, we will see the amazing love of God coupled with His unblemished holiness.



SERIES 2: PORTRAITS OF SALVATION

This series, "Portraits of Salvation," gives us snapshots of ways the Scriptures portray salvation. Luke 15 highlights the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son, while Luke 19 celebrates Zacchaeus's salvation. The Passover points to the blood of Jesus, and John 3 tells the story of Jesus' sacred conversation with Nicodemus. The series closes with the grace-filled adoption story of Mephibosheth.



SERIES 3: GOD, OUR JUDGE AND KING

In this series, "God, Our Judge and King," we walk through the Book of Judges to see how God used judges and prophets to lead and speak to His people. We will study Deborah, Gideon, Samson, and finally Samuel and Saul. No matter how little or much we feel we have to offer God, He is able to use us for His glory.

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1.1

THE TWO DEBTORS

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

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TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

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for Jesus because He
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FOCUS VERSE: Luke 7:47

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DAY 1

Luke 7:36-38

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³⁷ And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment,

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Biblical Insight

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Daily Devotion

In 1917, New York banker and baseball team owner, Morton F. Plant, exchanged his six-story Fifth Avenue mansion for a pearl necklace as a gift for his young wife. At the time, pearls were more valuable than diamonds. The double-stranded, natural, South Sea pearl necklace was worth \$1 million (equivalent to almost \$20 million today), and the mansion was assessed at \$925,000. It was a comparable trade.

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Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

Luke 7:39

³⁹ Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

Biblical Insight

When Jesus was approached and served by the “sinful woman,” Simon the Pharisee was distraught. The Pharisees formed supplemental purity laws to protect themselves from becoming ritualistically unclean. These laws were a superficial extension made by this sect of elite Jews to avoid the potential of becoming “unclean” as described in the Law. Simon’s purity was more important to him than any service he could extend to this woman. We can also regard others as a potential contagion that could infect us; however, Jesus practiced no such caution, and neither should we.

Daily Devotion

For over three thousand years, India’s caste system, a basic pillar of traditional Hindu society, has categorized Hindus at birth. This social hierarchy defines Hindus’ place in society, who they can marry, and what jobs they can perform. There are four main categories: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. Outside of the four main categories are the Dalits, the “untouchables” who are trapped in cycles of extreme poverty and oppression because they are valued less than animals.

In Christ, Dalits have discovered they are loved, valued, and worth dying for. Though love has not always been their experience within Christian churches in India, Dalits have found there are no “untouchables” in Christ.

Like India, many cultures have people who are treated as less than or different than others. Reflecting on your life, do you avoid certain people? Are there people or groups you would be unwilling to serve?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

Luke 7:40–43

⁴⁰ And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on.

⁴¹ There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.

⁴² And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?

⁴³ Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

Biblical Insight

Jesus presented Simon the Pharisee with a parable. One debtor owed fifty denarii, and the other owed five hundred denarii. The moneylender determined to cancel both debts. Jesus asked Simon which debtor would love the moneylender more, and Simon provided the correct answer—the debtor who had the larger debt forgiven. While Simon could understand the value of debt cancellation and money, he could not appraise the value of the forgiveness and restoration the woman received from Jesus. Like Simon, we cannot understand the importance of forgiveness until we have experienced the forgiveness of sins.

Daily Devotion

In 1986, Steven McDonald, a New York City police officer, and his partner were on lookout in Central Park due to a string of bicycle thefts. When questioning a small group of teenagers, McDonald was shot three times by Shavod Jones.

Against all odds, McDonald survived, but he was paralyzed from the neck down. In addition to learning how to live all over again, McDonald had to come to terms with being dependent upon others. Destructive emotions filled McDonald until he realized that unforgiveness in his heart would be inflicting spiritual injury on himself and his family. To McDonald, the only thing worse than being shot in the spine was nurturing unforgiveness in his heart.

McDonald held a press conference in which he publicly forgave Shavod Jones, but words were not enough for McDonald. While Jones was in prison, McDonald began writing letters to the teenager. After two years of writing to each other, Jones called McDonald and apologized.

What are ways you can go beyond words of forgiveness to demonstrate forgiveness?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

Luke 7:43-46

⁴³ Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

⁴⁴ And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

⁴⁵ Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

⁴⁶ My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.

Biblical Insight

Simon understood that the one with the larger debt also expressed the most gratitude and love. Jesus further emphasized His point by drawing attention to how inhospitably Simon had treated Jesus. If human beings may discover love and gratitude through experiencing forgiveness, then Simon’s maltreatment of Jesus was indicative of his lack of insight into his need for forgiveness. Instead of becoming distracted by the behavior of others, we must allow God to deal with our personal lives and help us grow into the people He is calling us to be.

Daily Devotion

In 1849, the last Maharaja of the Sikh Empire, Duleep Singh, presented Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom with the infamous 186-carat Koh-i-Noor diamond during the legal amending of the Treaty of Lahore. Upon receiving the diamond, Queen Victoria was not impressed and considered the giant gem to be dull.

The queen did not appreciate the gift she was given. Instead of feeling grateful to receive a diamond highly revered as a symbol of the power and beauty of India, Queen Victoria dismissed it. Because of her dismissal, the largest diamond ever found was cut down to 105.6 carats to please the queen.

Ingratitude always chips away at a gift until there is nothing left. If we are not careful, we can become like Queen Victoria and not appreciate God’s gifts. The gifts of God may not always come in the way we want or expect. While they may seem dull in comparison to our expectations, we should accept every gift from God with gratitude.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

Luke 7:47-50

⁴⁷ Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

⁴⁸ And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.

⁴⁹ And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?

⁵⁰ And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.

Biblical Insight

Instead of recognizing their need for greater forgiveness, Simon and his other guests were even further disturbed when Jesus forgave the sins of this woman. Instead of celebrating with the forgiven woman and welcoming her back into the community of faith, they looked on with scorn as Jesus offered grace and mercy to what they considered an undesirable, undeserving woman. Throughout this entire event, this woman spoke no words. Jesus saw through her actions and discerned the intentions of her heart. Jesus reminded her that her faith contributed to her wholeness, which emphasizes that she and we play a crucial role that contributes to our wholeness.

Daily Devotion

According to Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, studies have shown that hurt, resentment, and disappointment are both emotional and physical burdens. These feelings increase risks of heart disease and diabetes while also decreasing immune system response. The longer a person holds on to resentment, the greater the health risks.

Similarly, forgiveness improves health by improving sleep, reducing pain, lowering blood pressure, strengthening the immune system, and lowering stress. When we begin the process of forgiveness, our minds must make a conscious decision to let go of negative feelings. The continual conscious decision to let go changes the neuroanatomy of the brain on a structural level. Positive outcomes include improved emotional control, reduced stress, increased empathy, and easier forgiveness. In other words, the more we forgive, the more our brain becomes wired for empathy and forgiveness.

Not only is forgiveness a necessity for your soul, but forgiveness is the prescription for a longer, healthier, and happier life.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

1.2

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God gives
all believers
responsibility
in His kingdom.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will do my part
to advance the
kingdom of God.

MY PART IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD



FOCUS VERSES: Matthew 25:14-15

¹⁴ For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.

¹⁵ And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 25:14-30

Lesson Title: My Part in the Kingdom of God

Icebreaker: What is the largest amount of money you have ever seen at one time?

I. THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS**A. All the Talents Belonged to the Master**

» *How would you feel if your boss came to you tomorrow, opened up a briefcase, counted off ten thousand crisp one-hundred-dollar bills, handed them to you, and rode off to the airport? What would you do with the money?*

B. The Three Servants

» *Why do we often battle resentment when someone else is promoted or blessed more than us? How do we stave off resentment?*

C. I Will Faithfully Invest My Talents in the Kingdom of God

» *What would you say is your most skillful God-given gift? How are you using it for the glory of God?*

II. INVESTING MYSELF IN THE KINGDOM**A. The Joy of Serving****B. Self-Reliance, the Enemy of Obedience**

» *In addition to skills and talents, what other gifts from God might we use for the glory of God? What about our finances, our friendships, our influence?*

C. I Will Do My Part to Advance the Kingdom of God**Prayer Focus**

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to show us the gifts and talents He has given us
- For God to help us use those gifts and talents for His glory and to bless His kingdom

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Matthew 25:14–30

While it is tempting to view a parable as an isolated story, readers must consider what prompted the parable to understand the parable fully. In Matthew 24, Jesus and His disciples had departed the Temple. While walking among the Temple district of Jerusalem, Jesus told His disciples that all the buildings would be destroyed, prompting the disciples to ask, “When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” (Matthew 24:3). In response to their questions, Jesus delivered the lesson found in Matthew 24:4–25:46, which contains two parables. To properly study the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14–30), readers must allow the context of the disciple’s questions to frame their understanding of this text.

The first verse of the Parable of the Talents connects to the disciples’ questions about the signs of Jesus’ return and the end of the world, “For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods” (Matthew 25:14). These servants were likely trusted slaves of the man. Since he could not manage his household while he was away on a journey, he made his slaves stewards of his estate. Stewards did not own property; they managed property on behalf of an owner. Some interpret this parable through the principle of stewardship; however, readers must keep in mind that Jesus was telling this parable to teach about His return and the end of the world, not stewardship.

The man going on a long trip refers to Jesus and His ascension into Heaven. The man’s servants refer to Jesus’ disciples, whom Jesus would entrust with His “money,” or resources. The parable indicates that Jesus’ disciples would be rewarded and punished based on how well or poorly they utilized Jesus’ resources while He was away. Christians can apply this principle by recognizing whatever resources Jesus has entrusted to them and using those resources wisely to increase and extend the kingdom of Heaven on the earth.

TO PROPERLY STUDY THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS (MATTHEW 25:14–30), READERS MUST ALLOW THE CONTEXT OF THE DISCIPLE’S QUESTIONS TO FRAME THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THIS TEXT.

DAY 1

Matthew 24:14-15

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¹⁵ And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.

Biblical Insight

The man on the journey divided his resources among his servants in proportion to their abilities. The man knew his servants' abilities because he had observed their work. He promoted them to be stewards, likely due to faithfulness and quality in their past work. God does not call us to do more than we are capable of doing. Instead, He calls us to use our skills, abilities, and resources to extend His kingdom and spread the gospel across the earth.

Daily Devotion

Traditionally organizations reward top performers by giving them more responsibility followed by a raise or promotion. Ideally managers observe workers to see whose behavior is in line with the organization's values when rewarding employees. According to Harvard Business Review, many people only view the raise or promotion as a reward, and they devalue being given more responsibility.

Increased responsibility demonstrates a manager's faith in a worker's abilities while also providing a test to see if the worker could manage a promotion. If a manager were to promote someone who was unable to execute the responsibilities of the new role, the promotion would not be a reward but rather a curse.

We see this principle in God's kingdom as well. God rewards faithfulness with an increase in responsibilities in our local church, in our families, in our communities, and in spiritual warfare. How we handle the increase in responsibilities determines whether we will be promoted spiritually by experiencing new heights and depths in God.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

Matthew 24:16-18

- ¹⁶ Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents.
- ¹⁷ And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.
- ¹⁸ But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

Biblical Insight

The master distributed his resources among the three servants based on their abilities. The master believed the third servant had some skill and knowledge; otherwise, he would have distributed his resource to a different servant. Perhaps the servant's reluctance to use his master's resource was because he saw the other two servants receive more resources. Instead of basing his worth on the confidence the master had in him, he devalued himself and his abilities by comparing himself to others.

Daily Devotion

On May 13, 1950, Stevland Hardaway Judkins, known professionally as Stevie Wonder, was born six weeks premature. Between the premature birth and the oxygen-rich atmosphere of the incubator, Stevie's eyes stopped growing and his retinas detached, resulting in blindness.

Wonder was a child musical prodigy, debuting his first record at the age of twelve. In the following years, he became a singer, songwriter, producer, musician, and is considered one of the most creative musical figures of the late twentieth century.

Reporters asked Wonder if he thought of being blind as a disadvantage. Wonder responded that he never considered blindness a disadvantage. He said, "I love that God has allowed me to take whatever it was that I had and to make something out of it" (The Guardian, "Stevie Wonder").

Instead of thinking in terms of disadvantages and disabilities, we must realize that with God in our lives, we have advantages and abilities others do not. It is all a matter of perspective.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

Matthew 24:19–23

¹⁹ After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.

²⁰ And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.

²¹ His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

²² He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.

²³ His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

Biblical Insight

The master returned from his trip and investigated the work of his three servants. The results of the first two servants yielded an increase for the master. The first and second servants were faithful to what the master entrusted into their care. The master celebrated the diligence of these servants and presented them both with further responsibilities. God provides everyone the opportunity to practice and utilize their skills for His kingdom. When efforts result in furthering the gospel, there is a celebration in Heaven (Luke 15:10).

Daily Devotion

Albert Einstein was a German-born theoretical physicist, known around the world as one of the greatest physicists of all time. He is best known for developing the theory of relativity, contributing to quantum mechanics, and helping create the H-bomb. While the world knew who Einstein was, to Emmy, Einstein was the kind old man who knew a lot about mathematics.

When Emmy began having trouble with her fifth-grade arithmetic, she decided to ask the nice old man for help. Einstein was willing to help Emmy with her homework, and not just Emmy. There are countless stories in the news of Einstein helping children. Even with everything Einstein had accomplished with his skills and talents, he still desired to further the future of mathematics and physics by investing in others.

While we may not be geniuses like Albert Einstein, we can learn from his example. When we use our skills and talents to invest in others, especially in the next generation, we are investing wisely.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

Matthew 25:24-25

²⁴ Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed:
²⁵ And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.

Biblical Insight

Unlike the other two servants, the third servant did not utilize the resource entrusted to him by the master. The servant explained that because he believed his master was a “harsh man,” he feared what might happen to him if he lost the resource. The master may not have been harsh; however, because the servant perceived his master as harsh, he approached this opportunity with fear rather than faith. If Christians view God as harsh and come to Him from a position of fear, it will be a challenge for them to produce fruit for the kingdom of God.

Daily Devotion

According to the *Journal of Religion and Health*, the way people view God influences their mental health. Researchers discovered that symptoms such as social anxiety, paranoia, obsessional thinking, and uncontrollable compulsions were the highest among people who view God as punitive. When we view God as angry, vengeful, and unloving, it is difficult to believe He will protect, heal, and provide. Instead, on a neurological level, the brain will perceive God as a threat.

In contrast, the researchers discovered that belief in God as benevolent reduces neural stress. When God is seen as a protector, defender, healer, and as merciful, the brain can relax. A person can have more self-control, manage strong emotions, and better handle stress.

Philippians 4:6-7 links handling anxious thoughts to thankfulness. Thankfulness to God transforms the way we see God and makes it difficult to see Him as a threat. Instead, we will see His benevolence in all areas of our lives. Then the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

Matthew 25:26-30

²⁶ His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed:

²⁷ Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.

²⁸ Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.

²⁹ For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

³⁰ And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Biblical Insight

Upon hearing what the third servant did with his resource, the master was furious. He accused the servant of being wicked and lazy. The master gave the third servant's resource to the first servant. This parable was given to Jesus' disciples to explain the signs of the end of the age. Therefore, the parable shows that Jesus' disciples were tasked to utilize their resources appropriately. Those who use their resources will receive further responsibility and celebration; those who do not will lose whatever resources they possess and be ashamed.

Daily Devotion

On May 20, 1862, Abraham Lincoln signed the Homestead Act to accelerate the settlement of western territory. The Act allowed the head of the family to acquire 160 acres of public land. To claim the land, this person was required to live on the land, build a house, and improve the land through farming.

After five years on the land, the head of the family was entitled to the property deed "free and clear" except for the registration fee of eighteen dollars. However, if the family failed to live on the land for five years or to cultivate the land, the land reverted to the government. While the dream of owning land appealed to many Americans, many homesteaders struggled with the hardships of frontier life and abandoned the land they were entrusted with.

When bestowed with responsibilities, resources, and opportunities, we must resist the temptation to hide or run away. Instead, we must trust that God sees something in us and He will help us properly steward what He has entrusted to us.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

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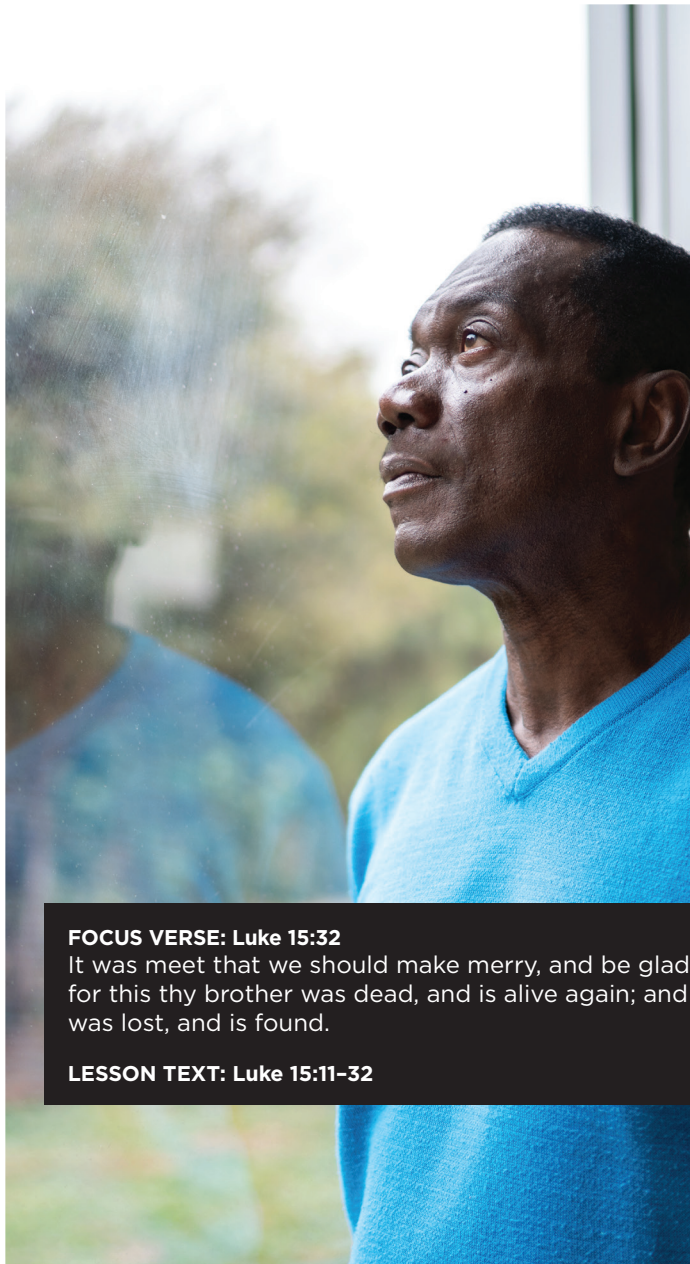
TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God loves the prodigals and waits patiently for their return.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

All who wander can return to their loving, heavenly Father.

