

**ADULT LESSON GUIDE
SPRING 2024**



JOHN

A glimpse at the Word made flesh

WORSHIPPING OUR SOVEREIGN GOD

Come let us worship and bow down

ELIJAH AND ELISHA

From generation to generation



GOD'S WORD



FOR LIFE

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GOD'S WORD



FOR LIFE

**ADULT LESSON GUIDE
SPRING 2024**

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*ES indicates Easter Sunday.

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LESSON GUIDE

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GETTING STARTED

The first page of each lesson gives pertinent information that will be foundational for teaching the lesson. Here you will find the Lesson Title, the Truth about God, the Truth for My Life, and both the Focus Verses and Lesson Text. In addition, a callout box will either give an overview of the series (the first lesson of each series contains this information) or will connect students with their daily devotional activity from the previous week.

MARCH 3, 2024
SERIES 1: JOHN

1.1

THE WORD MADE FLESH

FOCUS VERSES
John 1:1-14
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
...And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.

LESSON TEXT
John 1:1-14

TRUTH ABOUT GOD
 God became flesh to save us.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE
 I see how Jesus—God manifested in flesh.



Series Overview:
 The John series highlights key passages in the Gospel of John as we see the Word made flesh, fields ripe for harvest, a blind man see for the first time, Jesus as the Good Shepherd, and the selfless love of our God for the whole world.

LESSON 1.1

TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: What first comes to your mind when you think of Christianity?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

I. IN THE BEGINNING

- A. The Logos **(I)**
 - » In what ways do Jesus' words bring life besides physical healing?
- C. The Light
- D. I Will Use My Words to Speak Life
 - » Who has spoken life to you? How can you speak life to others?

II. WE BEHELD HIS GLORY **(II)**

- » How is God's glory revealed in Jesus Christ in your life?
- A. The World Received Him Not
 - » Have you ever faced rejection for the sake of the gospel? How did you respond?
 - B. Power to Become the Sons of God
 - C. The Word Made Flesh Brought Grace and Truth
 - D. I Will Show Others Grace as I Have Received Grace
 - » How can you show God's grace in your present circumstances?

Internalizing the Message

Prayer Focus

- Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:
- To speak life to others
 - To show grace to others

TEACHING OUTLINE

The SG (Small Group) Teaching Outline is the lesson content in outline form. Each lesson main point is listed along with suggested discussion questions. Although the outline can be used to teach the lesson in a large group setting, the "SG" indicates the content is also designed to be used in a Small Group. Because of this, an icebreaker question has been provided to help jump-start interaction in the Small Group meeting.

SPRING LESSON 1.1

LESSON CONNECTION

Symbols can convey powerful truths. Sometimes an individual's words and actions can become so intertwined with a symbol that the individual represents the idea or action as much or more than the original symbol. In the twentieth century, perhaps no one illustrated this better than Adolph Hitler.

The German Nazi Party came into existence in 1920 and chose the swastika as their symbol. The swastika had been used across an array of religions and cultures to convey a range of ideas for thousands of years prior to the 1920s. The Nazis used the swastika to represent what they saw as the racial purity of the German people. It became a symbol of national and cultural pride. Soon German soldiers were goose-stepping past swastika-embellished banners while ordinary citizens chanted their allegiance to German Führer and Nazi Party leader Adolph Hitler.

To the rest of the world, however, the swastika became a symbol of hatred and state-sponsored genocide, especially following the defeat of Germany in World War II and the uncovering of the atrocities the Nazis wreaked on the world. Most citizens in the West recoil at the sight of a swastika, and its display is banned in present-day Germany (encyclopedia.uhhm.uni). "The History of the Swastika," Hitler himself has come to serve as a stand-in for the swastika and the evils of Nazi Germany. Even the swastika's name now serves as a byword for evil and oppression. In the US, those who wish to disparage political opponents sometimes do so by labeling them "Hitler."

Distaste for Hitler even transformed American fashion. In the 1930s, many men, including the popular comedian Charlie Chaplin, sported what was commonly called a "toothbrush" mustache. Hitler also wore his facial hair in this style. Eventually the toothbrush mustache became so associated with the German leader that most American men shaved their upper lip clean. Today, many associate the toothbrush mustache with Hitler.

Symbols also play a role in Christianity. The most familiar symbol associated with Christianity is the cross, but even the term *Christian* is a symbol of sorts. The first recorded use of the term in Scripture is found in Acts 11:26, where Luke noted, "And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." Friends, neighbors, and associates saw striking similarities between the lifestyles of the first believers and Jesus Christ that society labeled them "Christians," or "Christ-like."

Modern Christians frequently display the cross in their homes or churches. But our witness is much more powerful and effective when we embody Jesus in our actions, attitude, and spirit. In this manner, we bear witness of Jesus and announce His coming Kingdom. Just as John the Baptist did in the first century (John 1:15), We become living symbols of Jesus' power and authority. His light will shine through us into a dark world, and His glory will be revealed.

LESSON CONNECTION

Most often the Lesson Connection will be a story or illustration designed to give students a glimpse of the overall theme of the lesson. Since stories often appeal to the heart and emotions, this portion of the lesson seeks to engage the heart to receive the truth that will be taught. You are encouraged to personalize this section and include your own testimony to help students connect to the lesson.

BIBLE LESSON

The Bible Lesson is a manuscript of the entire lesson. The lessons are written by various Apostolic authors who not only skillfully explain the truths of Scripture but also share ways we can apply these truths to our lives. The lesson contains discussion questions to stimulate thought and media callouts (videos and images available in the Adult Resource Kit) to connect with students of all learning styles.

BIBLE LESSON

I. IN THE BEGINNING

The Bible opens with immortal words in its most memorable opening: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." The apostle John, who would have been well acquainted with the opening line from Genesis, echoed its refrain when he began his Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). He then added, "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3).

The writer of Hebrews expressed it this way in the opening of his letter:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power; when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Hebrews 1:1-3)

God who spoke the universe into existence at the beginning of time has shared with us His message of grace and truth through the person of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh (John 1:14).

A. The Logos

Much has been written about the concept of logos, a Greek term John used that most English translations render as "Word" in his book *The Oneness of God*. David K. Bernard noted, "In Greek usage, logos can mean the expression or plan as it exists in the mind of the proclaimer—as a play in the mind of a playwright—or it can mean the thought as uttered or otherwise physically expressed—as a play that is enacted on stage."

Before God created the world and everything in it—including humans—He knew we would eventually fall into sin and need a Savior. Consequently, God had a plan to redeem us through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Jesus lived out that plan by dying on a cross for our sins and rising from the dead, thereby securing our deliverance and salvation. This logos or plan was in the mind of God from the beginning (John 1:2). As John later wrote in Revelation 13:8, Jesus Christ was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

B. Creator and Giver of Life

John made it clear that the logos was not separate from God, but "the Word was God" (John 1:1)—the same God Genesis credits with creating the Heaven and the Earth. "All things were

Teacher Option:
A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. 

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Some ideas and concepts cannot be fully grasped unless we see them acted out in the real world. Evil is an abstract idea until we witness the horrors humans perpetrate on each other every day. This lesson began with a summary of how Adolph Hitler became the embodiment of evil in the modern world. Recent history includes many accounts of tyrants whose names have become synonymous with brutality, genocide, and oppression—Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong, and Pol Pot.

Thankfully, there also have been many individuals who embodied noble values. If you hear the words *equality, justice, or civil rights*, the image of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. may immediately come to mind. Leaders such as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln illustrated the concepts of sacrifice, loyalty, devotion, and liberty to their countrymen. Lincoln's name became synonymous with emancipation thanks to his commitment to freeing enslaved people during the American Civil War. In more recent times, the Roman Catholic nun Mother Teresa became an international symbol of charity due to her selfless devotion to the poorest residents of Calcutta, India. We know what equality, liberty, freedom, and charity look like because we have seen these ideas lived out, albeit imperfectly, in others. Thankfully, most of us know someone personally who has shown us what love, kindness, compassion, faithfulness, and other virtues look like in daily life.

But when examined closely, all noteworthy personalities prove to be riddled with inconsistencies and flaws. Even biblical heroes such as Abraham, Moses, and David exhibited weaknesses and committed sins. God lives no human past or present could adequately represent His grace and truth, so He was manifested in flesh (1 Timothy 3:16). He alone lived a perfect life. Hebrews 4:15 says He was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." When we look to Jesus, we see all the characteristics of God perfectly demonstrated in human form.

For this reason, John could write, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18). When Philip said, "Lord, shew us the Father," Jesus responded, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9).

Even the best among us demonstrate inconsistencies and flaws. When we find ourselves disappointed by the failures of others, however, we can look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2, ESV). He will lift us when we fail, strengthen us when we are weak, and give us "power to become the sons of God" (John 1:12) through baptism in His name and the infilling and indwelling of His Holy Spirit.