THE FATHER IS WAITING



FOCUS VERSE: Luke 15:32

It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

LESSON TEXT: Luke 15:11-32



Lesson Title: The Father Is Waiting

Icebreaker: What is the farthest you have ever traveled away from home?

I. THE YOUNGER SON

- A. He Pursued a Life of Self-Determination
 - » *Why do you think the young man wanted to leave home so badly?*
- B. I Will Yield to God's Authority in My Life

II. THE OLDER SON

- A. He Lived a Life of Self-Righteousness
- B. He Did Not Acknowledge His Inheritance or His Brother's Restoration
 - » *Do we have a difficult time rejoicing when someone is restored? If so, why?*
- C. I Will Reject Self-Righteousness and Rejoice in the Restoration of Others
 - » *What are practical ways we can rejoice with someone who is restored?*

III. THE LOVING, FORGIVING FATHER

- A. He Allowed His Sons to Make Their Own Decisions
 - » *Why do you think our heavenly Father allows us to make decisions that may harm us?*
- B. He Desired to Restore Both Sons to a Wholesome Relationship with Him
- C. All Who Wander Can Return to Their Loving, Heavenly Father
 - » *Do you struggle more with outward sins everyone can see or inward sins only God can see?*

Prayer Focus

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to help us be content and thankful to be close to Him
- For God to help us welcome people back to right relationship with Him

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Luke 15:11–32

In Luke 15, Jesus addressed a group of Pharisees and religious experts who had complained about His regular practice of meeting and even eating with tax collectors and others who were known publicly to be sinners. They were appalled that any righteous man would interact with such sinful people. In response to their complaints, Jesus offered three parables. Luke 15:11–32, known as the Parable of the Prodigal (or lost) Son, shares this context with two shorter parables. These two parables are the Parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:3–7) and the Parable of the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8–10).

These three parables focus on three occurrences: 1) something of value becoming lost, 2) the efforts of the searcher to find the lost object, and 3) the subsequent celebration when that which was lost was found. Searching for the lost coin and the sheep would make sense to Jesus' audience. What the coin and sheep have in common is their value—the coin represented value as minted currency, and the sheep held value because sheep produced wool. This value was clear to Jesus' audience, the Pharisees and religious experts. What puzzled Jesus' audience was how the lost son in Luke 15:11–32 held any value.

Jesus lived in an honor-shame culture. The contention between the Pharisees and the sinners is evidence of this fact. The prodigal son's behavior would have resulted in him being shamed within this culture. Jesus' audience was likely surprised that the father even granted the son's request for his inheritance. When the father forgave the son and welcomed him back into the family, Jesus' audience would have been dumbfounded. This series of parables entrapped the Pharisees and religious experts and exploited how culture influenced their value system more than faithfulness to Scripture.

They ignored mercy, which was an essential matter of the Law (Matthew 23:23), and failed to show mercy to anyone except themselves and those like them. Like these religious experts, we can allow our culture to influence whom we value and deem worthy of generosity, assistance, compassion, and even salvation. A counter-cultural gospel compels believers to continue Jesus' ministry by first seeing and defending the value of every person. If Christians only show compassion to "good people," we are no different from others. Instead, Christians must remember that Jesus laid down His life for sinners (Romans 5:6–8). To continue Jesus' ministry, Christians must go and do likewise.

JESUS LIVED IN AN HONOR-SHAME CULTURE. THE CONTENTION BETWEEN THE PHARISEES AND THE SINNERS IS EVIDENCE OF THIS FACT.

DAY 1

Luke 15:11-13

¹¹ And he said, A certain man had two sons:

¹² And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

¹³ And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

Biblical Insight

Scrupulous understanding of Jesus' culture is not necessary to understand the impropriety of the younger son's request. Contained within the son's request for his inheritance was also a wish for his father's death. The younger son asked for his inheritance now because he was too impatient to wait for his father to die. Cultural standards dictated that the son should have been punished for making such a request; instead, the father granted his request. At the beginning of this parable, the Pharisees and religious experts in Jesus' audience began to doubt the father's status as an honorable man.

Daily Devotion

According to a study of wealthy families, the Williams Group Wealth Consultancy found that 70 percent of families lose their wealth by the second generation, and 90 percent of families lose their wealth by the third generation. According to a US Trust study, one reason for this loss of wealth is that the next generation is not financially responsible enough to handle an inheritance. It takes the average inheritor only nineteen days before buying a new car, and seldom does the inheritor hire a financial advisor.

Another reason for the quick loss of inheritance is that many people are not taught how to handle money. Stewardship is a lost concept because parents tend to forgo talking about budgets, how to make money, how to save money, and how to spend wisely. Without open discussions, children can view money for instant gratification. When parents do not model a biblical perspective of money, the next generation is left without a road map when they have money.

Financial stewardship is a biblical principle. In what ways are you modeling it for the next generation?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

Luke 15:14-19

- ¹⁴ And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.
- ¹⁵ And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.
- ¹⁶ And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.
- ¹⁷ And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!
- ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,
- ¹⁹ And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

Biblical Insight

After receiving his inheritance, the son likely believed his plans, whatever they were, were going to work out. Then the situation became overwhelming. Part of the son's despair was the irrefutable knowledge that his actions, to some extent, had created his circumstances. He was desperate enough to eat alongside the pigs. Eventually the growling of his stomach, the overwhelming loneliness he felt, and the widespread destitution of his situation brought him to his senses. Suffering can direct people back to God and accomplish God's purposes (Genesis 50:20).

Daily Devotion

Robert Robinson (1735–1790) left behind his life of sin as a young man and began serving God. At twenty-three, Robinson wrote the hymn “Come, Thou Fount” and soon after became a pastor at a church in Cambridge, where he diligently ministered to the university students. While his church grew in number and a new building had to be built, Robinson wrestled with his beliefs.

Robinson found himself questioning the deity of Christ and the deity of the Holy Spirit. Eventually, Robinson wandered away from God and backslid. One day, when traveling in a stagecoach, he heard a young lady singing, “Prone to leave the God I love.” Robinson burst into tears hearing the words from the hymn he had written decades ago. The lady reassured the wayward Robinson that the “streams of mercy” mentioned in the hymn still flowed.

Regardless of how far you or someone you know has wandered from the Lord, His streams of mercy still flow. If you need His mercy today, simply spend time with Him and ask Him.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

Luke 15:20–24

²⁰ And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

²¹ And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

²² But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:

²³ And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:

²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

Biblical Insight

The beautiful reunion of the father and son left the Pharisees scratching their heads. Due to the son's offenses, he should have been dead to his father, yet his father habitually watched for his son's return. The son should not have been allowed to return; however, the father clothed him, put a ring on his finger, and prepared a celebration. Something of value was found, and the dead son was returned to life. God is searching and ready to restore all people to abundant life and a reconciled relationship with Him.

Daily Devotion

Davy Crockett (1786–1836) was a frontiersman, soldier, politician, and American folk hero. In his autobiography, Crockett recounted when he joined other frontiersmen for a wolf hunt. Although the hunt began with many men, Crockett left the group, thinking he knew a better path, and found himself alone. As the sun began to set and clouds gathered in the sky, Crockett's fear increased, which caused him to be "mad lost." Crockett wandered for another eight miles until night fell when he finally acknowledged why he was mad lost. He had chosen the wrong direction and needed help.

Crockett would not have become lost if he had stayed with the men who knew the woods in that area. Instead, he thought he knew better. When we depend on our "own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5), we often cannot see the path or direction God has set for us. If you find yourself lost because of your own understanding, acknowledge that you are lost and ask your heavenly Father for help. He will direct your paths (Proverbs 3:6).

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

Luke 15: 25-27

- ²⁵ Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing.
- ²⁶ And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.
- ²⁷ And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.

Biblical Insight

The older son returned from working in the fields, which was his custom. He was surprised to hear the celebration and to learn of his brother’s return. The house was usually dark and quiet, but now it was alive with light and the sound of life. Something was keeping the older son from the father’s house. Whatever caused the separation between the older son and his father was different from what created the rift between the younger son and the father. Readers now see the separation between the older son and his father. This parable features two prodigal sons instead of one.

Daily Devotion

Offering forgiveness to Confederate leaders during the American Civil War was a painful issue and political risk. In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction whereby Confederate soldiers who were guilty of treason against the United States of America could receive a presidential pardon. President Lincoln wanted the United States’ prodigal sons to return home without fear.

President Lincoln had faith the prodigals would return home, and he wanted to set a precedent of forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing. Throughout the war, while most Confederates did not accept Lincoln’s offer of forgiveness, he never rescinded his offer of pardon. When asked how he planned to treat the Southerners after the war, President Lincoln declared he would treat them like they never left.

Unfortunately, after President Lincoln’s assassination, forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing gave way to Jim Crow Laws as Reconstruction ended. While President Lincoln desired healing, others did not, and much work still remains to address issues of division and racial inequity.

The larger concept of pardon is important in our spiritual lives. By forgiving prodigals before they return, we can create an atmosphere of reconciliation and healing in our homes and churches that will last for eternity.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

Luke 15:28-32

²⁸ And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him.

²⁹ And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:

³⁰ But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.

³¹ And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.

³² It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

Biblical Insight

Each character in the parable represented Jesus' audience. The older brother represented the Pharisees, the younger brother signified the sinners, and the father symbolized Jesus. Jesus revealed the Pharisees' inner dialogue through the character of the older brother. The Pharisees' problem was with their view of God. They believed God rewards those who work hard and punishes those who make poor choices. For them, if God did not do that, there would be no higher purpose to the rigid lifestyle the Pharisees lived. Like the older brother, Christians can become lost in the Father's house.

Daily Devotion

According to the "Lost & Found Survey" by the location app Pixie Technology Inc., it takes an average of five minutes and twenty seconds to find most lost items. Keys, wallets, umbrellas, passports, and ID cards take an average of fifteen minutes to find. The time spent searching for lost items has resulted in people being late for work, school, appointments, and meetings, and has caused missed flights, trains, and buses. Americans spend an average of two-and-a-half days a year looking for lost items.

In comparison, it takes less than a minute to send a text, and the average phone call for church follow-up is less than five minutes. How many minutes of the day do we spend reaching out to people who were not in church on Sunday? Have we ever been late to a meeting because we were busy caring for a prodigal who reached out for help? Do we spend more time looking for lost items than we do looking for the spiritually lost?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

MARCH 26, 2023

SERIES 1: PARABLES OF KINGDOM TRUTHS

1.4

FOR A SEASON

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God gives us a season to accept Him.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will choose to live for God today.



FOCUS VERSE: Luke 16:31

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

LESSON TEXT: Luke 16:19-31



Lesson Title: For a Season

Icebreaker: Share the most remarkable rags-to-riches story you have heard.

- I. PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES ARE NOT ALWAYS INDICATIVE OF FUTURE REALITY
 - » *If you were just looking at the station in life of the rich man and of Lazarus, whom do you think was more blessed? Explain.*
 - A. The Great Reversal
 - » *What are you most looking forward to in Heaven?*
 - » *What resources can you use today to help make disciples for God's glory?*
 - B. I Will Not Judge My Spiritual Position Based on My Temporal Reality
 - » *Since many of God's people in the Bible were persecuted and poor, where does the prosperity gospel stem from?*
- II. TODAY IS THE DAY OF SALVATION
 - A. The Rich Man's Request
 - » *What do you think is the most tormenting part of Hell?*
 - B. Abraham's Response

Prayer Focus

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to help us be ready for the day we will meet Him
- For God to help us notice people who may need our kindness

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Luke 16:19–31

Jesus began Luke 16 teaching His disciples through the Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1–13). Jesus taught about the dangers of loving money. Unannounced to the disciples, a group of Pharisees was eavesdropping on Jesus and His disciples. The Pharisees interrupted Jesus with their scoffing. Luke shed light on the Pharisees scoffing by stating they loved their money (16:14). When Jesus heard them, He turned from His disciples and addressed the Pharisees. Jesus charged the Pharisees with applying Torah to their lives inconsistently (Matthew 23:23) and condemning God's plans as revealed through John the Baptist's and Jesus' ministries (Luke 16:15–17).

When we arrive at Luke 16:19, we find Jesus still speaking to the Pharisees. He offered them the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. This Lazarus was Lazarus the beggar, not Mary and Martha of Bethany's brother, named Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead. The only details about Lazarus the beggar are those listed in this parable. Lazarus may have lain at the rich man's gate because he could not move around independently. When the rich man's servants tossed out scraps, Lazarus ate them alongside dogs that licked Lazarus' wounds.

Lazarus' sores may have resulted from being sedentary for long periods or from a disease, disorder, or disability not mentioned. During Jesus' time, poverty was considered a character flaw or moral failure. If someone was impoverished, it was either the result of their laziness or sinfulness. If someone experienced poverty related to a health disorder, the prevailing idea of the time was that these individuals' health issues and subsequent poverty were punishments from God for their sinfulness or their parents' sinfulness (John 9).

When the rich man saw Lazarus, he did not see someone needing help or care. Instead, he saw a vile sinner enduring God's punishment. Even when the rich man was in torment and Lazarus in Heaven, the rich man still saw himself as better than Lazarus and deserving of compassion. Through this parable Jesus showed how the pride we take in ourselves and shame we see in others endures after death because these problems are not social or cultural. These problems are profoundly entrenched in the human psyche and require the gospel of Jesus Christ and God's grace to be cured.

**DURING JESUS' TIME, POVERTY WAS
CONSIDERED A CHARACTER FLAW OR
MORAL FAILURE.**

DAY 1

Luke 16:19-21

¹⁹ There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:
²⁰ And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,
²¹ And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

Biblical Insight

While traveling across one's city, state, province, country, or even the globe to perform ministry can be an excellent opportunity to advance the kingdom of God, Christians do not need to travel far to minister to others. The rich man had a beggar living outside his home and eating alongside dogs out of his trash can. Instead of taking this opportunity to extend compassion and care to Lazarus the beggar, the rich man ignored Lazarus. Christians must never forget that ministry is not limited to church or on a mission trip. Ministry must start at home and extend into our local communities.

Daily Devotion

Nadirah was born into a strict Muslim household and grounded in the Quran. Unfortunately, in her country, this training did not allow for her to be taught how to read or write. One day she met Jesus and left behind her Muslim background and family. She married a Christian man and had a family. She was content being a mother and wife.

Later in life, her husband passed away and her children left home. Not knowing what to do, she asked God if there was any meaning to her life. God told her she had neglected her mission field. Immediately Nadirah repented. She then opened her house and her heart to everyone who needed love, comfort, wisdom, friendship, or a hot meal. Before long Nadirah had a new family all of whom she led to Jesus. Nadirah's home become a Christian congregation in a Muslim community because she opened her heart to her community.

Is your heart open to your community?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

Luke 6:22-24

²² And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;
²³ And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.
²⁴ And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

Biblical Insight

Jesus' intention was not to present His audience an image of Heaven and Hell, but rather to reveal the sinfulness of the Pharisees' hearts due to their love of money and disregard for the poor. The Pharisees in Jesus' audience were represented by the rich man. Even in torment the rich man understood Lazarus as being beneath him, evidenced by his request to Abraham to send Lazarus to bring him relief. Suffering and misery cannot cure a hardened heart; they only reinforce it. Just as God hardened Pharaoh's heart through interactions with Moses, every interaction with Jesus increasingly hardened the Pharisees' hearts.

Daily Devotion

The Gilded Age (1870-1900) was a time of rapid economic growth. During this time the captains of industry and robber barons became astronomically rich through industries such as steel, railroads, and coal mining. The defining difference between which wealthy elites were labeled "captains of industry" and which were labeled "robber barons" was how the businesspeople used their money.

Those who used their wealth to improve the country through increased industrial productivity, expanding economic markets, providing more jobs, increasing worker safety, or philanthropy were considered the "captains of industry." On the other hand, those who used questionable business practices, hoarded their money, or exploited their workers were called "robber barons." Though a century has passed since the Gilded Age, the labels attached to the industrial elite are still used today. The way they gained money and used money became part of their legacy.

How we view and use money can also become a part of our legacy. Upon reflection, what will your legacy be?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

Luke 16:25-26

²⁵ But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

²⁶ And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.