Prayer Focus

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

- To speak life to others
- To show grace to others

15

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

The end of each lesson will offer a final call to action to apply the lesson's content. The goal of each lesson is not just to share biblical information, but also to show what must be done with the information, challenging students to apply God's Word to their lives. You are encouraged to use the Prayer Focus to end the lesson with a time of consecration.

LEGEND

The following icons and boxes are used to aid leaders in navigating the content.

Contains a suggested discussion question

Gives direction regarding an available media callout



Signals the information can be used in a Small Group setting.

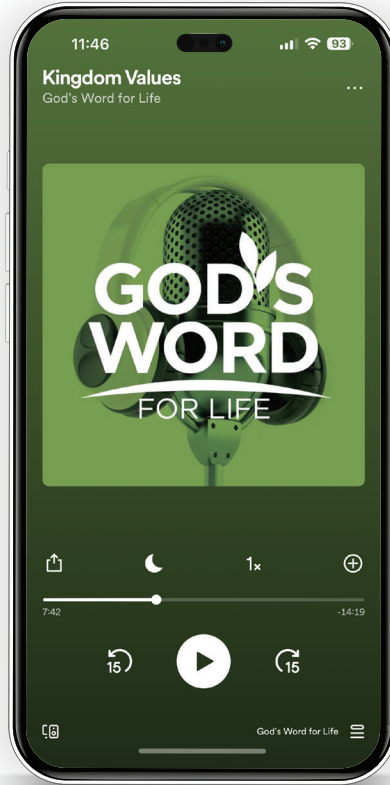


Shows a video component is available to help illustrate the lesson information.



Indicates an image is available to help illustrate the lesson information.

LEARNING AND LIVING OUT GOD'S WORD FOR LIFE



Join podcast host LJ Harry on the God's Word for Life companion podcast every week. Each episode complements the God's Word for Life Lesson Guide, Daily Devotional Guide, and the Small Group Guide as we think deeply about how God's Word impacts our lives. The podcast is a great tool for families and groups to listen to and discuss what we are learning from God's Word. The podcast shares stories and passages in Scripture with fresh insights to encourage followers of Jesus. Like the guides, each episode features discussion questions to help us apply what we are hearing and start conversations about God's Word.

Enjoy the God's Word for Life companion podcast as we learn and live out God's Word for Life.

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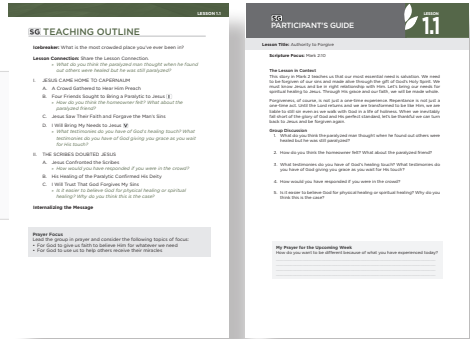
DIGITAL RESOURCE KIT

The Adult Resource Kit offers a wide array of materials to help expand the impact of each lesson. From videos that inspire discussion to social media tools to help encourage adults to join your group or class, this kit provides tools to help leaders grow their group and make teaching time more effective. Some resources include:



A Video to Accompany Each Lesson to Prompt Discussion or Further Thought

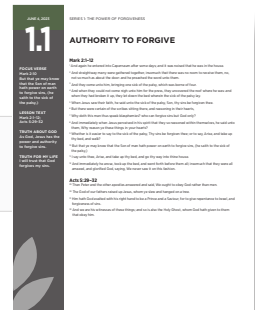
Small Group Teaching Outlines and Participant Guides



A Powerpoint to Accompany Each Lesson



Lesson Leaves and a Printable Version of the Scripture Text



Social Media Graphics, Tips, and Sample Posting Calendar

1.1

THE WORD MADE FLESH

FOCUS VERSES

John 1:1, 14

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

.....

¹⁴And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

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TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God became flesh to save us.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will know Jesus—God manifested in flesh.



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The John series highlights key passages in the Gospel of John as we see the Word made flesh, fields ripe for harvest, a blind man see for the first time, Jesus as the Good Shepherd, and the selfless love of our God for the whole world.

SG TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: What first comes to your mind when you think of Christianity?

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- A. The Logos (I)
 - B. Creator and Giver of Life
 - » *In what ways do Jesus' words bring life besides physical healing?*
 - C. The Light
 - D. I Will Use My Words to Speak Life
 - » *Who has spoken life to you? How can you speak life to others?*

II. WE BEHELD HIS GLORY (V)

- » *How is God's glory revealed in Jesus Christ in your life?*
- A. The World Received Him Not
 - » *Have you ever faced rejection for the sake of the gospel? How did you respond?*
- B. Power to Become the Sons of God
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 - » *How can you show God's grace in your present circumstances?*

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BIBLE LESSON

I. IN THE BEGINNING

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God who spoke the universe into existence at the beginning of time has shared with us His message of grace and truth through the person of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh (John 1:14).

A. The Logos


Much has been written about the concept of *logos*, a Greek term John used that most English translations render as “Word.” In his book *The Oneness of God*, David K. Bernard noted, “In Greek usage, *logos* can mean the expression or plan as it exists in the mind of the proclaimer—as a play in the mind of a playwright—or it can mean the thought as uttered or otherwise physically expressed—as a play that is enacted on stage.”

Before God created the world and everything in it—including humans—He knew we would eventually fall into sin and need a Savior. Consequently, God had a plan to redeem us through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Jesus lived out that plan by dying on a cross for our sins and rising from the dead, thereby securing our deliverance and salvation. This *logos* or plan was in the mind of God from the beginning (John 1:2). As John later wrote in Revelation 13:8, Jesus Christ was “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”

B. Creator and Giver of Life

John made it clear that the *logos* was not separate from God, but “the Word was God” (John 1:1)—the same God Genesis credits with creating the Heaven and the Earth. “All things were

Teacher Option:

A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. 

made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3). When God spoke in Genesis 1, life sprang into existence. Likewise, the New Testament portrays Jesus, the Word, as the creator and giver of life. Jesus said, “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63).

Jesus’ words brought physical healing on many occasions, such as when He healed the nobleman’s son with His spoken word (John 4:50). Jesus’ words even brought the dead to life, as dramatically illustrated in John 11:43 when the Lord stood outside a tomb and commanded His recently deceased friend, Lazarus, to “come forth.” When Jesus spoke, the natural process of physical decay was miraculously arrested and reversed. In an instant, Lazarus walked out of the grave.

In what ways do Jesus’ words bring life besides physical healing?

C. The Light

Light is prerequisite for physical life. Not surprisingly then, God’s first recorded words are, “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3). Light shone on the previously dark and formless mass of the world and set the stage for everything God planned to do next.

John revealed Jesus, the Word, as both the life and the light (John 1:4). The same God who spoke light into existence in Genesis later said, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12, see also 9:5). The light radiating from Jesus Christ shined into the darkened corners of the world, including the darkness of the human heart. (See Matthew 4:16; II Corinthians 4:6). As the Light of the World, Jesus illuminated spiritual truths that previously had been hidden (Matthew 13:35). John taught us that no one can escape the “true Light,” because it “lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9). Every person must stand before God and give an account of his or her response to the light of truth.

D. I Will Use My Words to Speak Life

As born-again believers, our mission is the same as that of John the Baptist: we “bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe” (John 1:7). Like John, we are “not that Light” but have been “sent to bear witness of that Light” (John 1:8). Satan is doing his best to blind people’s minds, but our testimony about Jesus can open their eyes so they may see “the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God” (II Corinthians 4:4).

Who has spoken life to you? How can you speak life to others?


When we tell others about Jesus and what He has done, light comes pouring into their hearts and minds, making it possible for spiritual life to grow in what previously had been the dark void of an empty soul. When we speak Jesus, we speak light and life.

II. WE BEHELD HIS GLORY

The apostle John was privileged to witness the glory of God in ways few others have seen. Matthew, Mark, and Luke record

that John was one of only three disciples (Peter and John's brother, James, being the others) invited to ascend the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus. John looked on as the Lord's "face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light" (Matthew 17:2). Luke recorded, "They saw his glory" (Luke 9:32).

Many years later, while exiled on the Isle of Patmos, John saw a vision of the heavenly city. Among the details he recorded was that "the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof" (Revelation 21:23). John had seen God's glory on a mountaintop; now it illuminated an entire city.

Teacher Option:
A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit. 

We have been invited to witness God's glory in Jesus Christ. Paul wrote, "For God, who said, 'Let there be light in the darkness,' has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ" (II Corinthians 4:6, NLT).

How is God's glory revealed in Jesus Christ in your life?

A. The World Received Him Not

Sadly, many of Jesus' contemporaries could not see His glory. Isaiah prophesied, "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53:2). Many saw only a carpenter's son from Nazareth (Matthew 13:55). Consequently, they rejected Jesus' ministry. Eventually, the leaders of His own nation conspired with the Gentile rulers to crucify Him. Even His closest followers temporarily forgot the glory they had witnessed on the mountain and abandoned Jesus in His hour of greatest need. Peter repeatedly denied knowing Jesus at all. Looking back on these events, John wrote, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11). The Creator stepped into creation, but the creation did not recognize who He was.

Many today cannot see His glory either. "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not," Paul wrote in II Corinthians 4:4. Jesus warned His followers that they would encounter the same rejection He faced (Matthew 10:24-25).

Have you ever faced rejection for the sake of the gospel? How did you respond?

B. Power to Become the Sons of God

Jesus was rejected by many, but there were those both then and now who believed and received Him. Those who received Jesus also received "power to become the sons of God"; that transformative power was and is given to those "that believe on his name" (John 1:12). Jesus later described this new-birth experience as being "born of water and of the Spirit" (John 3:5).

John concluded his account of the life of Jesus by explaining that his purpose in writing was "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31). We take on the family name, the name of Jesus, in baptism (Acts 2:38). When we take on Christ's name in baptism, we are "raised up from the dead by the

glory of the Father” so we can “walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). That life comes through the infilling of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:8-10).

God has many children, and new members are being born into the family every day. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we become “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17). As family members, we eventually will inherit a share in Christ’s glory (Romans 8:17-18).

C. The Word Made Flesh Brought Grace and Truth

Prior to the birth and ministry of Jesus, Israel’s faith was defined by the law of Moses. The history of Israel was essentially the testimony of the nation’s collective failure to live up to the demands of that Law. Even those who stringently adhered to the Law’s commands frequently missed the point of why it was given in the first place (Matthew 23:23).

Jesus, the Word made flesh, came to fulfill the words of the Law that had pointed to Him all along (Matthew 5:17; John 5:39). Whereas the Law brought recognition of humanity’s sinfulness (Romans 3:20), Jesus Christ revealed God’s grace. The *Apostolic Study Bible* and many other resources note that the Greek word John used for *dwelt* in verse 14 could be rendered as “tabernacled,” conveying an image of the Tabernacle in the wilderness where God met with humanity. The sacrifice of Jesus erased the need for the never-ending rituals that had been performed inside that Old Testament tent and provided grace to the countless multitudes who had not been part of the covenants God made with Israel.

D. I Will Show Others Grace as I Have Received Grace

Considering these truths, those of us who have seen God’s glory and received His grace have a responsibility to show others the same. We accomplish this mission in part by sharing the testimony of how the grace of Jesus Christ transformed our lives.

We must show grace to others, even when they do not deserve grace. Paul described his own gracious response to mistreatment in this way: “Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we intreat” (I Corinthians 4:12-13). In so doing, Paul was imitating the example of Jesus, “who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (I Peter 2:23).

We are never more like Jesus than when we show grace to those who deserve it the least. Through the empowerment of the Spirit, we become conduits of God’s grace to a lost world, preparing the way for God’s glory to be revealed in their lives, just as it has been revealed in ours.

How can you show God’s grace in your present circumstances?

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Some ideas and concepts cannot be fully grasped unless we see them acted out in the real world. Evil is an abstract idea until we witness the horrors humans perpetrate on each other every day. This lesson began with a summary of how Adolph Hitler became the embodiment of evil in the modern world. Recent history includes many accounts of tyrants whose names have become synonymous with brutality, genocide, and oppression—Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong, and Pol Pot.

Thankfully, there also have been many individuals who embodied noble values. If you hear the words *equality*, *justice*, or *civil rights*, the image of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. may immediately come to mind. Leaders such as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln illustrated the concepts of sacrifice, loyalty, devotion, and liberty to their countrymen. Lincoln's name became synonymous with emancipation thanks to his commitment to freeing enslaved people during the American Civil War. In more recent times, the Roman Catholic nun Mother Teresa became an international symbol of charity due to her selfless devotion to the poorest residents of Calcutta, India. We know what equality, liberty, freedom, and charity look like because we have seen these ideas lived out, albeit imperfectly, in others. Thankfully, most of us know someone personally who has shown us what love, kindness, compassion, faithfulness, and other virtues look like in daily life.

But when examined closely, all noteworthy personalities prove to be riddled with inconsistencies and flaws. Even biblical heroes such as Abraham, Moses, and David exhibited weaknesses and committed sins. God knew no human past or present could adequately represent His grace and truth, so He was manifested in flesh (1 Timothy 3:16). He alone lived a perfect life. Hebrews 4:15 says He was “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” When we look to Jesus, we see all the characteristics of God perfectly demonstrated in human form.

For this reason John could write, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (John 1:18). When Philip said, “Lord, shew us the Father,” Jesus responded, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:8–9).

Even the best among us demonstrate inconsistencies and flaws. When we find ourselves disappointed by the failures of others, however, we can look to “Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2, ESV). He will lift us when we fall, strengthen us when we are weak, and give us “power to become the sons of God” (John 1:12) through baptism in His name and the infilling and indwelling of His Holy Spirit.

Prayer Focus

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

- To speak life to others
- To show grace to others

1.2

THE UNSEEN HARVEST

FOCUS VERSE

John 4:36

And he that reapeth
receiveth wages, and
gathereth fruit unto
life eternal: that both
he that soweth and
he that reapeth may
rejoice together.

LESSON TEXT

John 4:31-38

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

Jesus calls us to
be workers in the
harvest.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will be a worker in
the harvest.



Thinking about Last Week:

Have students refer to their Daily Devotional Guide to answer the following questions:

1. What most affected you as you read through the Lesson Text and the Biblical Insights?
2. How did it shape your prayers and thoughts throughout the week?
3. Do you feel you grew closer to the Lord this past week? Why or why not?

SG TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: What is the most surprising conversation you see Jesus have in the Gospels?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection. **I**

I. PERCEIVED NEEDS VERSUS REAL NEEDS

A. A Unique Scene

» *How are meeting temporal physical needs and spiritual needs different? How are they alike?*

B. The Need for Physical Food and Spiritual Food

» *If you were one of the twelve disciples, how would you have responded to Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well?*

C. I Will Pursue Balance for My Physical and Spiritual Needs

» *As you reflect on your efforts, which part—physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual—is out of balance for you?*

II. LOOKING TO THE HARVEST

A. The Reality of the Harvest

B. The Need for All Workers in the Harvest

» *How long after you were born again did you begin to see your value in the body of Christ?*

C. I Will Be a Worker in the Harvest

» *What do you feel specifically God has sent you to do?*

Internalizing the Message **V**

Prayer Focus

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

- For us to see people as souls needing to be fed
- For God to use us to feed those hungry souls

LESSON CONNECTION

A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. 

The production and collection of food was a growing concern for Great Britain in the early years of World War I. By the autumn of 1916, this concern had become a full-blown crisis. The nation realized it only had sufficient stock to last another four months. A manpower crisis also developed in British agriculture. Until then, the focus of government had been on the increasing need to recruit sufficient soldiers and sailors to fight the war, which meant agriculture lost many of its fit, young farm workers. They were being targeted by army recruitment officers, and a significant number were signing up.

In December 1916, between the escalating food crisis and severe worries the nation could starve, the government took control of farming under the “plough policy.” This policy attempted to increase land devoted to farming, provide equipment, and allocate manpower back to the fields. The following spring, an appeal to the Police Sergeant’s Conference and to local councils for men with ploughing experience resulted in policemen from around Great Britain being released from law enforcement for the planting season as long as their chief constable agreed. They came from all over Great Britain to participate in this initiative.

Policemen-turned-farmers were said to be so successful they were asked to return temporarily for the harvest in 1917, for the planting season, and for the harvest again in 1918. As a result of this reallocation of labor to the field, the temporary workers—including policemen—had increased crops such as cereals and potatoes by 57 percent above pre-war levels by 1918, despite the shortage of skilled agricultural labor (particularly sowers and harvesters).

Wartime Britain needed all hands on deck. Because men and women responded to the appeal for field workers, crops increased and the nation was saved from starvation. Great Britain recognized planting and harvest will not happen without people to work in the field.

The end-time church needs all hands on deck as well. Seeds already sown are yielding a harvest waiting to be reaped. We cannot let the harvest rot in the field. Other seeds have yet to be planted. Seed does no one any good when it is left in the barn. Nothing can substitute for having workers in the field. The harvest needs workers, and each of us has something to contribute.

BIBLE LESSON

I. PERCEIVED NEEDS VERSUS REAL NEEDS

A. A Unique Scene

As Jesus' disciples returned from the city with food at the beginning of John 4, they found Him in conversation with a woman drawing water from the local well. Food and water are central to our natural life. Both are needed, and Jesus was able to capitalize on a teachable moment about perceived needs versus real needs for the woman (in search of water) and His disciples (in search of food). The conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman initially revolved around water. The Samaritan woman was thinking in a literal way about natural water, which is why she had difficulty comprehending the "living water" Jesus offered her. She was viewing this holy conversation from an earthly perspective, but Jesus was approaching it from a heavenly perspective, all the while inviting her to do the same.