Biblical Insight

While Lazarus lay outside the rich man's home, the rich man lived in lavish comfort nearby. Lazarus was grateful for any generosity, but the rich man was so entitled that he demanded Lazarus journey from Heaven to Hell. Entitlement, or what people believe they deserve, diminishes care for others and increases selfishness. When people require better treatment for themselves and fail to advocate for others, especially for those less privileged, entitlement is at work. One way for Christians to avoid entitlement is to do all things "as unto the Lord" (Colossians 3:23), who is "no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34).

Daily Devotion

In 2016 an unnamed guest posted in a UK forum asking for advice. The woman had recently attended a wedding where the wedding couple asked for cash gifts. After returning from the wedding, the guest received an email from the newly married couple declaring their surprise that her gift of £100 did not seem to match the warmth of her good wishes, and the couple suggested an "adjustment" to increase her monetary gift.

Beyond the social dynamics of that bold couple's request, we see in general that entitlement and discontentment often go hand in hand. Psychologists describe this as the beginning of the entitlement spiral. When expectations are unmet, people can begin to feel dissatisfied, which leads to feeling cheated. If people feel cheated, they will try to fix the situation by putting other people down.

The key to stopping the entitlement spiral is described in Hebrews 13:5, "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." If you are struggling with entitlement, seek contentment in God's presence.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

Luke 16:27-29

- ²⁷ Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house:
- ²⁸ For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.
- ²⁹ Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.

Biblical Insight

The rich man reiterated his demeaning view of Lazarus a second time by asking Abraham to send Lazarus to his father's home as a warning to his family. Abraham indicated that the rich man and his family were without excuse because Moses and the prophets warned against their sinful behaviors and attitudes. Moses' warning was reiterated by Jesus and by Paul, "Love thy neighbour as thyself" (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:35-40; Galatians 5:14). Torah is not fulfilled by avoiding uncleanness, but instead by regarding others as equals and caring for them as one would care for oneself.

Daily Devotion

Olaudah Equiano was born in 1745 in present-day Nigeria. He was one of the first Africans to survive chattel slavery and write about his experiences. In his autobiography, Equiano described the terror he felt as an eleven-year-old boy when he was captured. He described the appalling, crowded conditions of the slave vessel. His narrative recounts the slave markets in Barbados and the behavior of the buyers who inspected the African men, women, and children like commodities.

At this point in his narrative, Equiano asked a poignant question, "O, ye nominal Christians! Might not an African ask you, learned you this from your God who said to you 'Do unto all men as you would have them do unto you?'"

Equiano called out the fundamental difference between authentic Christians and nominal Christians. Nominal Christians are only Christians in name. What defines authentic Christians and nominal Christians is how we treat other people. When we treat others less than how we want to be treated, we are Christian in name only.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

Luke 16:30–31

³⁰ And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

³¹ And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

Biblical Insight

It is not uncommon to believe if people witness a miracle or see a great sign, they will come to faith in Jesus without hesitation; however, Jesus clarified this is not the case. Jesus foreshadowed His impending death and resurrection and the disbelief that followed. The main antagonists of Jesus' resurrection and the church were the Pharisees, to whom Jesus was currently speaking. Disbelief is not the result of lack of evidence but the suppression of evidence (Romans 1:18). What we need is not more evidence but rather to experience a faithful God.

Daily Devotion

In August 1990, Cathy was fatally stabbed in Alabama. Cathy's husband, Randal Padgett, was arrested and charged with capital murder. During his 1992 trial, prosecutors failed to tell the defense, the judge, and the jury that the blood from the crime scene did not match Randal's blood. Because the prosecution withheld vital information, Padgett was found guilty and sentenced to death. Three years later, Alabama's Court of Criminal Appeals ordered a new trial because the prosecution's actions became known. In 1997, Padgett was exonerated.

According to the Death Penalty Information Center, the most common reason for exonerations is official misconduct through concealing evidence. In trials, the suppression of evidence is a matter of life and death.

Suppression of biblical truth is a matter of eternal life or death. When we do not read, study, memorize, or meditate upon God's Word, we are suppressing evidence of God's faithfulness and power. By not engaging in Scripture's records, eye-witness accounts, and laws, we cannot experience true liberty that comes through abiding faith in Jesus. Who can you tell about the truth of God's love this week?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

2.1

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

The Messiah's mission is to seek and to save the lost.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will celebrate that Jesus sought me and saved me.

ONCE LOST . . . NOW FOUND



FOCUS VERSE: Luke 19:10

For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

LESSON TEXT: Luke 15:1-10; 19:1-10



Lesson Title: Once Lost . . . Now Found

Icebreaker: What is the longest you have ever been lost?

I. JESUS LOVES THE SINNER

» *How does it make you feel to know that Jesus died for you while you were lost?*

A. He Will Seek for Those Who Are Lost

» *Can you recall a time you felt the overwhelming relief of finding something or someone lost?*

B. He Will Rejoice Over Finding a Sinner

» *How often do you see the value in people like Jesus does?*

C. I Will Rejoice When the Lost Are Found

» *Think about the last person you recall being born again. Did you feel overwhelming joy?*

II. JESUS FOUND ZACCHAEUS

A. Zacchaeus Was Lost

B. Jesus Sought for and Changed Zacchaeus

» *Have you ever considered the miracle that Jesus found you where He did and saved you?*

C. I Celebrate That Jesus Sought for Me and Changed Me

Prayer Focus

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to seek and save those who are lost
- For God to help us rejoice when He seeks and saves the lost

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Luke 15:1-10; 19:1-10

The first text, Luke 15:1-10, contains two of Jesus' parables, the lost sheep and the lost coin. Luke 19:1-10, the second text, features Jesus' encounter with a tax collector named Zacchaeus. Money plays an essential role in understanding these two parables and the experience of Zacchaeus. Just as in contemporary culture, money in Jesus' culture was also valuable because it represented status, security, virtue, and even God's favor.

Money, however, is not the problem. Paul indicated that "the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:10). Jesus instructed His audience to store up riches in Heaven, not on earth (Matthew 6:19-20). Jesus said the "deceitfulness of riches" can even choke out the word of God (Matthew 13:22). In each of these texts, Jesus interacted with individuals who were deceived by the love of money and the status and security wealth afforded them. As a result, they lusted after it, harming others in the process.

Jesus demonstrated that the ethic of the kingdom of God sees the value in the one lost sheep or coin. Jesus' audience may have thought it foolish to put ninety-nine sheep at risk to save one; however, the shepherd in Jesus' parable worked to restore that one sheep to the fold. So, likewise, Jesus sees the value of every individual and actively positions Himself to restore that individual into the community of faith and body of Christ.

Jesus demonstrated this same ethic when Zacchaeus determined he would repay those he had cheated and use his wealth to help the poor. Jesus replied, "This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham" (Luke 19:9). According to Jesus, Zacchaeus's pledge to use his resources and position as a tax collector to care for the marginalized, correct systemic injustice, and provide restitution on behalf of his previous unethical conduct brought salvation to his home.

Zacchaeus's deliverance was not the only salvation of which Jesus spoke. As Zacchaeus embraced the ethic of the kingdom of God, he became an agent of reconciliation and redemption within his community. As the body of Christ reaches for those on the margins, breaks systems of injustice, and combats wickedness in high places, the ministry of reconciliation breaks the power and guilt of sin.

MONEY PLAYS AN ESSENTIAL ROLE IN
UNDERSTANDING THESE TWO PARABLES
AND THE EXPERIENCE OF ZACCHAEUS.

DAY 1

Luke 15:1-7

- ¹ Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.
- ² And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.
- ³ And he spake this parable unto them, saying,
- ⁴ What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?
- ⁵ And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.
- ⁶ And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.
- ⁷ I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

Biblical Insight

The shepherd's wealth was literally in his flock. Sheep produced value by growing wool, which the shepherd would shear and sell for a profit. What was unique about the sheep was its wool, and the shepherd would do anything to recover the lost sheep. Indeed, what is special about us is our unique skills and abilities. Each person is special to the Good Shepherd and has a unique and necessary ministry in the kingdom of God that can build up the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:11-13).

Daily Devotion

In August 1865, Dr. David Livingstone, a British explorer, set out for a two-year expedition to find the source of the Nile River in the heart of Africa. Soon after, Dr. Livingstone disappeared. For six years no one heard from the infamous explorer. Many Europeans presumed Livingstone was dead.

Looking for career-making adventure, on March 21, 1871, journalist Henry Morton Stanley led an expedition to find David Livingstone. Stanley declared he would not give up the hunt to find Livingstone dead or alive. Enduring endless miles of swampland and jungles, along with crocodiles, animal attacks, and disease, Stanley arrived at Ujiji in present-day Tanzania. There, Stanley found a sickly-looking European with a gray beard who had been sold into slavery. Stanley approached the man and asked, "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?"

Stanley demonstrated tenacity when searching for a lost person when others had given up. As Christians, we must be persistent when seeking the lost and sharing the gospel. How far are you willing to go to find one lost soul?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

Luke 15:8-10

- ⁸ Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?
- ⁹ And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.
- ¹⁰ Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

Biblical Insight

In this brief parable, the silver coin Jesus referred to was denarius. One denarius was the standard pay for a day of labor. The value of the coin is why the woman was so determined to find it. Once the coin was located, a celebration followed. Jesus indicated two things in this parable. First, whatever is lost has value and is worthy of being found. Second, when something lost is found, it is worthy of celebration. The church continues this pattern by searching for the lost and celebrating when they join the faith community.

Daily Devotion

In England, on November 16, 1992, Eric Lawes, a farmer, lost his hammer in one of his fields. Hoping to find his lost hammer, Lawes used a metal detector. Not long after he began his search, the detector picked up a strong signal. After digging, Lawes discovered shovelfuls of silver spoons and gold coins.

Soon archaeologists excavated the farmland and discovered nearly sixty pounds of gold and silver objects, including over fifteen thousand Roman coins. Of the forty treasure hoards that have been discovered in Britain, Lawes discovered the largest and most valuable hoard. The excavation also discovered Lawes’s hammer. For Lawes, his hammer was worth being found. Through his diligence to search for what was lost, Lawes discovered a treasure beyond his imagination.

The Great Commission commands the church to seek out lost souls and to disciple them. When souls are found and are saved, the entire church gains a treasure, a new brother or sister in Christ. Do we view new believers as treasure? Do we treat them like a treasure?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

Luke 19:1–4

¹ And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.

² And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich.

³ And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature.

⁴ And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycomore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way.

Biblical Insight

Zacchaeus was a resourceful fellow. He could not see Jesus, so he got a better view. Zacchaeus's community, however, did not see him as resourceful. Instead, they saw him as sinful. As a tax collector, he had the reputation of someone who became wealthy by collecting more taxes than required—essentially extorting his people for personal gain. The mental image of Zacchaeus in the tree to get a better view of Jesus, also represents a man who no longer belonged to his community. Yet on this day, Jesus specifically sought out Zacchaeus to explore what good he might be able to do in his community.

Daily Devotion

According to former Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, more than 20 percent of the adult population in America admits to struggling with loneliness, which is more than the number of Americans who have diabetes. Within his book, *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World*, Dr. Murthy argues that loneliness is the common thread in the rise in addiction, violence, depression, and anxiety in the United States of America.

Loneliness is a feeling of being separated from people or being left out. Because human beings need community to feel secure, feelings of separation cause the brain to enter a stress state. If loneliness persists for an extended period of time, the brain enters a chronic stress state that increases inflammation in the body, damages blood vessels, and stresses the heart.

If you are feeling lonely, take time to reflect on how active you are in your church. Being active in a church community means more than attending events and services. It means making personal connections, being vulnerable, and doing life together.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

Luke 19:5-7

⁵ And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house.
⁶ And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.
⁷ And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.

Biblical Insight

Due to Jesus’ popularity in Israel, Zacchaeus wanted to see Him. Zacchaeus was overjoyed that Jesus would visit his home. Zacchaeus led the way with glee and wanted everyone to see Jesus was going to his house. Unfortunately, the people were disappointed because they expected Jesus to avoid a vile sinner of such notoriety as Zacchaeus. Nevertheless, Jesus knew Zacchaeus’s home was where He was needed. Where sin’s corrosive power and guilt are, the body of Christ is required to break sin’s stronghold and extend the kingdom of God and the gospel to those held therein.

Daily Devotion

During the First Liberian Civil War, Joshua Milton Blahyi was infamous for his immense brutality as a warlord and high priest. Within his memoirs, Blahyi recounted sacrificing children, cannibalism, and being possessed by demons. He also recounted his career as a warlord, leading several dozen units of child soldiers.

In 1996, while still covered in blood from sacrificing a child, Blahyi had a vision of Jesus. Soon after, God sent Christians to the warlord’s compound to share the gospel with him. After hearing the gospel, Blahyi repented of his atrocities.

Today, Blahyi has traveled throughout West Africa sharing the gospel. He has devoted his life to rehabilitating child soldiers with the goal of introducing the children to Jesus and reintegrating them into society.

The debt Jesus paid on the cross was not only for us; it was also for people who have committed atrocities. Will we pray for their salvation? Will we rejoice in their conversion? Or will we only see their past?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

Luke 19:8-10

⁸ And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.

⁹ And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.

¹⁰ For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Biblical Insight

As far as Luke records, Jesus did not tell Zacchaeus a parable or even provide a rebuke. Instead, Zacchaeus felt a strange and unusual sensation while in Jesus' presence. This feeling was conviction. Sometimes being in the presence of God is all that is needed to correct sinful behaviors and attitudes. Zacchaeus's pledge for restitution resulted in salvation coming to his home and to the homes of those he had cheated. Jesus saw Zacchaeus not as a sinner or an enemy but as a disciple who would extend the gospel of the kingdom of God in his community.

Daily Devotion

On a chilly April day, a Polish woman called the Krakow Animal Welfare Society expressing concern for an unidentified brown creature trapped for two days in a lilac tree near her apartment. The team tried helping the woman identify what type of animal it was, suggesting maybe it was a sick bird.

The woman insisted the stuck animal was an iguana. Not sure how a reptile could survive in a tree in Polish weather, the Welfare Society decided to respond to the call since it is common for owners to abandon pets. Upon arrival, the rescuer noticed the animal had no head or legs. It was soon discovered that the "animal" was merely a croissant.

While we may not mistake a croissant for an animal, we all have made assumptions about people. These assumptions are based on where we have seen them, what we have heard about them, or with whom they associate. If we are not careful, assumptions can lead us to overlook people who are hungry for discipleship.

Take a moment to think of the people in your path. Is there anyone you've assumed would not want Jesus? Commit to prayer for them and seek an opportunity to share God's love.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

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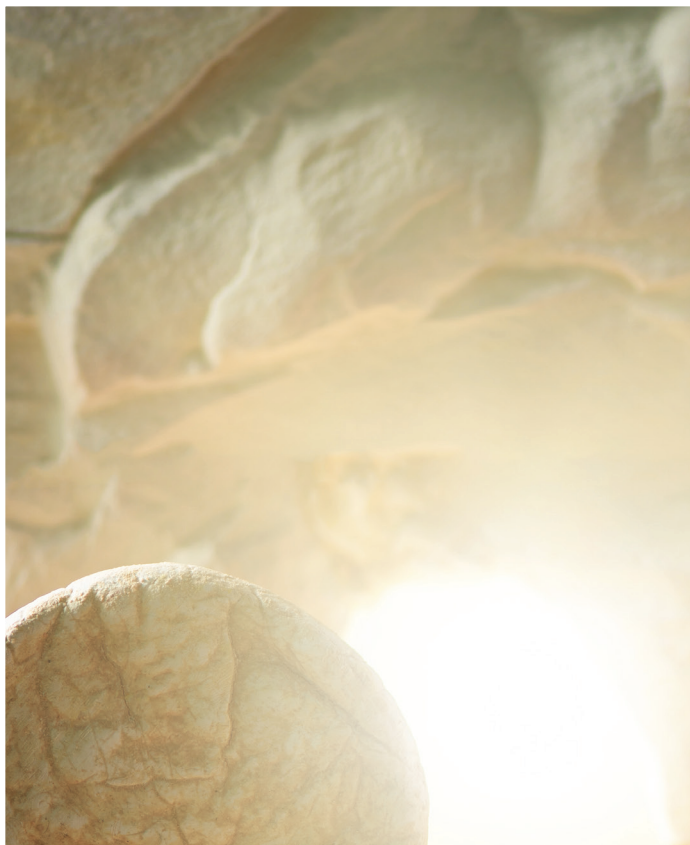
TRUTH ABOUT GOD

The resurrection of Jesus Christ inspires believers to share the good news of the gospel.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

We must be witnesses of the Resurrection to those who have not yet heard.

WITNESSES OF THE RESURRECTION



FOCUS VERSES: Luke 24:25-38

And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things.

LESSON TEXT: Luke 24:1-3, 13-16, 25-38, 44-48



Lesson Title: Witnesses of the Resurrection

Icebreaker: Have you ever been around a celebrity and didn't know it?

I. WOMEN WERE THE FIRST WITNESSES TO THE RESURRECTION

A. They Remembered Jesus' Words and Told the Disciples about the Resurrection

B. We Must Remember His Promises

» *How did you feel immediately following your experience of receiving the Holy Ghost? Does that change as we age?*

II. THE TWO MEN FROM EMMAUS WITNESSED THE RESURRECTION

» *How would you have felt if you were one of those two disciples? Do we sometimes doubt who Jesus is because we are disappointed?*

A. When They Realized Jesus Had Been with Them, They Left to Tell the Disciples about the Resurrection

B. We Must Not Allow Disappointment to Blind Us from Recognizing Jesus Is with Us

» *Have you ever experienced disappointment so severe you could not think straight? Can you share how God helped you survive that experience?*

III. THE DISCIPLES WITNESSED THE RESURRECTION

A. Jesus Appeared and Told Them to Tell Others about the Resurrection

» *Since Jesus commanded His disciples to preach repentance and remission of sins, how important is it for us to share the gospel with others?*

B. We Must Believe in the Reality of the Resurrection

IV. THE WITNESS OF THE RESURRECTION IS ALL AROUND US TODAY

A. We Witness the Resurrection by Experiencing the Gospel

B. We Must Be Witnesses of the Resurrection to Those Who Have Not Yet Heard

» *Have you received the Holy Ghost? How will you share that experience with others?*

Prayer Focus

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to give us faith to believe the gospel
- For God to give us courage to share the gospel

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Luke 24:1-3, 13-16, 25-38, 44-48

The years between the Old and New Testaments were a critical historical period significantly impacted by the actions of the Maccabean family and the Hasmonean dynasty that followed after them. These groups had a substantial influence on the region of Judea during the time Jesus lived on the earth. The Books of the Maccabees, found within the Jewish Apocrypha, describe this period of history. At the conclusion of the Old Testament, the Jews were governed by the Persian Empire; however, the Persians would soon be conquered by the newly forged Greek Empire under Alexander the Great. When Alexander died unexpectedly in 323 BC, his empire was divided among his three generals. Israel fell under the Seleucid Empire. The Seleucids took aggressive actions to make the Jews submit to their authority and adopt their culture.

Judah Maccabee and his family refused to submit to Seleucid rule, and they led a revolt against the Seleucid Empire. Eventually the Maccabean revolt caused the Seleucids to abandon Judea, which allowed the Jews to rule themselves under the Hasmonaean dynasty. This dynasty of rulers in Israel lasted from 140 to 37 BC, when the Romans removed the last Hasmonaean king and installed Herod the Great, who ruled Israel as a Roman client state.

During Jesus' lifetime, the Jews' expectation for the Messiah was someone like Judah Maccabee or King David. Their idealized Messiah would remove the Romans and rule Israel as an independent Jewish state. Even after Jesus' resurrection, His disciples continued to ask Him, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the people welcomed Him like their expected messianic King. When Jesus failed to live up to their expectations, they handed Him over to be crucified. They expected Him to destroy the Romans; instead, He was destroyed by them.

The faith of the women who prepared the spices and the disciples on the road to Emmaus was shattered by Jesus' death because their faith was not in who Jesus was but rather in who they expected Him to be. Likewise, believers today sometimes also place faith in the Jesus they expect rather than the Jesus revealed in Scripture. Believers must avoid the various "Jesuses" that are idealized within any given culture and submit to the lordship of the true Jesus Christ of Scripture.

DURING JESUS' LIFETIME, THE JEWS' EXPECTATION FOR THE MESSIAH WAS SOMEONE LIKE JUDAH MACCABEE OR KING DAVID.

DAY 1

Luke 24:1-3

¹ Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them.

² And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre.

³ And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus.

Biblical Insight

The women journeyed to Jesus' tomb to anoint His body according to Jewish custom. These women had prepared the spices the evening after Jesus' crucifixion, rested on the Sabbath, and then journeyed to Jesus' tomb on Sunday (Luke 23:55-56). Jesus predicted His resurrection frequently, but His crucifixion still dashed their hopes. These women went to the tomb that day not to find a living Jesus, but a dead one. Tragedy can leave Christians with what feels like a dead faith rather than a living one. Nevertheless, when things seem darkest, the light of the world overcomes the darkness.

Daily Devotion

On March 25, 1911, a fire broke out in the Triangle Shirtwaist Company factory in New York City. Within minutes the eighth floor of the ten-story tower was in flames. Firefighters quickly assembled to help rescue factory workers, but their rescue ladder only reached the sixth floor. In desperation, workers began leaping from windows. Within eighteen minutes, 146 workers, most of whom were young immigrant women and girls, were dead.

One of the most infamous tragedies in industrial history brought widespread attention to the dangerous sweatshop conditions of factories. New York State legislators created the Factory Investigating Commission to investigate thousands of workplaces. From the tragedy, new laws and regulations were enacted to better protect factory workers, not only in New York but throughout the United States.

When faced with tragedy, it is our choice to either be bound or gain wisdom. As Christians, we know God can use tragedy to reveal truth and to birth new opportunities. What has tragedy taught you or birthed in your life?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

Luke 24:13-16

- ¹³ And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs.
- ¹⁴ And they talked together of all these things which had happened.
- ¹⁵ And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them.
- ¹⁶ But their eyes were holden that they should not know him.

Biblical Insight

Luke does not state why these disciples were heading to Emmaus but only that they departed Jerusalem because their faith in Jesus as Israel’s Messiah was broken (Luke 24:21). They had heard the news of Jesus’ resurrection (Luke 24:22-24) but were still resolute to leave it all behind. Meanwhile, Jesus joined their party, but these two disciples were prevented from recognizing Him (Luke 24:16). Amid their hopelessness and despair, unbeknownst to them, hope walked alongside them. In our darkest moments, Jesus joins our company and continues to renew the gospel with us.

Daily Devotion

During the 1930s, the Southern Plains region of the United States became known as the Dust Bowl as severe dust storms resulted in a drought that killed crops, livestock, and people. The destruction of people’s livelihoods and the deterioration of living conditions caused 2.5 million people to migrate to other parts of the nation. Caroline Henderson was one of the farmers who decided to stay. From 1931 to 1937, Henderson exchanged letters with her friend in Maryland.

The letters revealed her struggle to hold on to hope amid hardship. In her letter from June 30, 1935, Henderson described physical “reminders of broken hopes,” such as abandoned tractors, unplowed fields, and deep wells no longer tended. These physical reminders caused Henderson to grieve for people who had given up because of broken hopes.

Every day we encounter physical reminders of broken hopes in the increase in suicides, drug abuse, violence, as well as the decrease in church attendance. Do we ignore these reminders, or do we grieve for these people enough to share the hope that can only come from Jesus?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

Luke 24:28-34

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?

³³ And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them,

³⁴ Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.

Biblical Insight

As they walked on the road, these two disciples knew something was special about this stranger who had joined their party and opened the Scriptures to them. When they broke bread with Him, they realized it was Jesus. With the burning in their hearts, they were reinvigorated and compelled to restore fellowship with Jesus' disciples. This story in Luke's Gospel established a pattern of the Lord's Supper that continues to this day. Believers still "break bread" in recognition of the gospel of Jesus and the Spirit of Jesus that is present among them.

Daily Devotion

In 2010, the political relationship between Israel and Turkey hit a new political low point. A Turkish-owned ship tried to breach Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip. This event resulted in the death of ten Turkish activists.

During this time, Israeli law student Nadav Ben-Yehuda was climbing Mount Everest when he noticed a 64-year-old Turkish man, Aydin Irmak, lying in the snow. Irmak had no gloves, oxygen, or shelter while in the "death zone." Exposure in the zone quickly leads to mountain sickness, hypothermia, and death.

Immediately, Ben-Yehuda gave the man some food and helped Irmak with the nine-hour descent to the nearest base. When asked by the Jerusalem Post why Ben-Yehuda gave up his dream for a Turkish man, Ben-Yehuda answered, "Because we just ate dinner together."

An old saying reminds us that "breaking bread with the enemy is the quickest way to find common ground." This statement is especially true when we partake of communion. When consuming the holy bread of Christ, we are reminded that we are brothers and sisters in Christ. There is no room for enemies within the church.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

Luke 24:35-38

³⁵ And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread.
³⁶ And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.
³⁷ But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.
³⁸ And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?

Biblical Insight

The disciples on the road to Emmaus realized Jesus was present during the breaking of bread. Communion, Eucharist, or the Lord’s Supper is what “breaking of bread” refers to, which continued to be a prominent ritual in the early church. (See Acts 2:42.) The disciples not only recognized Jesus through communion, but they also found that when they were present, Jesus was among them. The Spirit of Jesus continued to be with believers throughout the entire Book of Acts. (See Acts 16:7.) And His Spirit continues with the body of Christ to this day.

Daily Devotion

While driving home after church one Sunday, five-year-old Shiloh recounted his Sunday school lesson about the Day of Pentecost. After sharing what he had learned, Shiloh declared that he finally understood why we have to be baptized before we receive the Holy Ghost. According to Shiloh, “Since the Holy Ghost is fire, if you get the fire of the Holy Ghost before you’re baptized, the water will put out the fire. So it only makes sense that we are baptized before we get the fire. That also means that after I receive the Holy Ghost, I do not have to take any more baths.”

When Shiloh learned the Holy Ghost stays with those walking in covenant, no matter what we go through, he expressed both excitement and disappointment. He was excited he would one day receive the Holy Ghost, but he was disappointed he would still have to take baths. Regardless of our age, the promise of receiving the Holy Ghost should fill us with excitement. Journal about when you were filled with the Holy Ghost.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

Luke 24:44-48

⁴⁴ And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.

⁴⁵ Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,

⁴⁶ And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:

⁴⁷ And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

⁴⁸ And ye are witnesses of these things.

Biblical Insight

Despite Jesus frequently telling His disciples He would be killed and rise again, they were terrified and surprised. Somehow the disciples, just like the Pharisees and other religious experts, missed the person and mission of Jesus. They gained knowledge, wisdom, and experience through Jesus' ministry, but since their faith was misplaced in who they expected Jesus to be, rather than who He was, they missed Jesus and His mission. Faith is what reveals who Jesus really is, and Christians must walk in faith to continue the ministry "Jesus began both to do and teach" (Acts 1:1).

Daily Devotion

During the bombings in Lubek, Germany, during World War II, burnt plaster revealed Gothic frescoes in the thirteenth-century St. Mary's Church. After the war the church paid Lothar Malskat to restore the frescoes.

Three years later the unveiled murals became a symbol of a rebuilt Germany. They became a source of hope, but Malskat insisted the frescoes were forgeries and not the restored frescoes. He had gotten rid of the originals and had painted the masterpieces how he thought they looked instead of what the original frescoes would have looked like.

To prove he forged the frescoes, Malskat sued himself. In the trial Malskat explained that in the fresco there was a turkey, which did not exist in Germany during the thirteenth century, and an actress, who had not lived in the thirteenth century. Only when the people knew where to look did they realized they had placed their hope for a rebuilt Germany on a forgery.

Hell has many forgeries of the things of God. If we are not looking to God's Word and to His character, we can find ourselves placing hope in the wrong things.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

2.2

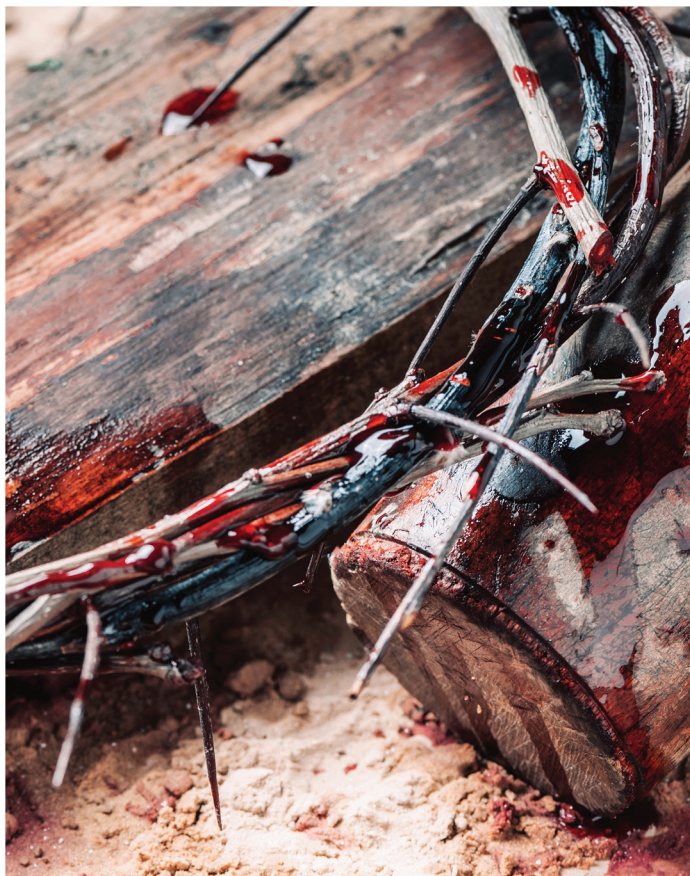
TRUTH ABOUT GOD

Jesus Christ's shed blood delivers us from sin.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will live above the power of sin in my life.

COVERED BY THE BLOOD



FOCUS VERSE: Exodus 12:23

For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you.

LESSON TEXT: Exodus 12:21-27; Matthew 27:33-54



Lesson Title: Covered by the Blood

Icebreaker: What are some funny phrases Christians say that others may not understand?

I. THE PRACTICE OF PASSOVER

A. Though Israel Was Captive in Slavery, God Brought About Their Deliverance

» *Have you realized that some of the things that happen in your life might be God trying to get your attention?*

» *Have you ever considered the physical actions the people had to perform to offer sacrifices to God?*

B. I Will Have Peace Because Jesus' Blood Protects My Life

II. JESUS DIED AT PASSOVER

» *How can you show Jesus your gratitude for being our ultimate sacrifice?*

A. Though Humanity was Captive in Slavery to Sin, Jesus Brought Deliverance

B. I Will Actively Thank Him for the Forgiveness of Sin

» *Do you view every day as a way to actively express your thanks to God?*

III. HIS BLOOD PRODUCES FREEDOM IN MY LIFE

A. Freedom from the Penalty, Power, and Practice of Sin

» *Have you ever compared the struggle in Romans 7 to the freedom in Romans 8?*

B. I Will Live above the Power of Sin in My Life

Prayer Focus

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to help us be grateful for the price He paid for us
- For God to help us live above the power of sin

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Exodus 12:21-27; Matthew 27:33-54

While the Passover is a story about God's miraculous intervention, in its own right, the Passover and the ritual memorializing it point to something greater. Ultimately, what led to the Passover was Pharaoh's resolute refusal to release the people of Israel from slavery to serve their God. God's angel of death "passed over" the homes that were marked by the lambs' blood. The angel of death killed the firstborn son and animal in every household in Egypt that was not marked with blood. After the Passover, Pharaoh's hardened heart was shattered, and the people of Israel were released from slavery.

Understanding the Passover was fundamental to understanding Jesus' atonement. While later theologians would develop theories that clarify Jesus' atonement, the Passover foreshadowed what Jesus' atonement was. Jesus was crucified on the Passover, serving as the Passover Lamb. Instead of the firstborn sons dying, God's only son, Jesus Christ, died on behalf of all. The result of the atonement is that God "passes over" the sins of those covered by the blood of Jesus. Jesus unjustly received the just punishment for sin according to God's justice, while humans redeemed by salvation receive God's mercy. Human beings deserve God's justice for sin; only Jesus deserved God's mercy. Jesus' atonement resulted in both human beings and Jesus receiving what they did not deserve from God.

The Greek word *euangelion*, which is translated "gospel" in English translations, literally means "good news." The message about Jesus is good news because prior to His atonement, no sufficient sacrifice for sin existed. There was no way for God to exact total justice for sin and deliver mercy to humankind. The good news is Jesus made a way for us to come to God. The cross of Christ is the crossroads where God's justice and mercy meet. Within the courtroom, judges often rule either on the side of mercy or justice; however, through Jesus' atonement, God's plan delivered both God's mercy and justice through the incarnation of an infinite God providing atonement for an infinite number of sins (Romans 3:21-26). God's plan brought about this conclusion, and this plan was set from the very beginning (Revelation 13:8). While believers may not know all the details, they can trust in God's plan to bring all things to fullness in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-14).

THE GREEK WORD *EUANGELION*, WHICH IS TRANSLATED "GOSPEL" IN ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS, LITERALLY MEANS "GOOD NEWS."

DAY 1

Exodus 12:21–27

²¹ Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel, and said unto them, Draw out and take you a lamb according to your families, and kill the passover.

²² And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the bason, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the bason; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning.

²³ For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you.

²⁴ And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever.

²⁵ And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the LORD will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service.

²⁶ And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service?

²⁷ That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD'S passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped.

Biblical Insight

The Passover was a significant event in Israel's history. Perhaps what is even more significant is how God commanded Israel to memorialize the Passover as a ritualistic celebration. Some may speak of ritual as vain repetition, which can certainly occur when participants complete ritual heartlessly; however, ritual is an important part of forming a community identity. God knew the power of ritual and instituted an annual ritual for Israel to pass the community identity from generation to generation. Rituals—like Passover, Easter, and Christmas—serve as milestones that direct community toward the purpose for which God called them together.

Daily Devotion

In 2018, a Pew Research survey discovered that approximately 57 percent of Americans know some of their neighbors. Of these Americans, a majority say they never have social events with their neighbors.

Meanwhile, the University of Oxford has discovered that communal meals increase happiness, strengthen community bonds, and combat feelings of loneliness and anxiety. Only about 28 percent of Americans say they have a get-together with neighbors less than once a month.

Our neighborhoods are our mission fields, and God has placed you in your neighborhood to be a light. One of the easiest ways to begin fulfilling the Great Commission is by getting to know your neighbors and building a bridge of connection. Maybe that looks like a small gesture this week to get to know them as simple as a wave and a smile or a bigger step such as inviting them over for dinner. Think about what you could do this week to strengthen your connections as you ask God to open doors.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

Matthew 27:33-38

³³ And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull,
³⁴ They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.
³⁵ And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.
³⁶ And sitting down they watched him there;
³⁷ And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.
³⁸ Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.