She asked Jesus why He didn't bring anything to draw water when He came to the well. She just did not understand who Jesus was or what He was offering her. In this story, natural water was the perceived need; living water was the real need. When we view life from a natural, earthly perspective, we often miss seeing the supernatural, heavenly perspective. The Samaritan woman's repeated trips to the well testified that its water could not permanently quench her thirst. Jesus contrasted that water with the living water He supplies. He even used two different Greek words to make that contrast even greater. When He spoke of the well, He referred to a water source dug deep into the earth. But when He spoke of a spring, He referred to the water source for the soul only God can give. (See John 4:14.) The well was an external, temporal resource, while the spring was an internal, eternal source.

How are meeting temporal physical needs and spiritual needs different? How are they alike?

B. The Need for Physical Food and Spiritual Food

Jesus' disciples brought Jesus lunch from town (John 4:8), and they insisted Jesus take time to eat. Their plea sparked a conversation about physical food and spiritual food, similar to the conversation Jesus just concluded with the Samaritan woman. The disciples were concerned with His physical well-being after a tiring trip, but Jesus invited them to see life as He saw it. He had been nourished in a deeper, more meaningful way than simply satisfying His physical hunger. Jesus declared, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of," and then explained that He was referring to being involved in the work God had sent Him to do (John 4:32-34).

If you were one of the twelve disciples, how would you have responded to Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well?

Jesus was not teaching that our natural needs are unimportant; rather, He was emphasizing the importance of an eternal perspective. Many times in Scripture, we see Jesus eat meals, break bread, and feed Himself and others. In this passage, He

was not dismissing our body's physical need for food; He was introducing an awareness of our soul's need for nourishment as well. These two facts are true at the same time: our body and soul both need to be fed.

C. I Will Pursue Balance for My Physical and Spiritual Needs

Through the conversations with the woman at the well and His disciples, Jesus taught us it is possible to be so distracted by our physical needs that we ignore our spiritual needs. Each of us is made up of both the material and immaterial. God created every one of us as an integrated whole, a unit. We have physical (body) needs, soul (emotional, mental) needs, and spiritual needs. God does not demand that we only give attention to our spiritual needs to the neglect of our physical, mental, and emotional needs. His expectation that we be "faithful stewards" extends to our bodies as well. He wants us to manage well the resources He has given us—resources such as our bodies, our minds, our feelings, and our choices.

The imbalance of these pursuits becomes an issue. Pursuing only physical development—diet, exercise, grooming, pleasure—to the neglect of our mental or spiritual health is not pleasing to God. Nor does He desire that we solely focus on our spiritual condition while disregarding our physical, mental, or emotional health. Jesus was a perfect example of balancing physical and spiritual needs. He tended to His physical needs, and He also gave attention to His mental and emotional needs as a human. He ate, He rested, He separated Himself from crowds from time to time. He prayed, He fasted, He read and quoted Scripture. Jesus faced the temptations we face, for the writer of Hebrews wrote that Jesus was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus is our great example in all things, including how He balanced caring for His physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs. Jesus knew we would need help to find balance.

As you reflect on your efforts, which part—physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual—is out of balance for you?

II. LOOKING TO THE HARVEST

A. The Reality of the Harvest

In John 4:34–35, Jesus again used the literal to draw attention to the spiritual. This time He shared an agricultural analogy of planting and harvesting. The Samaritan woman had exhibited a spiritual hunger the further she got into the conversation with Jesus. That desire for spiritual things culminated in her accepting Jesus as the Messiah, and she rushed back to town to share this good news.

When Jesus told the disciples, "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest," He was helping them see people from a heavenly perspective. The townspeople were about to rush out and meet Jesus because of the testimony of this one woman. Their urgency to meet Him signified their spiritual hunger. Jesus was preparing His disciples (and by

extension, us) to see beyond the physical to the spiritual needs of people. He invites us to view everyone from His perspective. On the surface, people may seem to want nothing to do with God, salvation, and transformation, but inwardly they are yearning for connection with God, redemption, and reconciliation.

B. The Need for All Workers in the Harvest

Jesus saw a need for more workers in the field of harvest to gather “fruit unto life eternal” (John 4:36). Again Jesus’ focus was on the eternal rather than the temporal. Like the temporal harvest that requires one who sows, one who waters, and one who reaps, many people are needed for this eternal harvest. No believer is exempt or unnecessary. We are saved to serve. When God fills us with His Spirit, it is not merely a ticket to Heaven; it is meant for empowerment here on earth. He empowers us to partner with Him and the work He wants accomplished in the earth.

When we are saved, we become part of the body of Christ. In I Corinthians, Paul pointed out that *every* part is important. Every person has a role and responsibility, not just the leadership or those who seem the most spiritual among us. You are an important part of the work of God. He has uniquely planted you in your neighborhood, workplace, school, and family. That is your field, and you are needed as a worker in that field. You are needed to show the love of Jesus—to be a listening ear to a coworker with a broken heart, to prepare a meal for a neighbor who is ill—planting seeds of kindness and watering seeds of truth.

C. I Will Be a Worker in the Harvest

With God, nothing is on accident; everything is on purpose—including you. His purpose *for* you preceded His design *of* you. You were created for a purpose—His purpose. The mission of God in the world is deeply personal. He has invited us to partner with Him to accomplish His work. We have to take it personally, like the Samaritan woman did. She became a worker in the harvest when she turned her experience *with* Christ into an invitation *to* Christ. Each of us has an experience with God. He has done something marvelous in our lives, whether it is our experience of salvation, transformation, protection, deliverance, provision, or a miraculous healing. Now we can commit to turn that experience into an invitation to others so they can have a similar experience.

Proverbs 10:5 teaches, “He that gathereth in summer is a wise son: but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame.” This verse prompts reflection: am I actively involved in the harvest? We cannot afford to “sleep” or be inactive given the day and time in which we live. These are the last days, and many still need to hear the gospel. Thankfully, many are spiritually hungry for truth.

As the city came out to meet Jesus, He turned to His disciples and announced to them, “I sent you” (John 4:38). Their mission

How long after you were born again did you begin to see your value in the body of Christ?

was to disciple people in a similar way Jesus disciplined them. That holy calling was true for the twelve disciples Jesus walked with that day, and it is also true for us, His twenty-first century disciples. God has sent us. Whether we feel qualified and capable or not, He sent us. Although we are broken, prone to mistakes, and have faults and weaknesses, He sent us.

What do you feel specifically God has sent you to do?

The beautiful part of being sent is knowing we do not go in our own authority. We go in the authority of the one who sent us. We don't enter the harvest field—our job, family, school, or neighborhood—only equipped with what we are able to do. We minister to the spiritually hungry with the power and provision of Him who sent us.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit. 

Alison parked her car in the parking lot of Shop 'n Save to run in and grab the ingredients for her banana pudding cake. She quickly found the wafers, the pudding, the cake mix, and she headed to the area she thought the Cool Whip would be. That's when she saw him. She recognized him but couldn't think how or why. *Now, where is the Cool Whip?* She thought. She turned to try another section, and she nearly bumped into him.

Alison gave a shy smile. Suddenly, she remembered he was in a recent church service. He was diagnosed with cancer, and he used to attend her church years ago. Still focused on her shopping list, she found the Cool Whip and headed for the self-checkout to save time. She glanced over to see him standing in aisle 4 with his milk, his ice cream, a case of Guinness. And his cancer.

As she raced for the door, she remembered her church was celebrating Miracle Sunday the next weekend. She was in a hurry, and now she was battling a bowl of Cool Whip melting in her shopping bag. She steadily stepped toward the exit, but the voice spoke again, "He needs Miracle Sunday." She made it to her car, unlocked the door, tossed the ingredients in the backseat, and started the car.

Alison felt a twinge of guilt, so she bargained with God. *If he walks out of the store and he's parked kinda near me, I'll invite him.* When he cleared the exit and headed in her direction, she felt nervous. When he opened the back hatch of the car right next to hers, she had no excuse. She grabbed an invite and stepped out of her car. They struck up a conversation, and when she asked how he was doing, Gary told her the cancer had progressed; he didn't have much time. His next words shocked her. "I still remember the pastor's sermon 'It Started with a Look' about Abraham and Lot. I think about it often. Just a glance at sin will take you farther than you intend to go." Had she misjudged him? Was he waiting for the opportunity to talk about God? She nodded and added, "I think the opposite is also true . . . just one look toward God can start something good." She handed him the invite to Miracle Sunday.

As Alison got back her car, her eyes welled up with tears. God had sent her to Shop 'n Save that day because Gary was there. She thought her physical hunger for banana pudding cake had taken her there, but Gary's spiritual hunger was the actual reason. God had given her an opportunity to be a worker in the field. She was there for Gary, as if God was saying, "You shop, and I'll save."