Biblical Insight

Golgotha was outside of the walls of Jerusalem but close enough so residents could see crucifixions. Jesus was accused of challenging Caesar’s rule as a rival self-proclaimed king. The Jews may have advocated for Jesus to be crucified, but it was the Roman government who failed to defend Jesus’ innocence and later crucified Him to appease Jewish fervor. Jesus’ death was intended to send a message; however, it did not become the symbol the Romans and Jews intended. At the cross the message of death and shame became a message of new life and hope.

Daily Devotion

In Northern Europe during the eighth and ninth centuries, missionaries initially struggled to share the gospel with the German-Saxon tribes who preferred worshipping warrior deities. The Saxons also found it hard to comprehend that an all-powerful God would choose to become a “hanging God” and experience suffering.

To help Saxons better understand the gospel, missionaries emphasized the spiritual warfare side of the Crucifixion and Resurrection. When the Saxons saw the cross in terms of warfare against forces of darkness, they understood the gospel was different from their mythology. Unlike their mythological warrior deities who used people to fight other deities, Jesus Himself fought to protect humanity.

The realization that God loved His creation enough to fight to the death and then overcome death through the Resurrection transformed their perspective of Jesus. He became their champion, mighty chieftain, and their God.

Over one thousand years later, the gospel still transforms the most hardened, preconceived ideas of Jesus. It is up to us to keep sharing the gospel.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

Matthew 27:39–44

³⁹ And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads,

⁴⁰ And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.

⁴¹ Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said,

⁴² He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.

⁴³ He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.

⁴⁴ The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.

Biblical Insight

The crowd believed that if God approved of Jesus, then God would save Him, as He did some prophets in the past. Or if Jesus was truly the Son of God, He would have the ability to save Himself. Nevertheless, Jesus was vindicated by raising from the dead. The Resurrection demonstrated the supernatural approval of Jesus' entire ministry and that He had been God in flesh all along. Furthermore, Jesus broke the power of death by demonstrating that death cannot hold power over humans. Since death has been broken, Jesus as the "firstfruits" demonstrated that believers will also rise from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20–22).

Daily Devotion

Every major religion considers Jesus to be an important religious figure and seeks to account for His existence and teachings. One thing that makes Christianity unique is the belief that Jesus resurrected from the dead. Few world religions affirm that Jesus resurrected, yet belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus is integral to the gospel.

According to the 2020 State of Theology study from Lifeway Research, two-thirds of American adults believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus. These findings shock many Christian researchers since only one-third of American adults attend church weekly. The discrepancy between how many people believe Jesus resurrected and how many attend church indicates the belief in the Resurrection has little impact on their lives. To them the Resurrection is a story they hear once a year, instead of a transformational truth.

In what ways has the Resurrection transformed your life?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

Matthew 27:45-49

- ⁴⁵ Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.
- ⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?
- ⁴⁷ Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias.
- ⁴⁸ And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink.
- ⁴⁹ The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.

Biblical Insight

When Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46), He referenced Psalm 22:1, which was one of David’s psalms of lament. A psalm of lament contains a sorrowful complaint regarding a tragic situation. David did not write Psalm 22 for Jesus to quote on the cross. Rather, Psalm 22 was rooted in David’s loneliness and abandonment. When Jesus quoted this psalm, He identified with David’s lament, demonstrating that Jesus was empathetically touched by human pain and brokenness (Hebrews 4:15) and that suffering found ultimate fulfillment in Christ (Colossians 1:24).

Daily Devotion

In 1975 when the Cambodian Civil War came to an end, the Communist Khmer Rouge regime implemented the killing fields. Because death and cruelty were a daily reality, Kim saw things no person should ever witness. At the age of eight, Kim decided she would never submit to God and, instead, hatred filled her heart. After leaving Cambodia, the hatred in her heart grew, leaving her cold toward her children, suicidal, and unfaithful to her husband. One day Christian coworkers invited Kim to church and she went.

Although it was a Spanish-speaking church and Kim did not understand Spanish, she knew she felt unconditionally loved. Suddenly she heard a voice telling her, “You can trust Me. I understand suffering.” She began wailing as she poured out all her trauma, brokenness, and pain. For the first time in her life, Kim experienced peace as Jesus began healing her.

Jesus desires not only to heal physical wounds but also emotional and mental wounds. Take some time today to give surrender your wounds to God in prayer.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

Matthew 27:50–54

⁵⁰ Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.

⁵¹ And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;

⁵² And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,

⁵³ And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.

⁵⁴ Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.

Biblical Insight

Jesus' death and resurrection separated what kept people apart from God and life. Matthew recorded that the curtain in the Temple was torn asunder. This curtain separated the inner sanctum, where God's presence dwelled, from others. The high priest would only enter this area annually on the Day of Atonement. The tearing of the curtain symbolized that all people now had full access to a relationship with God. The religious boundaries of Judaism would no longer keep people separated from God because God would soon come to take up residence within the human heart (Acts 2).

Daily Devotion

One day as an Apostolic Pentecostal student was sitting in her History of Christianity in America class at a liberal university, her professor lectured about the 1906 Azusa Street Revival. While the teacher was discussing the cultural significance of Azusa Street during the strict segregation and racial violence of the early twentieth century, a skeptical student in the back of the class began scoffing. "No one here can believe this happened, right? Speaking in tongues, overcoming racism to worship—this must be sensationalized, right?"

The Pentecostal student raised her hand and said, "I not only believe this happened, but I have the Holy Ghost. I also speak in tongues. May I share with you what it feels like to have the Holy Ghost?" With the professor's permission, she enlightened the class about the power of the Holy Ghost to transcend cultural norms.

Who can receive the gift of the Holy Ghost is not based on demographics. The Holy Ghost is for everyone. Are you sharing the news of the Holy Ghost at every opportunity with the people you encounter?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

2.3

YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God's method of salvation remains unchanged since the Passion.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will firmly establish my faith on the Apostolic message of new birth.



FOCUS VERSE: John 3:3

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

LESSON TEXT: John 3:1-21



Lesson Title: You Must Be Born Again

Icebreaker: Which of Jesus' twelve disciples do you most identify with?

I. JESUS MEETS NICODEMUS

- A. Nicodemus Had Some Questions about Jesus
 - » *Why do you think God delights in giving us second chances?*
- B. The Answer Is to Be Born Again
 - » *Do you understand the message of new birth in a way that you could explain to others?*
- C. I Must Be Willing to Share this Message with a "Nicodemus"

II. JESUS MEETS EACH OF US

- » *Do you recall where you were and the feelings you experienced when Jesus met you?*
- A. People Wrestle with Spiritual Questions
- B. The Commandment Is to Be Born Again
 - » *Have you been born again?*
- C. I Will Remain Committed to the Apostolic Message of New Birth

Prayer Focus

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to help us live as born-again believers
- For God to help us share the gospel so other people can be born again

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: John 3:1-21

In the synoptic Gospels (i.e., Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and Acts of the Apostles, the Pharisees were the most common antagonists of Jesus and the church. However, two Pharisees were not presented in opposition to the gospel. These two were Nicodemus (John 3) and Gamaliel (Acts 5). There may have been more Pharisees who were favorable to Jesus' message because when Nicodemus visited Jesus at night, he stated, "We all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you" (John 3:2, NLT).

Despite Jesus' miracles and teaching, most Pharisees opposed Jesus' ministry. Some Pharisees even accused Jesus of being in league with Satan as an explanation for the power Jesus had over demons and sickness (Luke 11:14-23). However, Nicodemus was different; he recognized that Jesus performed miracles because God was with Him. Nevertheless, this did not grant Nicodemus more insight into Jesus' teaching about being born again.

In all four Gospels, we see it was common for Jesus' audiences to misunderstand His spiritual language, thinking He was speaking of physical realities. One example is when Nicodemus asked how a man can enter his mother's womb to be born a second time (John 3:4). Jesus was insistent that this new birth must come from above through the power of the water and the Spirit because only the Holy Spirit can create spiritual life (John 3:6).

Jesus demonstrated that some earthly things are a symbol of spiritual things that are to come or are already present. Jesus referenced the bronze serpent from Numbers 21:4-9. Due to the complaining and faithlessness of the people of Israel, God had sent venomous serpents among them. At God's command, Moses created the bronze serpent to be a symbol people could look toward in faith for salvation from snake bites. The bronze statue did not heal them; God healed them when they trusted Him enough to follow His commands. Likewise, Jesus said He also must be lifted up so the world will look to Him in a similar way. When believers see Jesus lifted up, through their faith in the gospel and their trust in God's plan of salvation, they begin to experience faith that empowers the entire process of salvation from beginning to completion.

DESPITE JESUS' MIRACLES AND
TEACHING, MOST PHARISEES
OPPOSED JESUS' MINISTRY.

DAY 1

John 3:1-4

¹ There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:

² The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

³ Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

⁴ Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

Biblical Insight

Nicodemus, a Pharisee, desired to meet with Jesus. Nicodemus admitted to Jesus that he and others knew Jesus was sent by God. Although Nicodemus was able to acknowledge who Jesus was, he met with Jesus in secret in the dark. Nicodemus likely held his reputation as a Pharisee in high regard. When Jesus explained that everyone needed a new-birth experience, Nicodemus was unable to understand beyond a natural birth. Jesus immediately demonstrated to Nicodemus that acknowledgment of and belief in Jesus were not enough to enter the kingdom of God.

Daily Devotion

Just believing a baby has been born is not something any mother would rationalize. Mothers go through the process of carrying a child for nine months, and by the end, they are ready to hold the blessing in their arms, not just imagine the child's existence. There is a process and a tangible finality to the birthing process. Belief is great, and it has its place, but action has to be involved.

When people are born again, it is much the same. It takes more than simply believing they are reborn. They must go through the process and definitive experience (of water and Spirit baptism) to receive new life. Everyone must be born again. The birth certificate written at the start of one's earthly life ensures legitimacy of humanity. Your name written in the Lamb's Book of Life confirms your rightful identity as a redeemed heir of God.

Think back to when you were baptized and filled with the Spirit. Just as baby must grow and develop after birth, we too should grow after our spiritual new birth. How have you grown since then, and how can you grow more as you look ahead?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

John 3:5-8

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.

Biblical Insight

Jesus continued explaining to Nicodemus that the new birth must be completed in water and in Spirit. Jesus explained that Nicodemus needed to see beyond the natural and consider a deeper, spiritual birth. In order for one's spirit to be whole, there must be a godly, spiritual encounter. Jesus wanted Nicodemus to understand that being born again was far beyond what we can see or logically explain. As the wind is felt and not seen, Jesus demonstrated to Nicodemus that being born again of the Spirit is something felt and experienced rather than physically seen.

Daily Devotion

God works in the element of faith in many areas of our spiritual journey. It takes faith to be healed, to believe God will provide, and even to be saved. These miracles don't necessarily make sense to our human logic, but God does not generally operate on our finite frequency.

Being born again sounds impossible if you exact it literally. However, being born again is a beautiful, simple process God welcomes us to. It does not, at its genesis, quantify hard labor, but rather surrender. We do not have to overcomplicate coming to Jesus. He has always equated it to coming to Him as a child—innocent, faithful, and dependent. That is how a child is born into this worldly realm, and that is how He desires us to be reborn—simply and surely, with the reliance of a child.

- If you have been born again, do you remember your experience? Write about it.
- If you have never been born again, what are the barriers you think are holding you back?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

John 3:9–13

⁹ Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?

¹⁰ Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

¹¹ Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.

¹² If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?

¹³ And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.

Biblical Insight

Despite Jesus' explanations, Nicodemus still questioned the possibility of what Jesus was teaching. Nicodemus was an educated member of society, and Jesus had an expectation of him that He would not have had with others. Jesus challenged Nicodemus's unbelief and questioned whether Nicodemus was even capable of hearing about spiritual, heavenly things. Despite Nicodemus previously acknowledging Jesus was sent by God, Jesus had to remind him that He had descended from Heaven as the Son of Man. Paul went on to teach in I Corinthians that no one can say Jesus is Lord except in the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:3).

Daily Devotion

Faith is a word we hear often regarding the teaching and practices of Jesus. Believing when you cannot see something is not a custom many skeptics buy into. They like to see the proof—to touch it and comprehend the meaning of it. Nicodemus was no different. He did not fully grasp the greatness of God; thus he did not give it proper authenticity.

He was looking for answers when the answer was right there looking at him. How often do we miss Jesus in an attempt to define Jesus? He goes beyond our knowledge and understanding. We do not always get to know the answers, but we are called to trust Him every single day in all circumstances. We get to know Him, but knowing Him does not mean we get all the solutions or even that it will all make sense to us.

- In what ways do you know you can trust God on a deeper level?
- Has unbelief ever kept you from experiencing God on a deeper level?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

John 3:14-17

- ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:
- ¹⁵ That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.
- ¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.
- ¹⁷ For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

Biblical Insight

Jesus regularly talked to individuals in ways they could best understand. Nicodemus was educated in the Scriptures; therefore, Jesus reminded him of an Old Testament story. Jesus was trying to make connections for Nicodemus so he would better understand. It is interesting to note that the famous John 3:16 verse was during Jesus’ interaction with Nicodemus. Jesus demonstrated that it was important for even the Son of God to share the gospel with those who would lend an ear. Although Nicodemus lacked faith in Jesus’ new-birth teaching, Jesus reminded him of the salvation and everlasting life that was to be bought through Jesus’ own sacrifice.

Daily Devotion

A sad reality is that many people overcomplicate Jesus. He is powerful, but He is oh so gentle. He is just, but He is kind. He has the power to destroy, but He also sustains. He is all knowing, all powerful, and all sufficient. You may not be able to explain in detail the things theologians can. You may not have all the answers to all of life’s questions, but you can know one thing for certain: Jesus is good and He is real. Rest in the raw, unabashed message that is often overlooked.

Just like the words of the timeworn song: “I will cherish the old rugged cross, till my trophies at last I lay down; I will cling to the old rugged cross and exchange it someday for a crown.” There is nothing more christological than this. Therein lies the fundamental conclusion Nicodemus missed. If you know nothing else all your days, cleave to the beauty of simply knowing Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Consider this simple question: do you *know* Jesus, or do you just *know about* Him?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

John 3:18–21

¹⁸ He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

¹⁹ And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

²⁰ For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

²¹ But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

Biblical Insight

Pharisees like Nicodemus were notorious for righteous judgments. Jesus taught Nicodemus that judgment does occur, but based on Nicodemus's behavior, he would be judged. It is also significant that Nicodemus seemingly met Jesus in the dark, in secret. Jesus wanted to bring awareness to Nicodemus's evil actions and expose his true motives. Finally, Jesus explained that Nicodemus could not walk in the light and begin spreading the gospel with others if he could not work through his unbelief.

Daily Devotion

Darkness covers. Darkness occurs where no light resides. In darkness is also where trust is observed. Where there is no light, we are dependent on our other senses. Even if there had been a candle, Nicodemus would have had to call out to know where Jesus was that evening.

If you have ever played a game of Marco Polo or flashlight tag, you know you have to look or listen for those small glimmers of response to lead you forward. In that same way, Nicodemus had to grasp the reality that he could not share the good news about the light if he did not know how to find it and, moreover, did not fully believe it.

Think of the Parable of the Ten Virgins. Half of them brought enough oil to light their lamps; the others did not. Those who did not bring oil missed out on their destination because their way was not illuminated. Even if you do not always know the way, be sure to walk with the Light. You may not know where you are going, but it helps to know you don't have to go there alone.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

2.4

WELCOME TO THE FAMILY

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God gives each person the opportunity to live a new and better life.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will not live my life below my standing as God's child.



FOCUS VERSE: Romans 8:15

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

LESSON TEXT: II Samuel 9:1-13; Romans 8:12-15



Lesson Title: Welcome to the Family

Icebreaker: Who is your favorite lesser-known Bible character?

I. MEPHIBOSHETH'S ADOPTION

- A. Mephibosheth was Lamé in His Feet
- B. The King Sought Out Mephibosheth and Adopted Him
 - » *Can you recall the feeling when you realized God really does love you?*
- C. I Should Actively Seek for the Hurting

II. SPIRITUAL ADOPTION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

- A. Every Person is Spiritually Lamé
 - » *Do you realize that you were born as a sinner?*
- B. The King of Kings Has Sought Us Out and Adopted Us into God's Family
 - » *How should our lives be different once we realize God as a loving Father adopted us into His family?*
- C. We Have Rights and Privileges as Children of God
 - » *Can you honestly say you see yourself as God sees you, as His son or daughter?*
- D. I Will No Longer Live My Life Below My Standing as His Child
 - » *Are you living in the full hope of the promises God has made to you in His Word?*

Prayer Focus

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to help us be thankful He adopted us
- For God to help us care for others who still need to be spiritually adopted

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: II Samuel 9:1-13; Romans 8:12-15

David's kindness to Mephibosheth violated cultural norms. David, whom God described as "a man after his own heart" (I Samuel 13:14), expressed God's compassion to Mephibosheth. In addition, David defied cultural expectations concerning how a king would deal with the family of his former rival and religious ideas regarding disabilities and other health disorders. Mephibosheth appeared to be the only living heir to Saul's dynasty. The term dynasty refers to an unbroken lineage of rulers within a country. If Israel wished to continue Saul's dynasty, which was very common, Mephibosheth was heir to Saul's throne, not David.

If David had handled his succession to the throne as expected, Mephibosheth, a potential heir to Saul's throne, would have likely been executed or exiled from the kingdom of Israel. Instead, David wanted to show compassion to Saul's family because Jonathan, Saul's son, had been David's dear friend. David defied cultural expectations by allowing Mephibosheth to live. He exceeded these expectations by restoring Mephibosheth's familial wealth and providing for Mephibosheth until his death.

According to the ideas of his time, David also should have rejected Mephibosheth because he had a disability. Israel had formed a theology concerning disability, disease, and other health disorders that continued toward the time of Christ. Israel concluded that disabilities, disorders, or diseases were the result of judgment from God for one's sin or a family member's sin. When Jesus encountered a man born blind (John 9), even Jesus' disciples continued to perpetuate this belief. Instead of condemning Mephibosheth, David showed compassion for Mephibosheth, which continued to defy cultural expectations.

Just as David defied cultural expectations to care for Mephibosheth, God defied what was appropriate by extending the spirit of adoption to all human beings. Paul presented a systematic argument regarding humanity's sinful behavior, rightful condemnation, and how the Law provided no escape from God's justice (Romans 1-3). Through the cross, God made a way to reconcile His justice (II Corinthians 5:19) and justify human beings (Romans 3:26) through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The result is adoption through God's Spirit, which grants the power to put guilt and the power of sin to death. Just like Mephibosheth was included in the king's household, Christians are adopted into the kingdom of God as co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17).

DAVID DEFIED CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS
BY ALLOWING MEPHIBOSHETH TO LIVE.

DAY 1

II Samuel 9:1-5

¹ And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake?

² And there was of the house of Saul a servant whose name was Ziba. And when they had called him unto David, the king said unto him, Art thou Ziba? And he said, Thy servant is he.

³ And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may shew the kindness of God unto him? And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet.

⁴ And the king said unto him, Where is he? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lo-debar.

⁵ Then king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lo-debar.

Biblical Insight

When Samuel visited the home of Jesse to find a king to anoint, Jesse was reluctant to present David to him. In fact, if Samuel would not have asked, it is likely Jesse would not have mentioned David (I Samuel 16). Similarly, when David asked for a member of Saul's family, Ziba was reluctant to introduce Mephibosheth due to his disabilities. David understood how it felt to be considered "disabled" and offered the same inclusion to Mephibosheth as Samuel had shown him. David desired to show kindness, and his kindness was not limited by prejudice.

Daily Devotion

In biblical times lepers were made to shout out their uncleanness. They were publicly shamed and considered outcasts. Those who were deemed "less than perfect" were made to feel as though they did not measure up. In much the same manner, so were sinners. They were often publicly scorned and shamed for what they had done. Those acts of shunning were inappropriate then, just as they are now.

Jesus flipped the narrative completely when He got close to the outlaws and the "less than perfect." He even let them sit at His table and served them second helpings of grace, love, and approval. He let them close to Him to love them and lead them toward new life.

The same opportunity is available to you. However you come to Jesus, He welcomes you. No matter what society says of you or what limits you think you have, Jesus already knows and loves you.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

II Samuel 9:6-8

⁶ Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David said, Mephibosheth. And he answered, Behold thy servant!

⁷ And David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually.

⁸ And he bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?

Biblical Insight

Anyone considered disabled in ancient times would not hold very much worth. Any worth or “use” Mephibosheth had was due only to his family and royal blood. Despite that, he still remained humble before David and had low expectations for his treatment. David wanted Mephibosheth to know he would have anything owed to him and would be treated no less than another royal family member. David wanted to honor his vow to Jonathan. Mephibosheth was shocked that a king would treat a “dog” so well and was honored.

Daily Devotion

Picture it: it is the early 2000s, and a newly adopted little girl is playing upstairs when she hears weeping from the floor below. Intrigued and concerned, she makes her way down the stairs, peeks through the railing, and sees her mother crying, talking to Jesus. There is beauty in brokenness and in imperfection, and her momma was not afraid of those things.

The story of Mephibosheth displays how those the world deems unworthy belong and are vital to the Kingdom. It also paints a messy yet beautiful picture of grace and acceptance. Mephibosheth had permission to be broken. In fact, he was welcomed and invited because of those parts. The real version of you is valuable. If no one has told you lately, you matter significantly, just the way God made you.

- Take some time to journal what parts of you and your life you have deemed inadequate based on the standards of others.
- How can those beautifully broken pieces help others around you?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

II Samuel 9:9-11

⁹ Then the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy master's son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house.

¹⁰ Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him, and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy master's son may have food to eat: but Mephibosheth thy master's son shall eat bread alway at my table. Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.

¹¹ Then said Ziba unto the king, According to all that my lord the king hath commanded his servant, so shall thy servant do. As for Mephibosheth, said the king, he shall eat at my table, as one of the king's sons.

Biblical Insight

Ziba had been Saul's servant, and it seems that although he knew of Mephibosheth, Ziba had not been involved in his life. David instructed Ziba and his family to farm the land and care for Mephibosheth. Allowing Ziba to care for Mephibosheth would have been gracious enough, but David went on to set a place at his own table for Mephibosheth.

Daily Devotion

Raise your hand high if you went to high school and did not get invited to sit at the "cool kids" table. The feeling you had might be how Mephibosheth felt. He did not fit into the inner circles with the popular kids. Even though he resided near royalty, he was not exactly the captain of the football team of his day.

David saw things differently. He not only made provision for the young man, but he even gave him a permanent place sitting at David's own table. What the world deemed uninvited, the king welcomed close. You may feel inadequate, but there is always a seat at God's table with your name on it.

- Can you recall some times in your life when you felt the sting of rejection?
- In what ways can you live a life of acceptance and love in Christ?
- Write the following statement on a notecard or in a journal to look back at when you feel left out and lonely: "The King requests for me to sit at His table."

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

II Samuel 9:12-13

¹² And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Micha. And all that dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants unto Mephibosheth.
¹³ So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem: for he did eat continually at the king's table; and was lame on both his feet.

Biblical Insight

King Saul initially had shown David kindness, which had continued for a time. David wished to continue this kindness to Mephibosheth and his children. Mephibosheth and his family had not been assured much of a future; however, due to David's intervention, they continued to receive provision from the king's estate. Just like David extended help to Mephibosheth, Christians can find those with less privilege and extend help to them as well.

Daily Devotion

As the body of Christ, we are called to love others, always. We are to love past timelines and deadlines. There is no limit to God's love. When it is in our power to do so, we should extend grace and kindness to those around us. It does not have to be a grand gesture or a lofty plan. Sometimes loving others means inviting them to sit next to you.

Maybe your gifts and talents look a little different than someone else's. Let this lesson remind you that's okay. In fact, it's more than okay; it's needed.

When it comes to living for Christ, people may not agree with you, and some may cast you aside. The beautiful part of being a child of God is that though you are rejected by some, you are always accepted by the God of the universe. He cares deeply for you and loves you more than His own life. Run to Him when others cast you away. You matter. You are accepted and are right where you belong.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

Romans 8:12-15

¹² Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.

¹³ For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

¹⁴ For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

¹⁵ For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

Biblical Insight

Mephibosheth was connected to David based only on the honor David gave to Saul's family. Mephibosheth's disability should have prevented him from receiving the treatment David offered him. In a similar way, we also should be prevented from accessing covenant with God. He is perfect and holy; we are flawed and finite. Nevertheless, through adoption by God's Spirit, the children of God can sit at the King's table.

Daily Devotion

David understood the Lord's good will for His people, especially when it came to loving like God and being the church. The church is not a setting for perfect people; if it were, none of us would fit. The church is a place to find rest, encouragement, peace, and belonging in Jesus. The church is a place where we can love and be loved, carry and be carried.

It is not a place where people should think of themselves as better than another. The church is kind and gentle, safe and strong. It is where the broken find their healing and the weak find their strength. The church is a shelter for the wandering and a safe haven. It points others toward Jesus and invites everyone to be a part. No matter what you look like, what you sound like, what you smell like, what you have done, or where you came from, there is a seat at the King's table just for you.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

3.1

GOD BRINGS VICTORY

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God will bring victory even if He has to choose a new deliverer.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will experience victory when I accept and follow God's call.



FOCUS VERSES: Judges 4:22-24

²² And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will shew thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples.

²³ So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel.

²⁴ And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

LESSON TEXT: Judges 4:1-24



Lesson Title: God Brings Victory

Icebreaker: Who is the most heroic woman you have known?

I. GOD CALLED BARAK

» *Can we allow God to speak to us through the inspired word of another?*

A. Israel Faced Oppression at the Hands of the Canaanites

B. Deborah Prophesied of Barak's Victory

» *How does knowing that God has the end in view help us face the present circumstances?*

C. Barak Refused to Fight without Deborah

» *What other notable women do you recall from biblical history?*

D. We Must Heed God's Call

» *What difficult tasks has God asked of you? How has He enabled you to perform them?*

II. GOD PROVIDED VICTORY THROUGH Jael

A. Deborah and Barak Routed the Canaanite Army

B. Sisera Fled and Was Subdued by Jael, Who Achieved Complete Victory

» *What application can we make to spiritual battles and conflicts?*

C. I Will Experience Victory When I Accept and Follow God's Call

Prayer Focus

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to help us hear His call for our lives
- For God to give us faith to answer His call, no matter the cost

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Judges 4:1-24

The Book of Judges records an exciting period in Israel's history. The appropriately named book features the twelve judges who led Israel during the time after the end of Joshua's leadership. Eli and then Samuel also served as judges over Israel before Saul became king in Israel. Although the judges were not kings, their roles more closely resembled the functions of Joshua and Moses. The twelve judges in Israel rose to prominence because of spiritual giftings, wisdom, leadership, knowledge, or by experiencing other signs that God was with them.

However, unlike Joshua's succession from Moses, after the end of each judge's leadership, the people of Israel lost their faith. The Book of Judges presents a cycle of faithlessness, apostasy, judgment, repentance, and then deliverance through one of Israel's judges: God sent judgment upon the people of Israel due to their faithlessness. God's judgment came in the form of foreign oppressors. After the people of Israel repented of their sins, God sent deliverance in the form of a judge.

God's deliverance was sent to help the people get aligned with God's will. However, the people of Israel maintained a negative pattern that made them see God's deliverance as approval of their faithlessness. This negative pattern continued for 430 years. It did not end with the people having faith in God; rather, they requested to become a monarchy like neighboring nations instead of the theocracy God instituted on their behalf. Instead of being God's special people, Israel was determined to be like other nations.

Among the twelve judges featured in this book was one female judge—Deborah. In addition to being a judge, Deborah was also a prophetess. She was in good company among other prophetesses, such as Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Huldah (II Kings 22:14), Anna (Luke 2:36), and Philip's four daughters (Acts 21:8-9). Deborah collaborated with Barak, a military commander in Israel, to end the oppression of their people from Canaanite rulers. Deborah is an excellent example of how a woman can be extensively used by God and accepted and respected by the people (Judges 4:4-5). God calls and equips both men and women for His service; however, people must welcome and legitimize the callings. Christians must continue this example by accepting and celebrating the calling toward Christian ministry.

ALTHOUGH THE JUDGES WERE NOT KINGS,
THEIR ROLES MORE CLOSELY RESEMBLED
THE FUNCTIONS OF JOSHUA AND MOSES.

DAY 1

Judges 4:1-3

¹ And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead.

² And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles.

³ And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel.

Biblical Insight

While we see in the Book of Judges the cycle of apostasy, judgment, repentance, and deliverance, what is especially tragic in this text is that the nation of Israel continued in Canaanite oppression for two decades. Their period of judgment could have been decreased if they had turned their hearts to the Lord earlier. Israel refused because they were a stubborn and stiff-necked people. Their attitude prolonged their suffering. God does not continue suffering because it merits Him some form of sadistic pleasure. Rather, God extends suffering as long as it is necessary for people to learn the lesson contained within the pain.

Daily Devotion

If you are a parent, no matter how perfect your angel is, you have more than likely dealt with a child who has broken a rule or two. We were all born with a sinful nature, and it does not take us long to discover it. When a child makes a mistake, correction is often involved. This correction is for the benefit of the young one's future. Children learn from their mistakes and hopefully do better the next time. However, occasionally the consequences outlast the misstep, and that is something children (and adults alike) must wrestle with and navigate.

Our gracious, all-knowing Father does not enjoy the pain that comes with correction, but He does know it is refining and for the good. When you fall, know that He is there to help you back up. The way home is easy, but you may still have to walk through some valleys and briars to get there. The good news is: He is there with you, no matter what.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

Judges 4:4-10

- ⁴ And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.
- ⁵ And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Beth-el in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.
- ⁶ And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh-naphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun?
- ⁷ And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand.
- ⁸ And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go.
- ⁹ And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh.
- ¹⁰ And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him.

Biblical Insight

One of the most important things to note about the story of Deborah is the influence she had in a time when women were not held in the same regard as men. She was clearly attuned to the voice of God and called by Him. Although God had led her and spoken to her, she was fine with Barak going without her. Deborah did not insist on going for her own clout, but instead went only because Barak would not go without her. His insistence on her going could have shown his lack of faith in Deborah and in God, thinking that if the mission failed, he would not be blamed. However, Deborah trusted in God and was prepared to carry out His leading.

Daily Devotion

Group projects often get a bad rap. No matter how many people are involved, it seems one or two tend to take on the bulk of the work. Deborah was a fierce and faithful woman. She was devoted to her part of the group assignment.

She held up her end of the deal and followed the voice of God to the finish line. God was faithful to do what He said He would then, just as He is now. He will not lead you down a path or into a battle for which He has not already prepared provision and victory. You can trust Him in all things. If you do your part, you will be sure to finish strong and fulfill the assignment.

- Are there areas in your life you know you need to surrender to God?

If you work with others, especially in ministry, how can you do your part to ensure the calling of God is fulfilled?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

Judges 4:11-16

¹¹ Now Heber the Kenite, which was of the children of Hobab the father in law of Moses, had severed himself from the Kenites, and pitched his tent unto the plain of Zaanaim, which is by Kedesh.

¹² And they shewed Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam was gone up to mount Tabor.

¹³ And Sisera gathered together all his chariots, even nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people that were with him, from Harosheth of the Gentiles unto the river of Kishon.

¹⁴ And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this is the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee? So Barak went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him.

¹⁵ And the LORD discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword before Barak; so that Sisera lighted down off his chariot, and fled away on his feet.

¹⁶ But Barak pursued after the chariots, and after the host, unto Harosheth of the Gentiles: and all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword; and there was not a man left.

Biblical Insight

Deborah led Barak and his men into battle and signaled the men to attack. Her faith never wavered as she declared that God was already ahead of them. Not only was the Lord fighting with them, but He also caused Sisera's men to panic. Sisera's cowardice was apparent when he left his men. Even nine hundred chariots were no match for the men led by the Almighty. Just as Deborah had proclaimed, the battle ended in an overwhelming victory. This battle demonstrates the reassuring understanding that if God is for us, none can stand against us.

Daily Devotion

One spring day, a young, twentysomething woman decided it was time to run a half-marathon. She had not trained, nor had she worked out in a while. Yet she was determined. She laced up her shoes and on she went. There were times, starting about a quarter of a mile in, when she wanted to hide under the nearest park bench and not come out. A phrase she held on to was simply "keep going." Those words were her mantra for those sun-drenched, long hours when she wanted to give up.

Just like in the passage we read today, God has already won and has proven Himself to be mighty in battle. When you don't feel Him close, maybe it's because He is at the finish line holding a sign sky-high to encourage you to keep pursuing and keep progressing. Even when you can hardly put one foot in front of the other, just keep going.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

Judges 4:17-21

¹⁷ Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite: for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.

¹⁸ And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle.

¹⁹ And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty. And she opened a bottle of milk, and gave him drink, and covered him.

²⁰ Again he said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and enquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No.

²¹ Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died.

Biblical Insight

Although Heber was a descendent of Moses, it appears he and his family were friends with the Canaanite king. Sisera trusted Jael enough to lay vulnerable in her tent after fleeing his army. Despite Jael's husband's relationship with these people, Jael showed where her alliance was. She demonstrated great courage by not only defeating Sisera, but also going against what her husband's family may have wanted. Jael was likely afraid of being punished or even put to death for her actions, but she knew Sisera needed to be destroyed.

Daily Devotion

Superheroes were around way before modern-day comic books. The women of the Book of Judges were powerful and not to be messed with. They knew their mission, and they carried it out well. Jael knew the stakes were high (no pun intended), and she did what she needed to do to defeat the enemy.

Sometimes people around you will not understand why you do what you do, especially for the Lord. There will also be times when you must take risks for the sake of the Kingdom. However, the Lord promises that when you put Him first and do what He has called you to, you will not be eternally disappointed. God already knows the outcome. He has already won the battle, filled the gaps, and provided a way of escape for you. Do your part, no matter how others may view it or what you assume the consequences will be. You are mighty through God.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

Judges 4:22-24

²² And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will shew thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples.

²³ So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel.

²⁴ And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

Biblical Insight

This story of God's deliverance would have been very different if individuals like Deborah and Jael had not been willing to follow God and His instructions despite fear and cultural boundaries. Jael's outcome is unknown, but it is certain she was a vessel God trusted to do His work. The Canaanite king was defeated because of the courage to fight for the one true King and His people. It is important to remember that whom God calls, no one can limit or defeat.

Daily Devotion

Have you ever found yourself in a really stressful and confusing season? Have you ever limited yourself based on resources and what you think you cannot do? If the answer is yes, you are not alone. When you are in the middle of battle, with proverbial bullets flying, and your armor is getting heavy, it is easy to forget God is fighting with you and for you. The beautiful truth is, even in the middle, God has already gone ahead of you and equipped you with what you need to be victorious.

No matter what others think of you, remember God is the one in whom your identity is found. He thinks you are wonderful. He thinks you are a warrior. He gave His life for you. He says you are chosen and set apart. He says you are His and you are worth it. With Him, you will win.