Prayer Focus

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

- For us to see people as souls needing to be fed
- For God to use us to feed those hungry souls

1.3

WHEN THE LIGHT SHINES

FOCUS VERSE

John 9:39

And Jesus said,
For judgment I am
come into this world,
that they which see
not might see; and
that they which
see might be made
blind.

LESSON TEXT

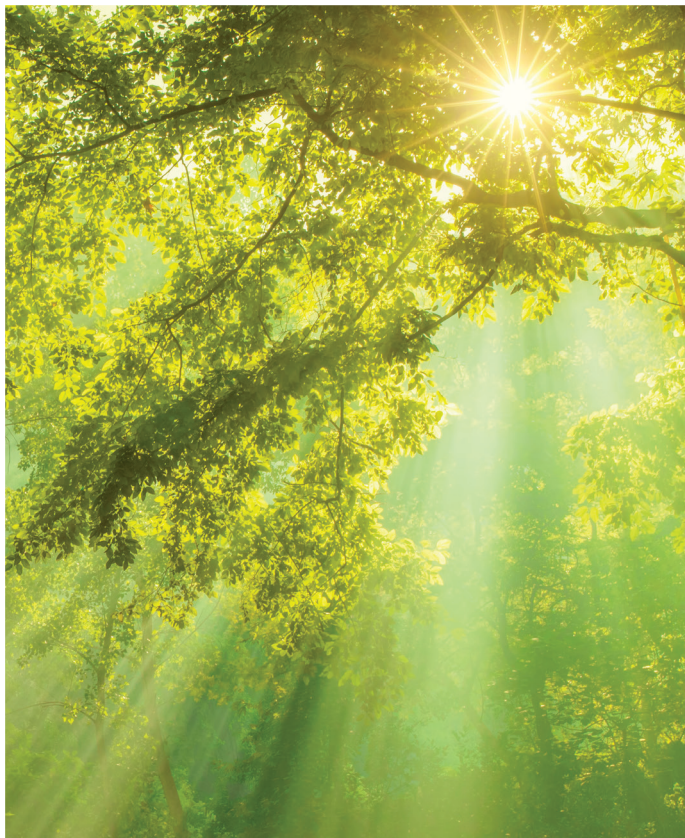
John 9:24-41

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God's miracles
reveal His glory.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will submit my life
for the glory of God.



Thinking about Last Week:

Have students refer to their Daily Devotional Guide to answer the following questions:

1. What most affected you as you read through the Lesson Text and the Biblical Insights?
2. How did it shape your prayers and thoughts throughout the week?
3. Do you feel you grew closer to the Lord this past week? Why or why not?

SG TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: What is your favorite work of art?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

- I. JESUS SAW A NEED
 - A. Why Needs Arise
 - » *How do you respond when someone asks you a question like the disciples asked Jesus?*
 - B. I Will Trust God, Especially When I Face a Need
- II. RESPONDING TO THE MIRACULOUS
 - A. Jesus Healed, But Some Did Not Believe
 - » *Why didn't people believe the man who saw was the same as the one born blind?*
 - » *What do you think of the man's boldness toward the religious leaders?*
 - B. Personal Experience with Jesus Brought Illumination
 - C. Jesus Revealed His Identity and the Identity of Believers **V**
 - » *See yourself in the story. Which character are you: the disciples, the neighbors, the parents, the Pharisees, or the believers?*
 - D. I Will Submit My Life for the Glory of God
 - » *How will you submit your life for the glory of God?*

Internalizing the Message **I**

Prayer Focus

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

- To look for the glory of God to be displayed
- To submit our lives to be used for God's glory

LESSON CONNECTION

Eşref Armağan is an internationally acclaimed artist whose works have been exhibited in galleries throughout Europe, Asia, and North America. The Turkish-born painter paints landscapes, still lifes, and portraits in bright colors. His mastery of perspective, scale, light, and shadow is stunning, particularly because Eşref was born completely blind.

As a child, Eşref noticed people constantly warned him about his surroundings, but they never seemed to warn others. When he asked his parents about it, he learned that other people could see what he could not. Eşref reached out to his father for help. His father patiently answered his questions and introduced him to objects, shapes, and textures.

Once, Eşref's father gave him a paper butterfly to help him understand their shape. While holding the model, Eşref drew the shape to test the accuracy of his perception. He began by etching on cardboard to make indentions he could trace with his fingers. He then practiced drawing lines to represent the butterfly's outline. With practice, he eventually mastered the ability to draw and color butterflies and other objects.

As his skills developed, Eşref began to paint on canvas. When he heard his paintings appeared flat and unrealistic, he discovered light acts on objects and creates shadows and shades of color. Amazingly, he was able to incorporate these features into his art, accurately recreating what others described. Eşref later learned about scale and perspective and was able to add depth and dimension.

In 1994, he participated in an international exhibit of visually impaired artists. He began to catch the attention of artists and researchers alike. Eventually, he became the subject of scientific studies on human perception. During brain scans conducted while Eşref drew, researchers observed that his visual cortex illuminated as if he were seeing. The experiments proved that vision was a function of perception, regardless of how it is experienced. Simon Hayhoe, at the University of Bath, observed that Eşref's "work shows that it is possible for people born blind to understand, describe, and create visual pieces of art" ([theconversation.com, "How a Blind Artist Is Challenging Our Understanding of Colour"](http://theconversation.com/How-a-Blind-Artist-Is-Challenging-Our-Understanding-of-Colour)). Eşref Armağan has an accurate vision of the world, although he has never seen it with his eyes.

Seeing is not the same thing as perceiving. The Lord told the prophet Isaiah to say to disobedient Israel: "Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not" (Isaiah 6:9). Jesus applied these words to the unbelief He encountered in His day (Matthew 13:14-15; Mark 4:11-12). Because of their hard hearts, some people were blind to what could clearly be seen. But others, like Eşref Armağan, perceived what they could not see with their eyes. The difference between seeing and perceiving is a matter of faith and courage.

BIBLE LESSON

I. JESUS SAW A NEED

John opened his Gospel with a reference to light:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. (John 1:1-5)

Light is a powerful symbol in biblical imagery. It recalls the power of God's presence to bring life and understanding, to warm our spirits, and to illuminate our path so we may know the truth and be free from chains of darkness, ignorance, and sin. John traced the theme of light throughout his Gospel. It comes into particular focus in chapter 8 when Jesus stood in the Temple and declared publicly: "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). John 9 reveals precisely what happens when people encounter the light. The story begins with Jesus and His disciples seeing a man who was born blind.

A. Why Needs Arise

Much like Job's friends, the disciples assumed that sin and suffering were directly connected. In John 9:2, the disciples reasoned that this man was suffering as a penalty of sin. Their only question was whether the sin was his own or his parents'. Jesus rejected their narrow theology. Something as complex and mysterious as human suffering cannot be explained away with simplistic moralizing.

How do you respond when someone asks you a question like the disciples asked Jesus?

Jesus shed light on the disciples' dark assumption, framing this man's need within the broader picture of God's redemptive purpose. The works of God would be revealed through this man. Like in the beginning, God was shining light into darkness and chaos. Jesus came into our world precisely for this reason, and this blind man's need provided an occasion for God's healing, restoration, and new creation to be displayed.

B. I Will Trust God, Especially When I Face a Need

Needs arise in life for a variety of reasons. We could spend a lot of energy attempting to answer the question "why?" However, the better question is "how?" How will God's work be revealed in and through this need? How will His glory be displayed? How is His light shining?

The "how?" questions help us frame our needs within the context of God's grace and redemption. No matter why we have needs,

we can trust that God sees them and He is working all things together for our good and for His glory (Romans 8:28).

II. RESPONDING TO THE MIRACULOUS

After refocusing the disciples' attention on God's work, Jesus turned toward the blind man and miraculously opened his eyes. John called Jesus' miracles "signs" because they pointed to Jesus' identity and mission. This miracle clearly demonstrated who Jesus was and what He came to do. Those who saw the light shine that day responded in different ways. This sign revealed Jesus' identity and the condition of their hearts.

A. Jesus Healed, But Some Did Not Believe

In the beginning, God crafted a human body out of dirt and breathed into it to bring it to life (Genesis 2:7). In an echo of that original creative act, Jesus grabbed a handful of dirt, mixed it with the moisture of His breath, and smeared it onto this man's hollow eyes. Then Jesus sent the man to wash in a pool appropriately named "Sent."

The light of new creation shone on this man who had battled blindness since birth, and he responded with simple obedience to Jesus' spoken word. "He went . . . and washed, and came seeing" (John 9:7). The man born blind was so transformed by his encounter with Jesus that he was barely recognizable. Those who knew him before weren't quite sure if the person they were now seeing was the same man (John 9:8-9). When he said, "It's me," they gasped, "What happened to you?"