- What battles are you fighting right now that you can apply these principles to?
- Think back to times God has proven Himself strong and helped you fight.

What labels do you need to put off or change concerning yourself?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

3.2

GIDEON AND THE STRENGTH OF HONESTY

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God will not turn us away when we express our doubts in honesty.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will fight through doubt and trust God.



FOCUS VERSES: Judges 6:15-16

¹⁵ And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.

¹⁶ And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.

LESSON TEXT: Judges 6:11-23, 36-40

Lesson Title: Gideon and the Strength of Honesty

Icebreaker: Were you picked first, in the middle, or last in gym class?

I. GOD CALLED AN UNLIKELY HERO

» *Have you ever found yourself in a position for which you felt unqualified?*

A. The Midianites Had Oppressed the Israelites

» *Why does it sometimes seem easier to see God's hand of judgment than to recognize the abundance of His blessings?*

B. God Called Gideon While Gideon Was Hiding from the Enemy

C. Gideon Honestly Expressed His Doubts

D. I Can Be Honest with the Lord about My Situation

» *Why is it so hard to believe that God can use us to fulfill His purpose?*

II. GOD CONTINUALLY CONFIRMED HIS CALL TO GIDEON

» *When God promises victory for something we have prayed for, how should we respond?*

A. Gideon Prepared a Sacrifice

B. Gideon's Fleece

C. I Will Fight Through Doubt and Trust God

» *How can honesty bring about stronger faith in our relationship with God?*

Prayer Focus

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to help us hear His voice as He calls us
- For God to help us through our doubts to trust His call

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Judges 6:11–21, 36–40

Forty years after Deborah and Barak defeated Sisera, the people of Israel resumed their cycle of apostasy. As a direct result of their apostasy, the Lord put Israel under the dominion of Midian. The Midianites stole the produce Israel planned and left Israel without subsistence. As a result, Israel abandoned their land and retreated up into the mountains to hide in caves and fortresses. Midian was in the deserts of northwestern Arabia, which explained the camel cavalry they used to force Israel into hiding.

While Israel was in hiding, they cried out to the Lord for deliverance, and God responded by sending them a prophet. This prophet informed Israel they did not need to fear. However, the prophet also informed Israel that the Midianites were not the real problem; Israel's refusal to obey God's voice was the problem. Nevertheless, God would send deliverance in the form of a new judge, Gideon.

The angel of the Lord encountered Gideon while he was threshing wheat inside a winepress. While greeting Gideon, the angel described him as a "mighty man of valour." Threshing was normally done on high ground so the wind could separate the wheat from the chaff. Gideon threshed inside the winepress to hide the grain, which made his work quite laborious. Even though the setting in which Gideon is presented does not make one instantly think of valor, Gideon's work ethic shows he was determined to do what was necessary to survive, even if that then involved especially challenging work. Since Gideon's survival was continually challenged by the Midianites, it is no surprise Gideon had difficulty trusting others, even angels sent from the Lord.

Gideon felt God had abandoned them, but the angel reminded Gideon that God had not abandoned them and was sending Gideon as a deliverer for Israel. Hearing the angel speak these words threw Gideon's doubt and fear into overdrive. Gideon requested three signs from the Lord before he could believe in the angels words. God knew Gideon would need three signs. God knew Gideon's doubts. Despite Gideon's insecurities, God chose a doubtful and fearful man to deliver His people. Fear and doubt among people of faith is often seen in a negative light; however, God was prepared for Gideon's doubts, just as God is prepared for the fears and doubts of all believers.

MIDIAN WAS IN THE DESERTS OF
NORTHWESTERN ARABIA, WHICH
EXPLAINED THE CAMEL CAVALRY THEY
USED TO FORCE ISRAEL INTO HIDING.

DAY 1

Judges 6:11-13

¹¹ And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abi-ezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.

¹² And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.

¹³ And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.

Biblical Insight

It is interesting that it had only been forty years since the overwhelming victory the Israelites had against the Canaanites. Gideon had likely witnessed that victory and still was challenged by God's calling. Rather than focusing on the apostasy of the Israelites, or even on God's deliverance just forty short years ago, Gideon chose to see only his current circumstances. Yet, despite himself, the angel called Gideon a mighty hero and encouraged him that God had not abandoned him or his people.

Daily Devotion

It is easy to mistake God's silence for His absence. Just because we do not see or feel Him close does not mean He isn't there. When we are in the midst of a trial, many times we forget the history of God when we are faced with the mystery of uncertainty.

Gideon could have looked back and remembered God's faithfulness, but instead of trusting the Lord's track record and His ability for the future, Gideon chose to focus on the present. He had been through desert places before. He had seen God perform. Perhaps his faith was just a little small in comparison to his fears the second time around.

Faith isn't faith when we have all the answers. In those lonely, dry places, God gets right in the middle with us, all the while reminding us of what really matters. Even when you cannot see the answers, trust He will come through, just like He always does and always will do.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

Judges 6:14-15

¹⁴ And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?
¹⁵ And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.

Biblical Insight

Rather than challenging Gideon or arguing with him, God continued to encourage Gideon. God reminded Gideon that he was strong and called. Gideon still struggled with his calling and was fearful he was too weak for such a mission. Throughout Scripture God frequently called those who may not seem to be the obvious choice. While Gideon wanted God's deliverance, he was still unsure if he was willing to play a role in that deliverance.

Daily Devotion

"God doesn't call the qualified; He qualifies the called" is a saying you likely have heard in at least one or two sermons in your life. While it is nice to hear, it is not always easy to believe. We want to feel qualified for the task at hand and for the callings God has set before us. We long to feel worthy or what we have been tasked to do. No matter what you may or may not feel, it is important to remember that feelings are not facts. You may feel inadequate or second rank, but the fact is you are made in the image of God. You have a place, and you are dearly loved. If He has called you to something, He will equip and empower you to do it.

You are chosen and you are needed. Put away doubts, fears, and inadequacies and trust God's Word and plan. He has called and qualified you. It is time to believe and walk in that truth.



Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

Judges 6:16-18

¹⁶ And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.

¹⁷ And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me.

¹⁸ Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again.

Biblical Insight

God's patience and longsuffering was great with Gideon. God continued to reassure Gideon that he would not be alone and would be victorious. Despite this reassurance, Gideon requested a sign. Graciously, the Lord did not rebuke him for this request but accepted it. God consistently is asked to prove Himself to His people, and although He continues to show His power, many still lack the faith to believe on Him. Thankfully He is patient with us.

Daily Devotion

Hebrews chapter eleven starts full steam with "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." We could also throw in "things not heard." You may feel like your prayers have been hitting the ceiling, but rest assured, God is listening. That's when faith comes into play. Place confidence in the fact He is still moving even if it is not immediately evident. God's timing is part of His plan. When it feels like you are down to nothing, remember He is up to something.

Gideon was in the same boat you and I board sometimes. He wanted assurance and something tangible to place his hope in. God reminds us through His Word that it is impossible to please Him without faith; we should not always seek signs, but there are moments when He grants our requests and responds to our fleeces. He desires a relationship with us in which we follow and believe Him without knowing all the answers. He is God. We can rest in Him and trust Him to be God in all things.

- What are some ways you are not trusting God in all areas of your life? Take time to write those things out and then commit them to God.
- Have you ever asked God for a sign as Gideon did? What happened?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

Judges 6:19–23

- ¹⁹ And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it.
- ²⁰ And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so.
- ²¹ Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight.
- ²² And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face.
- ²³ And the LORD said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die.

Biblical Insight

When Gideon brought his offering before the angel, it was accepted. Gideon realized he was in the presence of the Lord and was immediately struck with fear. This fear was not ill-founded. In Gideon’s fear, the Lord continued to be gracious and reassuring. If Gideon would have been killed, it would have been justified, but God chose mercy with him. In his fear, Gideon named the place an altar of peace. The peace Gideon felt was a special type of grace that can only be given by Almighty God.

Daily Devotion

Perhaps you have met someone famous like an actor, singer, politician, or the like. In those instances, some play it cool, acting like they are used to that sort of encounter. Then there are dedicated fans who have the T-shirts and bobbleheads.

When it comes to being in the presence of Almighty God, we should have such reverence. Maybe not bobbleheads and T-shirts, but the same sort of respect and excitement. When we realize we are entertaining not just any king, but the King of all kings, our perspective changes.

It is humbling and wonderful. To have an audience with the Creator of the universe is a huge deal. Gideon must have realized that, and it frightened him. The God who could end his life with a word chose to welcome him in and love him as his child, as he does with you.

Therein is the gift and greatness of grace—you belong. You are fully accepted and deeply cherished. Pull up a chair and pour a cup of coffee. You have a place in the presence of Royalty. And best of all—He has a seat saved just for you.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

Judges 6:36-40

³⁶ And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said,

³⁷ Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said.

³⁸ And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water.

³⁹ And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew.

⁴⁰ And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.

Biblical Insight

While Gideon had rested in the peace and grace of God, he continued to ask for further confirmation. While it seems easy to judge Gideon on these requests, it is easy to be tempted to ask God for many confirmations in our own situations. The lesson to take away from Gideon's requests is the overwhelming kindness he received from God. Gideon had been called by God for a reason and the Lord was not blindsided by Gideon's desires. God proved Himself twice to Gideon, and He consistently proves Himself to others.

Daily Devotion

Siri and Google have done a number on navigation. While we used to have trifold maps and multipage atlases, we now enjoy turn by turn instructions and voice directions in just about any accent our hearts desire. Gideon didn't even have an atlas, much less a Bible. He had to rely on faith, and the path was uncharted. He asked God to prove Himself, as many of us might do today.

Though God did so with Gideon, He might not always give you the turn-by-turn directions you hope for. Perhaps you've walked trails that seemed to be leading nowhere, all while hauling more than you thought you could handle. Though the path may be void of signs and riddled with debris, know you will be okay when you follow by faith. Be content with the detours and details. Those harrowing, hard, and holy roads teach us more about direction, growth, and trust than the broad, easy ones ever will. Keep going, friend. Whether God gives you confirmations or not, He is right there with you.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

3.3

SAMSON'S CRY

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God wants us to realize our need for Him.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

Though God has empowered me with His Spirit, I will still cry out to Him during times of distress.



FOCUS VERSES: Judges 15:18-19

¹⁸ And he was sore athirst, and called on the LORD, and said, Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?

¹⁹ But God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived: wherefore he called the name thereof En-hakkore, which is in Lehi unto this day.

LESSON TEXT: Judges 15:1-20



Lesson Title: Samson's Cry

Icebreaker: If you could be any superhero, who would it be?

I. GOD CALLED SAMSON AND EMPOWERED HIM

» *In a world with quick answers from technology and the ease of online ordering, what can we do to recognize our need for God?*

A. God Manifested His Power in Samson When He Killed a Lion

B. God Empowered Samson to Defeat the Philistines

C. I Will Rely on God's Power to Defeat My Enemies

» *In what situations do you need to call on the Lord for help?*

II. SAMSON STILL NEEDED GOD

A. Samson Took Revenge on the Philistines and Fought Them at Lehi

» *What is the most unconventional victory you can recall in your life?*

B. In His Desperation, Samson Cried Out to God

C. I Will Cry Out to God in My Time of Need

» *What is preventing you from calling on the Lord for what you need?*

Prayer Focus

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to help us rely on Him for our strength
- For God to help us never take our relationship with Him for granted

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Judges 15:1–20

After the death of Israel's eleventh judge, Abdon, whose leadership was relatively uneventful (Judges 12:13–15), Israel fell into its habitual and cyclical pattern of sin. Finally, after they had been under the dominion of the Philistines for forty years, God promised Israel another judge. An angel announced Samson's birth to his parents. Samson's parents were infertile and had no children. The angel informed them Samson would be a Nazarite from birth, which meant his hair would remain uncut and he could not drink alcohol or eat other foods forbidden by the Law. The angel told them Samson would begin to rescue Israel from the Philistines (Judges 13:5).

Despite the great hope surrounding Samson and his great strength, Samson's behavior dashed Israel's hopes repetitively. Samson was born to deliver God's people, but Samson lacked interest in providing the promised deliverance. Instead of rescuing Israel from the Philistines, Samson fell in love with two different Philistine women. Samson killed Philistines, not because they oppressed God's people, but rather to take vengeance against them for killing Samson's wife.

Israel became so disheartened with Samson that they determined to hand over Samson to the Philistines for execution, hoping the Philistines would leave Israel in peace after executing Samson. Samson killed one thousand Philistines, but not for the people's deliverance. Instead, Samson fought for his own survival and vengeance. Samson lived his life as a self-absorbed, sinful man despite his great power. The author of Judges offered these final comments after Samson collapsed the Philistine temple upon himself and the Philistines within it: "So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life" (Judges 16:30). In summary, Samson was more useful to Israel in death than he ever was while alive.

While anointing, spiritual gifts, talent, and resources can be used for the glory of God, these are not indicators God approved of Samson's faithless lifestyle. The Christian life may not always be extraordinary or miraculous; instead, it may sometimes be a life intentionally lived out through faithful obedience in ordinary circumstances. Christians should never follow anointing, gifts, or charisma for their own sake. Christians must be wary of following preachers, teachers, and other ministers due to their talents and abilities as if these individuals were celebrities. If Christians follow anything, they follow the faith of others as they follow Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1).

IF CHRISTIANS FOLLOW ANYTHING,
THEY FOLLOW THE FAITH OF OTHERS
AS THEY FOLLOW CHRIST.

DAY 1

Judges 15:1-3

¹ But it came to pass within a while after, in the time of wheat harvest, that Samson visited his wife with a kid; and he said, I will go in to my wife into the chamber. But her father would not suffer him to go in.

² And her father said, I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her; therefore I gave her to thy companion: is not her younger sister fairer than she? take her, I pray thee, instead of her.

³ And Samson said concerning them, Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines, though I do them a displeasure.

Biblical Insight

Samson's calling was to deliver the Israelites from the Philistines. Marrying a Philistine woman was a slap in the face to his family and his people. His father-in-law may have been afraid Samson was only using his wife to complete his calling. Either way, Samson was betrayed. Samson suggested that because of this betrayal, he could not be blamed for what would happen to the Philistines. Samson wanted to use his calling as an excuse for his anger, but his motives were prideful.

Daily Devotion

After years of trials, Nicholas Cruz pled guilty for taking the lives of seventeen people at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. He was repentant, but families were still destroyed. A father of one of the victims reacted in anger. He would not accept Cruz's apology. It has been said that anger is sadness and hurt that have nowhere to go. This father will never get his little girl back, but holding on to hate for her killer also will not make the pain go away.

What do you do when the one who has hurt you, in your mind, does not merit forgiveness and deserves punishment? How are you supposed to react when you are so betrayed, slandered, hurt, and angry that you feel you can never let it go? Put yourself in the shoes of this father. Could you forgive that grievous of a sin? Jesus did and does, and we are to mirror our lives to His.

Our callings are never excuses to hurt others or retaliate. Even when we are betrayed, we are called to love and let the Lord fight for us. Samson lacked that one key piece, and pride came before his fall.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

Judges 15:4-8

⁴ And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails.
⁵ And when he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks, and also the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives.
⁶ Then the Philistines said, Who hath done this? And they answered, Samson, the son in law of the Timnite, because he had taken his wife, and given her to his companion. And the Philistines came up, and burnt her and her father with fire.
⁷ And Samson said unto them, Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you, and after that I will cease.
⁸ And he smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter: and he went down and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam.

Biblical Insight

Samson’s selfishness and pride not only led him to act out in anger, but it also cost his wife and her family their lives. If he would have followed his calling as he should, he would have avoided heartache and other challenges. When he found out the fate of his wife, it further stoked his fires of revenge. After killing many Philistines, he fled to a cave. Samson could have been repentant and gone back to his people, but he chose seclusion instead. While the destruction of the Philistines was God’s plan, the way in which Samson carried it out and his motives were not God’s plan.

Daily Devotion

The way others treat you is out of your control, but how you react and respond is within your control. It is important to understand that in the same manner you are impacted by negative responses, others can be as well. According to Newton’s Third Law, “Every action has an equal and opposite reaction.” Your actions and reactions matter.

Had Samson taken a deep breath, along with a step back, thought through what he was about to do, and reconsidered, the outcome could have been a whole lot different. Instead, his anger led him nowhere except down a road of loss and destruction.

- In what ways can your reactions improve or impend upon situations?
- Have you walked through a scenario in which stepping back and reevaluating your responses could have enriched the setting?
- What is the most valuable takeaway you can learn from this lesson and apply to your life?

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

Judges 15:9-13

⁹ Then the Philistines went up, and pitched in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi.

¹⁰ And the men of Judah said, Why are ye come up against us? And they answered, To bind Samson are we come up, to do to him as he hath done to us.

¹¹ Then three thousand men of Judah went to the top of the rock Etam, and said to Samson, Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us? what is this that thou hast done unto us? And he said unto them, As they did unto me, so have I done unto them.

¹² And they said unto him, We are come down to bind thee, that we may deliver thee into the hand of the Philistines. And Samson said unto them, Swear unto me, that ye will not fall upon me yourselves.

¹³ And they spake unto him, saying, No; but we will bind thee fast, and deliver thee into their hand: but surely we will not kill thee. And they bound him with two new cords, and brought him up from the rock.

Biblical Insight

Samson was Israel's promised deliverer; however, he had not behaved as promised. When the Philistines invaded Israel on the hunt for Samson, the Israelites provided no defense for Samson. They handed Samson over because it was expedient. Samson was an empty promise that was full of potential. The Israelites felt no obligation to protect him. When a person breaks bonds of fellowship within the community, that person should not expect the community to provide protection. Samson had a responsibility to live up to within the community. Likewise, Christians have a responsibility to other members of the body of Christ.