Why didn't people believe the man who saw was the same as the one born blind?

The neighbors asked, "How were your eyes opened?" and he told his story. After hearing it, they wanted to see Jesus for themselves. Jesus had slipped away, so they brought the healed man to their religious leaders. Something extraordinary had happened, so they turned to the religious professionals to make sense of it. But things were not quite that simple. Blinded by their inflexible paradigms, many of those leaders could not bring themselves to see the light shining right in front of them (John 9:10-16).

In the investigation, the Pharisees secured the testimony of the man who was formerly blind. He testified that Jesus must be sent from God—like a prophet doing the works of God. His clear-headed, experience-based testimony was dismissed because it did not fit within the religious leaders' presumptions (John 9:17-18). The authorities questioned the man's parents, looking for another explanation.

The parents could not deny that this man was their son or that he had been born blind. But they could not bring themselves to support his testimony either. Paralyzed by fear, they gave safe answers and shrank back into the shadows, leaving their son standing alone in the light (John 9:20-23).

With their investigation floundering, the religious leaders brought the healed man back into interrogation and applied pressure: “Tell the truth. What really happened? We know this Man is a sinner, so fess up.” (See John 9:24.) Refusing to be intimidated, the man stuck to his story. His eyes had been opened physically and spiritually, and he could not deny what was now so clear. Regardless of what the religious leaders presumed about Jesus, the man was confident of this one thing: “I was blind, now I see” (John 9:25).

When the religious leaders covered the same territory again, the healed man turned the tables and asked, “Is there something else going on? Do you have some secret motive?” Embarrassed and exasperated, the religious leaders responded in anger. They could not explain or control the light shining brightly on them. Rather than admitting the obvious power of working through Jesus, they clung to their safe and controllable traditions. Masking their fear in anger, they hurled insults at the healed man and his healer.

What do you think of the man's boldness toward the religious leaders?

B. Personal Experience with Jesus Brought Illumination

Fear and doubt kept others in the dark, but light and life transformed the man born blind. His experience with Jesus not only opened his eyes but also illuminated his mind and filled his heart with courage and faith. He responded to his interrogators with boldness.

Hebrew Scripture and Jewish tradition report one or two instances of the blind being healed but never anyone who was born blind. It was obvious only God could have performed such an unprecedented act of new creation. The healed man retorted, “How could you blindly claim that you do not know where Jesus is from?” (See John 9:30–33.)

They squeezed their eyes even tighter against the light and grasped for the same dark idea the disciples proposed near the beginning of John 9: the healed man must be a sinner. After all, he was born blind. They cast him out because they couldn't stand the light.

C. Jesus Revealed His Identity and the Identity of Believers

Psalm 27 opens with these words: “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalm 27:1).


The healed man lived out the words of this ancient song. The Lord had been his light and had saved him from living the rest of his life in darkness. His encounter with the Lord had filled him with uncommon courage, and he stood firm under the pressure of his interrogators. The psalm continues: “When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up” (Psalm 27:10). This man's father and mother had forsaken him, but the

LORD did not leave him orphaned. He never does. He will not abandon His own. He never leaves us nor forsakes us (Hebrews 13:5). Jesus found the healed man and revealed Himself to him.

An encounter that began with healing concluded with a bold profession. When the formerly blind man saw Jesus for the first time, he did what comes naturally to those who can see. He professed his faith, and he worshiped (John 9:35-38). That response should happen whenever the light shines.

John chapter 9 concludes with Jesus' assessment of what had just taken place: "And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind" (John 9:39). The great irony is that a man who had so obviously been blind was the only one who could clearly see, while all those who thought they were seeing were clearly living in varying degrees of blindness.

Teacher Option:

A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit. 

See yourself in the story. Which character are you: the disciples, the neighbors, the parents, the Pharisees, or the believers?

The disciples could not see what God was doing in the world. The neighbors could not perceive if this was the same guy they had known. The parents could not see past their fear. The Pharisees refused to see that God was in their midst, fulfilling all the ancient promises and launching the project of new creation. The light was shining on them all, but only the man who had been blind could see it.

D. I Will Submit My Life for the Glory of God

Others were blinded by their preconceived ideas, fear, and pride, but the man born blind saw clearly enough to simply do what Jesus said. May we do the same. With faith and courage, his response to the light led him to a face-to-face encounter with the one who known as the brightness of God's glory. Jesus saw his trust and obedience and opened the man's eyes. Suddenly, he saw the Lord. That still happens whenever we encounter God's Word and His works.

When the presence and power of Jesus shines in a life, some are like the disciples: preoccupied with the wrong questions and too distracted to see what God is doing. Others, like the neighbors, are curious but not engaged. Some, like the parents, fear what it might cost if they embrace the light. Still others, like the Pharisees, are so certain they can see that they firmly close their eyes and utterly reject the light.

But may we always respond like the man born blind. He was open, honest, humble, trusting, and courageous. He submitted his life for the glory of God and was transformed by the light.

How will you submit your life for the glory of God?

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. 

It is hard to imagine any place darker than a Nazi concentration camp. Yet in the winter of 1944, a bright light of faith and courage flickered defiantly in such a camp. Hugo Gryn was thirteen years old when he, his family, and ten thousand other Jews from the Berehovo ghetto were deported to Auschwitz. His grandparents and little brother were immediately gassed since they were of no value to that brutal regime. Hugo and his father were transferred to the Lieberose forced-labor camp and put to work constructing a resort town for Nazi officers and their families. In that dark, cold, miserable place, Hugo witnessed a triumph of hope and the resilience of faith. He later recalled:

Although we had nothing like calendars, my father, who was my fellow prisoner there, took me and some of our friends to a corner in our barrack. He announced that it was the eve of Hanukkah, produced a curious-shaped clay bowl, and began to light a wick immersed in his precious, now melted, margarine ration. Before he could recite the blessing, I protested at this waste of food. He looked at me—then at the lamp—and finally said: “You and I have seen that it is possible to live up to three weeks without food. We once lived almost three days without water; but you cannot live properly for three minutes without hope!” (Noam Sachs Zion and Barbara Spectre, eds., *A Different Light: The Hanukkah Book of Celebration*)

The light of that makeshift menorah, kindled in audacious faith represented a hope that could not be snuffed out. The image evokes a phrase from John’s Gospel: “And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” (John 1:5).

In the beginning, God brought hope to a world filled with darkness and chaos by speaking the words, “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3). Centuries later, the prophet Isaiah promised hope and light to a people walking in darkness (Isaiah 9:2). The apostle Paul alluded to these texts when he wrote to the Corinthians, “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (II Corinthians 4:6).

God’s first creative act was to cause light to shine on a dark, formless void. God’s ultimate creative act causes light to shine in our hearts, dispelling darkness. That light shines in the face of Jesus Christ. When we respond to God in faith and courage, walking “in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (I John 1:7).

Prayer Focus

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

- To look for the glory of God to be displayed
- To submit our lives to be used for God’s glory

1.4

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

FOCUS VERSE

John 10:11

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

LESSON TEXT

John 10:7-18

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

Jesus gave His life for us.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will know the Good Shepherd's voice and follow Him alone.



Thinking about Last Week:

Have students refer to their Daily Devotional Guide to answer the following questions:

1. What most affected you as you read through the Lesson Text and the Biblical Insights?
2. How did it shape your prayers and thoughts throughout the week?
3. Do you feel you grew closer to the Lord this past week? Why or why not?

SG TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: If you could have had any job in the Bible, what would you have done?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection **I**

- I. JESUS TAUGHT ON THE ROLE OF THE SHEPHERD
 - A. False versus True Shepherds
 - B. I Will Know the Shepherd's Voice
 - » *What does it mean to know God's voice? How do we know His voice?*
 - » *Recall a time when your thoughts and feelings aligned with God's Word. What about a time they did not?*
- II. JESUS REVEALED HIMSELF AS THE GOOD SHEPHERD
 - A. Lays Down His Life for the Sheep
 - B. Knows the Sheep
 - » *How do you feel knowing God knows all about you and loves you anyway?*
 - C. Speaks to the Sheep **V**
 - » *In addition to your daily Bible reading, what is your favorite way of taking in more of God's Word?*
 - D. I Will Follow the Shepherd Alone
 - » *What other voices and influences will you need to reject or stop following to truly follow Jesus?*

Internalizing the Message

Prayer Focus

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

- To hear and follow the good shepherd's voice
- To silence other voices and influences trying to lead us astray

LESSON CONNECTION

A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. 

Over the past five decades, we have seen exponential growth in the ability of a machine or program to receive and interpret spoken commands known as voice recognition technology. In 1976, computers could only recognize slightly more than one thousand words, but that total jumped to twenty thousand in 1980 as IBM continued developing voice recognition technology. Fast forward thirty years to 2011 when Apple introduced Siri, 2014 when Amazon introduced Alexa, and 2016 when Google debuted Google Assistant. You can talk to your Alexa device, and she can recognize your words, understand what you mean, and respond appropriately—most of the time.

Not only can devices receive and interpret the spoken word, but they are now equipped to recognize the person speaking. This advanced capability increases the efficiency of the device and makes it more valuable in its functionality to the user. For instance, for Apple consumers running an updated iOS, Siri can give out personalized answers based on who speaks, which means the handling of calls, messages, calendar entries, and reminders will be personalized to whoever speaks to Siri. Certainly, people are concerned the technology may be too invasive, but the fact that this capability is available is remarkable.

But, like her human designers, Siri can sometimes be mistaken. In a technology journal written by Apple, they explained, “The overall goal of speaker recognition (SR) is to ascertain the identity of a person using his or her voice. The danger, however, lies in the handling of imposter accepts; if enough of these get included early on, the resulting profile will be corrupted and not faithfully represent the primary users’ voice. The device might begin to falsely reject the primary user’s voice or falsely accept other imposters’ voices (or both!) and the feature will become useless.”

Much like speaker recognition technology, as followers of Christ, our goal is to recognize the voice of our Shepherd—the one we follow. The danger comes when we allow so many other voices the opportunity to influence us that His voice—the primary voice—is not recognized at all or, worse yet, we accept the voice of an imposter. Falsely rejecting God’s voice or falsely accepting an imposter’s message can leave us lost, frustrated, and confused in this journey of life. Thankfully, we have a loving Shepherd devoted to guiding, instructing, and caring for us—even when we get ourselves messed up.

BIBLE LESSON

I. JESUS TAUGHT ON THE ROLE OF THE SHEPHERD

A. False versus True Shepherds

In John 10:7-18, Jesus revealed His true identity by teaching on the role of the shepherd. The previous chapter, John 9, recounts the story of Jesus healing the man who was born blind and His revelation as the long-awaited Messiah. The Pharisees (a religious sect of the Jews) took issue with Jesus' claim and with anyone believing Jesus' claim, to the extent they expelled the healed man from the synagogue. The context provided in John 9 is important in understanding what Jesus was doing in John 10. Ever the master Teacher, Jesus was using the way the Pharisees had just reacted to Him and the healed man to capitalize on a teachable moment. As Jesus turned the conversation to the role of a shepherd, He recognized that His audience (the Pharisees) knew what the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel had to say about the role of shepherds.

Through both prophets God had pronounced hard judgment on the leaders of Israel, calling them false shepherds because they had usurped authority over God's flock. He charged them saying, "Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them" (Jeremiah 23:2), and "the shepherds fed themselves, and fed not my flock" (Ezekiel 34:8). However, along with a judgment on the false shepherds came a comforting message of hope to the scattered flock—the promise of a faithful shepherd.

In Jeremiah's prophecy the shepherd was the Branch of David, "the LORD our righteousness" (Jeremiah 23:5-6). In Ezekiel's prophecy, God Himself would be a shepherd to restore and bless the nation that had been scattered (Ezekiel 34:11-15). Again, Jesus was aware that the religious, Scripture-devoted Pharisees would know these prophecies. Against this background He began to paint the picture of the current scene. When the Pharisees expelled the healed man from the synagogue (John 9:34), they misappropriated the authority of shepherds over the nation and demanded the people follow them. They were convinced Jesus was a false Messiah, and they were seeking to persuade the people to reject Him (such as in John 9). While pointing out the current-day false shepherds, Jesus also demonstrated that He was the true shepherd the prophets promised would come.

B. I Will Know the Shepherd's Voice

Christ came just as Scripture indicated the true shepherd would. In this teachable moment, Jesus pointed out the shepherd "callesh his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out" (John 10:3), emphasizing the power of the shepherd's spoken word. Our shepherd still speaks. His is a voice of love, a voice speaking peace—voicing words of mercy and forgiveness—a voice supporting morality, and a voice building others up.

What does it mean to know God's voice? How do we know His voice?

In our relationships, personal, meaningful, and consistent connections help us get to know others. We learn their likes and dislikes, their strengths and weaknesses, their preferences and favorites. This type of knowledge stems from time spent with people. As the sheep of God's pasture, knowing the shepherd's voice is a beautiful benefit of knowing the shepherd. We can rightly discern truth from error when we have communed with our shepherd in consistent relationship through prayer and study of God's Word. We begin to learn His likes, dislikes, preferences, and priorities. Submitting ourselves to His voice of authority means we become aware that sometimes our voice or the voice of society and culture conflicts with God and His Word. We must be in relationship with Him and listen for His voice to know His voice. Through opportunities such as reading His Word, attending church services, Bible study, personal prayer time, fasting, small groups, and so on, we hear His voice more and more.

Let us make listening to God our priority, to do what is necessary to know His voice. It is a wonderful blessing to know we *can* know God's voice, and we have confidence that we will know His voice. Learning someone's voice happens by hearing that person talk—a lot. If we are not yet accustomed to hearing God speak and don't feel confident identifying a thought, concept, or idea as His voice, we are not without hope. One way we discern His voice is by making sure our thoughts and feelings align with His written Word. We can prayerfully search the Scriptures to test our thoughts against His truth. Another way is to consult someone more seasoned or spiritually mature. We can authentically share our struggle with that person and ask for help discerning the voice of our shepherd.

Recall a time when your thoughts and feelings aligned with God's Word. What about a time they did not?

II. JESUS REVEALED HIMSELF AS THE GOOD SHEPHERD

A. Lays Down His Life for the Sheep

To the gathered multitude and Pharisees, Jesus presented Himself as the good shepherd in contrast to the false shepherds functioning as the religious elite of His day. Jesus declared that “the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” (John 10:11), which is distinctly different from the false shepherds the prophets described. David's daring rescue of his sheep from the mouth of the lion and paw of the bear teach us that shepherds may risk their own life to save their flock. Shepherding is a selfless role—one that prioritizes the care, protection, direction, and provision of the sheep.

Later in the Gospel of John, Jesus emphasized a good shepherd's core motivation when he announced, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Our good shepherd is motivated by love. That is why Paul wrote in Romans 5:8, “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Ancient shepherds often laid across the threshold of the sheepfold to keep sheep in and wolves out. This selfless act was an example of protection and

prevention. Sheep could not wander out of the enclosure during the night. In a similar way, Christ's death on the cross protects us from the power of sin and death and prevents us from stumbling through life under the burden and weight of our sin.

B. Knows the Sheep

When Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep" (John 10:14), He meant more than having knowledge that a particular sheep belongs to His flock. Mere identification does not describe deeply enough the knowledge a good shepherd has of his sheep. Our good shepherd knows our needs, the desires of our heart, the way we take, our thoughts, our deepest fears, our sincere longings, our priorities, our everything. There is nothing about us that He doesn't already know; let that sink in. But don't let it make you uneasy or fearful.

Remember, a key aspect of our good shepherd is love. He looks on us and acts toward us while motivated by His love for us. We can entrust the intimate knowledge of our past, our present, and our future to our good shepherd. There are likely things in our past we hope others never know—things we've done or things done to us. Our good shepherd already knows all about us, and He does not hold those actions and choices against us when we have brought our past to Him for healing or forgiveness. We need not fear that God knows our past.

How do you feel knowing God knows all about you and loves you anyway?

Similarly, the good shepherd knows our present. He knows our present struggles and present needs. He knows the current chaos, confusion, or questions that surround us. He is not unaware or oblivious or uninterested. The good shepherd's love reassures us that He is aware, interested, and wants to be involved. Every day we may be assured Jesus also knows our future. He knows what we need before we ask or even know *to* ask. He is watching over us and will guide us into future days as we follow Him. Corrie ten Boom is quoted as having said, "Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God." The future is daunting because of its uncertainty, but it is only uncertain to us—not to our good shepherd. He knows our future. The good shepherd knows every aspect of His sheep.

C. Speaks to the Sheep

Earlier in John 10, Jesus emphasized the shepherd's spoken word when He pointed out the shepherd "calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out" (John 10:3). In verse 16, Jesus reiterated that our shepherd speaks. He is not distant, disinterested, or distracted. He speaks to His sheep. The voice of the shepherd serves as a reassuring reminder that He is near. Additionally, the shepherd guides the sheep with his voice. We are blessed by all these qualities in our good shepherd.

Sometimes throughout this long journey of life, we might feel far from God, but Paul pointed out He is "not far from every one

Teacher Option:

A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit. ▼

of us” (Acts 17:27). God Himself promised, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5). Our shepherd walks with us, and as He does, He speaks to us. He speaks wisdom and peace for our journey. When we begin to feel alone, distanced, or separated from the Lord, remember, He is speaking to us.

There are several ways we can engage in deeper personal study of God’s Word. We can listen to sermon recordings through a church website, social media, CDs, podcasts. We can attend a small group or read through a devotional or personal journal.