Daily Devotion

As a church family, we are the body of Christ. According to Scripture and basic anatomy, the body is made up of many parts. The beautiful thing is that each portion is connected and needs its counterpart to function as it should.

Likewise, as a body of believers, we need each other to function at the capacity for which we were created. The way we act around others matters. The way we treat others matters. The way we treat ourselves matters. We are all in this together, and it is vitally important to treat those we are connected to well. We need one another as we run this race.

- In what ways do you feel you can improve your interactions with those to whom you are connected?
- How have you personally been impacted by the decisions of those around you in the body of believers? Whether positive or negative, how did those experiences make you feel about interacting with others?
- Write about a time when you had to sort through a Samson-reaction moment.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

Judges 15:14-17

¹⁴ And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands.
¹⁵ And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith.
¹⁶ And Samson said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men.
¹⁷ And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking, that he cast away the jawbone out of his hand, and called that place Ramath-lehi.

Biblical Insight

Samson was comfortable with his strength. Perhaps the fight with the Philistines was premeditated. However, before Samson could act on his plans, he felt the Spirit of God come upon him powerfully. Samson took action and, perhaps for the first time in his life, he performed the task he was born for, fighting the Philistines on behalf of God’s people. While Samson was abandoned by his countrymen, he was not abandoned by God. God was present with Samson and strengthened him for the task ahead. In extreme circumstances, God may also strengthen us to be able to overcome or endure extreme circumstances.

Daily Devotion

Have you ever prayed angry prayers, begging for God to take you out of whatever you are going through? Often humanity’s general go-to is looking for the exit sign and the easiest way out. However, when you trust God, you will learn the easy road is not always the path He wants you on, not because He doesn’t love you; rather, like with the disciples, in those moments He is growing your faith and teaching you to rely on Him.

It’s funny how God will take you where the waters are deep and terrifying to teach you that’s often where He likes to move and where He likes to do some of His greatest work. It’s not always mountaintop faith that carries us; sometimes it comes in waves and in moments when we feel like everything is in chaos.

You may feel forgotten amid the battle, but keep fighting. God is there with you.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

Judges 15:18–20

¹⁸ And he was sore athirst, and called on the LORD, and said, Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?

¹⁹ But God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived: wherefore he called the name thereof En-hakkore, which is in Lehi unto this day.

²⁰ And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.

Biblical Insight

Samson had become depleted from his fierce and lonely battle. For the first time during his service as Israel's judge, Samson performed the labor for which he was destined, delivering Israel from the Philistines. Unfortunately, Samson had neglected his calling for so long, his people had abandoned him, just as Samson had abandoned them for the past two decades. Nevertheless, God did not forsake Samson and provided water to revive him. When believers engage in their God-ordained calling, God provides restoration along the journey. However, this restoration is only available for those who seek it (Hebrews 4:1–13).

Daily Devotion

The story is told of a preacher who went to the barbershop. While cutting the preacher's hair, the barber asked why he believed in a God who let bad things happen to good people. The preacher kindly listened and did not say much. Once he stepped outside, he encountered a man with unkept hair and a matted beard. He walked back inside, pointed out the man, and announced, "Barbers do not exist."

The barber was slightly perturbed. "They surely do. I am standing right here."

The preacher responded, "No, they must not. Otherwise there would be no people with their hair out of sorts."

The barber, still confused, responded very simply, "Ah, barbers do exist, but people do not come to me." In that, the preacher's point was made. God is always there, but people neglect to reach for Him, thus discounting His existence.

God allots His people the strength they need to face whatever comes their way. The most important part to note is that facing whatever comes your way cannot be done properly without Him. Whatever you face, seek His face. He is there and He is able.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

3.4

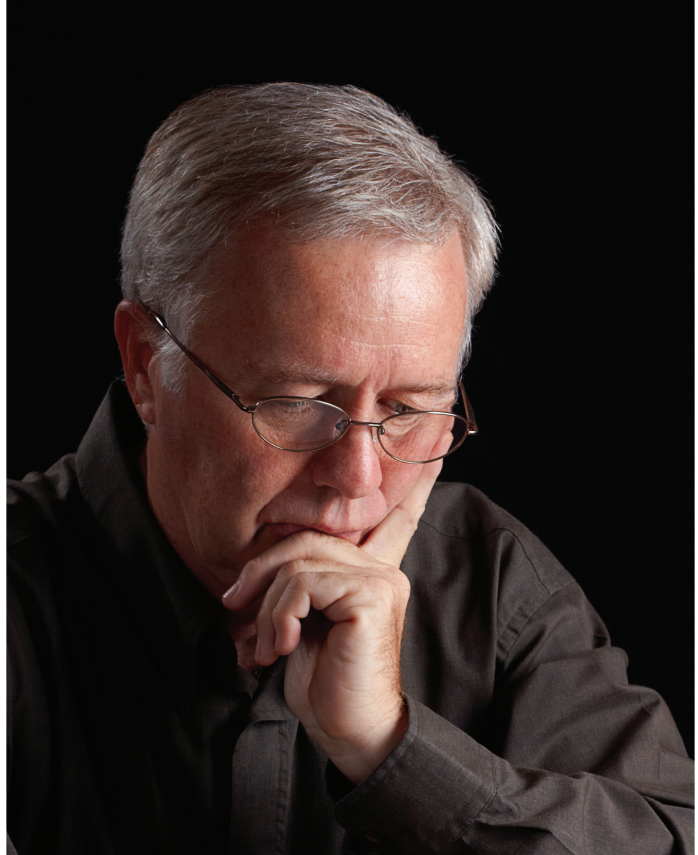
HELP TO UNDERSTAND GOD'S CALL

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God will speak into our lives and provide confirmation.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will counsel with godly leaders to help me understand God's call.



FOCUS VERSES: I Samuel 10:6-7

⁶And the Spirit of the LORD will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man.

⁷And let it be, when these signs are come unto thee, that thou do as occasion serve thee; for God is with thee.

LESSON TEXT: I Samuel 10:1-24



Lesson Title: Help to Understand God's Call

Icebreaker: As a child, what did you dream about doing as an adult?

I. GOD CALLED SAMUEL

» *To whom can you turn for godly advice? What advice from them has helped you in the past?*

- A. Samuel's Mother Dedicated Him to the Lord
- B. When Samuel Heard God Speak, Eli Helped Him Understand God's Voice
- C. We Need the Ministry to Help Us Hear and Understand the Plan of God
 - » *What may be hindering you from hearing the voice or call of God?*

II. GOD CALLED SAUL

- A. The Spirit Moved on Saul and God Gave Saul Signs to Confirm His Calling
- B. We Must Allow the Spirit to Move in Our Lives
- C. Saul Felt Reluctant to Accept His Call
- D. Though I May Feel Inadequate, the Ministry Can Help Me Accept and Understand My Calling
 - » *What causes your reluctance to answer God's call in your life? How would a man or woman of God in your life respond to your reluctance?*

Prayer Focus

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to help us understand His call for our lives
- For God to help us respond to His call for our lives

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: I Samuel 10:1–24

After Samson, Eli and then Samuel along with his sons judged Israel. When Israel requested a king for their nation, like surrounding nations (I Samuel 8:4–5), God sent Samuel to anoint Israel's first king, Saul. Later, Samuel would also anoint David, Israel's second king, after God rejected Saul. Samuel was also a prophet who regularly delivered the word of the Lord to Israel. When the elders of Israel requested a king, Samuel was disappointed and warned them of the consequences monarchy would bring. Nevertheless, the people refused to hear Samuel's wisdom. God told them Samuel would give Israel the king they requested, and then God instructed Samuel to anoint Saul as king of Israel.

During Saul's search for his father's lost donkeys, he determined he would visit Samuel to see what insight he might have toward locating the lost donkeys. When Samuel encountered Saul, God instructed Samuel to anoint Saul as king over Israel. Saul's anointing was private; it was not yet time for Saul to publicly reveal himself as king. Nevertheless, Samuel's anointing set Saul apart.

Samuel ordered Saul to travel to Gilgal and wait for him. Samuel informed Saul that he would see three different signs along the way, which would confirm that Samuel's words were from God. Along the way, the text records, Saul was given "another heart." Those who knew Saul were shocked to see Saul prophesying among the prophets (I Samuel 10:9–13). Apparently, before his anointing, Saul had not been the most spiritual person. However, Saul's interest in prophecy demonstrated that the anointing had begun to transform Saul's interests.

When Samuel introduced Saul as king of Israel, Saul hid "among the stuff" (I Samuel 10:22). Although Saul was anointed as king, he was not prepared to be shuffled before the people of Israel as their king. While the Lord gave Saul a new heart and Saul was initially troubled by the weight of responsibility, Saul later disobeyed God and was rejected as king. Saul's story is a reminder that although God can change hearts and help believers grow spiritually, believers can also oppose the process of change and embrace carnality. A person's position is not an indicator of a right relationship with God. Only faith in God and the fruit produced by that Spirit can display that a person is in relationship with God.

SAMUEL WOULD ANOINT DAVID,
ISRAEL'S SECOND KING, AFTER
GOD REJECTED SAUL.

DAY 1

I Samuel 10:1-2

¹ Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the LORD hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?

² When thou art departed from me to day, then thou shalt find two men by Rachel's sepulchre in the border of Benjamin at Zelzah; and they will say unto thee, The asses which thou wentest to seek are found: and, lo, thy father hath left the care of the asses, and sorroweth for you, saying, What shall I do for my son?

Biblical Insight

Samuel anointed Saul in private; however, the anointing symbolized change had begun to take place within Saul's heart. Likewise, the anointing also represented how Saul's destiny had been significantly altered. While looking for donkeys, Saul walked away as a king. Samuel told Saul he would find the donkeys on his journey, but now his journey pointed beyond the donkeys. People may encounter God through the most mundane tasks; however, after the anointing of the Holy Spirit, believers walk away directed toward a higher purpose.

Daily Devotion

It has been said the Lord works in mysterious ways. Though this can be true, it is also clear the Lord works in ordinary ways that are often overlooked. It would be a tragedy to miss God's promptings while looking for Him in the extraordinary, when He is trying to reach us on the wavelength of the ordinary.

One Canadian summer, a group of girls were in line for a shuttle bus after a tour. One of the girls was almost knocked down by a man with sunglasses, a pole, and someone leading him by the arm. Once the girl realized the man was blind, she was moved to tears. He couldn't see the things that had just captivated her. It seemed as though he was missing everything. The truth is: he was using the rest of his senses to experience the wonder around him. He knew something beautiful was there and he was heading toward it because he trusted the person leading him.

God can speak in extravagant ways, but sometimes He tells us to just trust Him and we will know Him in all things. When we walk closely with God daily, even the small things can turn out great.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

I Samuel 10:3-8

- ³ Then shalt thou go on forward from thence, and thou shalt come to the plain of Tabor, and there shall meet thee three men going up to God to Beth-el, one carrying three kids, and another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine:
- ⁴ And they will salute thee, and give thee two loaves of bread; which thou shalt receive of their hands.
- ⁵ After that thou shalt come to the hill of God, where is the garrison of the Philistines: and it shall come to pass, when thou art come thither to the city, that thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp, before them; and they shall prophesy:
- ⁶ And the Spirit of the LORD will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man.
- ⁷ And let it be, when these signs are come unto thee, that thou do as occasion serve thee; for God is with thee.
- ⁸ And thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal; and, behold, I will come down unto thee, to offer burnt offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace offerings: seven days shalt thou tarry, till I come to thee, and shew thee what thou shalt do.

Biblical Insight

Samuel described to Saul three particular signs that would confirm Samuel was telling the truth. Later in the chapter, Saul discovered Samuel had spoken the truth. Samuel's instructions emphasized the importance of Saul being changed into a different person (I Samuel 10:6). Samuel knew Saul's transformation could only occur through worshiping God while surrounded by other believers. Spiritual transformation is designed to happen within the body of Christ. Believers must encounter God, but they also need to engage with their brothers and sisters in Christ to experience spiritual transformation.

Daily Devotion

Transformation is a slow and steady process. When Saul's life was turned around on the road to Damascus, it was initially seen as sudden, but he had to make the choice to live changed from that point forward. A sure way for him to stay on track was to surround himself with fellow believers who would hold him accountable and help him in his journey.

The same goes for people in the church today. Surrounding ourselves with those of like faith helps build us up and encourages us to walk in the right direction. We are who we encircle ourselves with. This fact by no means allots us a pass to ignore or disregard those outside the four walls of our church. It simply means to choose how we spend our time wisely. Spiritual renovation happens one step at a time, in step with God's Word and His people.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

I Samuel 10:9–16

⁹ And it was so, that when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, God gave him another heart: and all those signs came to pass that day.

¹⁰ And when they came thither to the hill, behold, a company of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them.

¹¹ And it came to pass, when all that knew him beforetime saw that, behold, he prophesied among the prophets, then the people said one to another, What is this that is come unto the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?

¹² And one of the same place answered and said, But who is their father? Therefore it became a proverb, Is Saul also among the prophets?

¹³ And when he had made an end of prophesying, he came to the high place.

¹⁴ And Saul's uncle said unto him and to his servant, Whither went ye? And he said, To seek the asses: and when we saw that they were no where, we came to Samuel.

¹⁵ And Saul's uncle said, Tell me, I pray thee, what Samuel said unto you.

¹⁶ And Saul said unto his uncle, He told us plainly that the asses were found. But of the matter of the kingdom, whereof Samuel spake, he told him not.

Biblical Insight

One member of the audience recognized Saul and was surprised to see him among the prophets, indicating that before his anointing, Saul had not been a spiritual person. Afterward, Saul encountered his uncle, who seemed frustrated that Saul did not return with the donkeys. Perhaps Saul's uncle felt Saul should not have been with prophets and instead should have returned to work in the field. Those who have a carnal worldview cannot understand the spiritual life (I Corinthians 2:14). Only after being spiritually transformed can one see the virtue of the spiritual life that was previously hidden.

Daily Devotion

Sometimes Jesus does things that do not make sense to us. From humanity's viewpoint, those who do the crime should serve the time, or suffer the consequences. Jesus does delve out healthy servings of justice, but His specialties are grace and forgiveness. Based on the world's standards, certain elements make someone successful and worthy, but God's ways are higher and have a lasting reward.

We are working for eternity, not for the frivolous incentives of the present that will fade. It might look appealing now, but as the saying goes, "Everything that glitters [here] is not gold." If you stay the course and put God's kingdom first, you are promised entire streets paved with gold.

What are you carrying from your past that you are still choosing and allowing yourself to be defined by? No matter what others may think of you, lay it all down at the Master's feet. Take some time to journal your thoughts.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

I Samuel 10:17-21

¹⁷ And Samuel called the people together unto the LORD to Mizpeh;
¹⁸ And said unto the children of Israel, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all kingdoms, and of them that oppressed you:
¹⁹ And ye have this day rejected your God, who himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations; and ye have said unto him, Nay, but set a king over us. Now therefore present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes, and by your thousands.
²⁰ And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the tribe of Benjamin was taken.
²¹ When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken: and when they sought him, he could not be found.

Biblical Insight

Israel was intended to be a “kingdom of priests” and a “holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). God’s kingdom would not be ruled by a human king but rather a kingdom of priests led by God. The Hebrew word *kadosh*, which is often translated as “holy,” expresses the idea of being kept separate and intended for a special purpose. This was God’s plan for Israel; however, they continued to want to be like other nations and have a human king. While God has perfect plans for us, He will not interfere with our decision to seek our own will.

Daily Devotion

Empathy is a powerful tool. There is a special kind of vulnerability when you can look someone in the eye and say you understand and have been where that person is. Saul took some time to grasp this concept and strived to be like kingdoms of the world, but we can learn from him in this situation. God’s plan is always the best plan, no matter what we conjure up on our own. We do not have to measure up to what the world thinks is wealthy and worthy. Our worth is secure in God.

- What is waiting for you on the other side of what you are afraid of? Can you use what you have learned and experienced to have empathy to minister to others?
- Do you know someone you could help through the things God has brought you through? Take some time to pray about how the Lord can use your testimony and even the hurts you have faced to lead someone closer to Him and help ease that person’s suffering.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

I Samuel 10:22-24

²² Therefore they enquired of the LORD further, if the man should yet come thither. And the LORD answered, Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff.

²³ And they ran and fetched him thence: and when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward.

²⁴ And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the LORD hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king.

Biblical Insight

Despite the spiritual transformation Saul had experienced, nothing could have prepared him to be coronated as king of Israel. Saul's response was to hide. After all, Saul was called to fill a throne abdicated by God. How could Saul even compare with God? Israel exchanged the divine and infinite for the earthly and finite. They wanted a king because they wanted someone like them, rather than something beyond them. God is always calling believers to something beyond themselves; however, throughout the uncertainty of life, the temptation to settle for the understandable and familiar is always present.

Daily Devotion

Growing up, many youthful sayings were used in an attempt to alleviate painful feelings. We call them "comebacks." See if you remember or can finish any of these: "I'm rubber, you're glue . . ." "I know you are, but what am I?" "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words . . ."

One saying that can be equated with this passage, but in a positive way, is: "It takes one to know one." When you have experienced true forgiveness and restoration, you want that for everyone you meet. It takes a person who has felt the weight of sin and oppression be lifted to understand the freedom we feel in that transformative moment. You view life differently when you look at it through the lens of forgiveness. It takes someone who has truly been pardoned to know one and to want others to experience that joy as well.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

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