D. I Will Follow the Shepherd Alone

Jesus demonstrated to His audience (Pharisees included) that multiple voices attempt to lead us, the way a shepherd leads his sheep. In sharing this pastoral metaphor, Jesus was asking His audience to consider which voice they will follow. They could follow Him, the good shepherd, or the Pharisees, the false shepherds. Of course, Jesus was inviting and urging them to follow Him. He is urgently inviting all of us to do the same. We have a choice: listen to the voice of our good shepherd who cares deeply for us; or follow our own voice, the voice of our culture and society, the voice of politics, or any other voice attempting to influence our lives.

If you’ve ever been in a caravan of cars going to the same place, it is frustrating when another vehicle with a different destination infiltrates the caravan right in front of you. Your friends continue straight, but the outlier takes a left and you follow. Suddenly you’re lost and separated from the people you love. It matters whom we follow. Let us follow the good shepherd because He loves us, speaks to us, leads us, protects us, provides us, and He always has our best interest in mind.

In addition to your daily Bible reading, what is your favorite way of taking in more of God’s Word?

What other voices and influences will you need to reject or stop following to truly follow Jesus?

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

In an adapted version of the fable of Pinocchio, there is a somewhat frustrating portion as he is on his way to school for the first time. Having been lovingly instructed by his creator and father figure, Geppetto, Pinocchio joins a parade of children, led by the schoolteacher, as they make their way in a single file line to the schoolhouse. After a momentary distraction, he gets separated from the group and soon falls in with a variety of bad characters, particularly the Fox and the Cat. Though Geppetto was clear with his instructions, Pinocchio chooses to listen to voices that have a contrary plan. The Fox and the Cat are able to persuade him to follow them to pursue values and experiences quite contrary to what Geppetto had intended for him. In order to follow the Fox and the Cat, Pinocchio cannot follow Geppetto's directions.

Pinocchio ends up miles away from his original destination. There he encounters danger, temptation, and becoming something he was never intended to be—all the result of choosing to listen to the wrong voices, being influenced by the wrong messages, and following the wrong crowd. It's not difficult to see where and when Pinocchio's mistakes happen. As third-party observers, it's quite clear to us what he is doing wrong and what he should be doing instead. But what about when it comes to our own lives?

The commitment to listen to the shepherd's voice and follow Him alone is challenged every day, multiple times a day. Our shepherd has invited us on a journey to follow Him. Our adversary attempts to intercept and reroute that journey. The "Pinocchio problem" is not being aware that the Father's voice is being challenged. It is vital we become aware of the imposter voices and distracting influences in our lives. We should pray for an awareness and for wisdom to recognize behaviors and priorities influenced by the wrong voices. When we become aware and recognize that we are following anything except our good shepherd, we have a loving invitation to return to Him and follow Him alone.

Prayer Focus

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

- To hear and follow the good shepherd's voice
- To silence other voices and influences trying to lead us astray

ES

THIS GLORIOUS GOSPEL

FOCUS VERSES

John 3:16-17

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.

LESSON TEXT

John 3:16-17

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God loved us so much that He gave Himself for us.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will receive Jesus' gift of salvation for me.



Thinking about Last Week:

Have students refer to their Daily Devotional Guide to answer the following questions:

1. What most affected you as you read through the Lesson Text and the Biblical Insights?
2. How did it shape your prayers and thoughts throughout the week?
3. Do you feel you grew closer to the Lord this past week? Why or why not?

SG TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: What is your favorite Easter tradition?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

I. JESUS' CONVERSATION WITH NICODEMUS **V**

A. Jesus' Example of Love

» *If you had the chance to ask God why He loves us, what do you think His response would be?*

B. Jesus Foreshadowed His Death

C. I Will Believe in Jesus' Love for Me

» *What does unconditional love look like to you?*

II. JESUS' DEATH AND BURIAL

A. Jesus Was Crucified

» *Can you share an experience where you were accused falsely?*

B. Jesus Was Buried

C. I Will Praise Jesus for His Sacrifice

» *What do you think when you realize we don't have anything to offer Jesus to repay Him? What do you feel when you realize He doesn't ask us to repay Him?*

III. JESUS' RESURRECTION

A. Jesus Resurrected from the Grave **I**

B. I Will Respond to This Glorious Gospel

» *Others saw Jesus after His resurrection, but they did not recognize Him either. Why?*

Internalizing the Message

Prayer Focus

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

- For God to help us rightly respond to this glorious gospel
- For God to help us share this glorious gospel with others

LESSON CONNECTION

Each year the forest rangers of Bedford County, Virginia, contend with a roving array of treasure hunters. The scavengers descend on the national forest to pursue the promise of a fabled treasure. Legend has it that in the 1820s Virginian Thomas Jefferson Beale went west with other adventurers and found thousands of pounds of gold, silver, and gems he then buried back home in Bedford County. Beale left coded messages describing the contents of the treasure and its location, and in 1885 those papers were published.

Over the years, many have tried to decode the Beale Papers and find the treasure. One woman dug up a church cemetery (and subsequently her own legal albatross) in a failed attempt. Others have attempted digs believing God would lead them to the treasure.

An officer of Jefferson National Forest recounts accompanying a man convinced of the specific location of the treasure. The hunter rented a tractor with a front-end loader and carefully began strategic digs. After spending the day digging fifteen feet deep, he sank to the ground with tears pouring from his cheeks as he stared at an empty hole in the earth.


Most empty things no longer hold their value. Imagine going to your bank safe-deposit box or to your home safe to obtain your valuables only to find it is empty. Many of us know the disappointment of opening our favorite box of cereal to find that someone has left one-sixteenth of a cup of cereal in the box and put the nearly empty box back in the pantry. Most empty things have no value. But the gospel is unlike anything else in this life because it centers around an empty tomb. And the empty tomb is of incomparable value because it testifies that Jesus Christ has risen from the grave under His own power. Because of Jesus' resurrection, we can know and experience the priceless wonder of hope.

BIBLE LESSON

I. JESUS' CONVERSATION WITH NICODEMUS

Early in Jesus' ministry, He agreed to have a private conversation with a ruler named Nicodemus. They met at night because Nicodemus, being a Pharisee, did not want to be caught seeking an audience with Jesus. The Jewish leaders despised Jesus, and Nicodemus knew they may despise him as well if he was seen with Jesus. But Nicodemus risked his reputation because he was hungry to know more about this miracle man. Nicodemus opened his remarks by telling Jesus he understood that Jesus was from God because of the miracles He had performed. (See John 3:2.)

Teacher Option:

A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit. 

A. Jesus' Example of Love

Nicodemus was not the only one amazed and puzzled by Jesus. Everyone who saw what Jesus did and heard what He said was in awe of the marvels Jesus wrought. But the miracles were not the primary reason Jesus came to us. He revealed His true mission to Nicodemus by sharing this most beloved Scripture text: "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" (John 3:16).

Nicodemus knew Jesus had come from God, but he did not fully grasp that God had come in flesh as Jesus. God's great love is displayed in the Gospels. He could have come with fanfare; rather, He chose to come as a baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes. Jesus came and lived as one of us, exemplifying sacrifice and divine desire to connect with humanity as His crowning creation. God came. We sing and celebrate this truth every December, but this truth rings true all year, every year. God came in human flesh.

Jesus explained to Nicodemus that He did not come into the world to condemn it but to save it. How beautiful to hear the words of Christ and to know they are the true heart of God. Although we can do nothing to earn His love, Jesus was clear: He loves us.

If you had the chance to ask God why He loves us, what do you think His response would be?

B. Jesus Foreshadowed His Death

In this late night, holy conversation, Jesus foreshadowed His own death as early as John 3 by explaining He would have to die so others could live. He even hinted as to how He would have to die: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:14). Jesus knew Nicodemus studied Moses' law closely; He alluded to over a thousand years earlier when the children of Israel were attacked by serpents as judgment for their sin. God instructed them to make a bronze serpent and lift it up on a pole so everyone

who had been bitten could look on the brazen statue and not die. Jesus applied that story to Himself concerning the day He would be lifted on a cross and everyone who looked to Him for salvation would be saved.

C. I Will Believe in Jesus' Love for Me

The love of Jesus is without end. No one can know the height or depth or width or breadth of it. Have you ever wondered where the end of a rainbow is? If you searched for it, could you find it? Or could you find the exact starting point? It is the same with the love of God. It is just there. It is there for us if we search for it, if we reach for it. We can search the entire world, but we will never find a love more true, devoted, kind, or sacrificial than our Savior's love.

He did everything He could to demonstrate His love for us "in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Some people find it difficult to allow themselves to be loved. Some have not had a good experience with "love." Love is sometimes a noun and sometimes a verb. Throughout history, the word *love* has held varying degrees of significance. It has ranged from deep affection and loyalty to casual connection with everyday objects. We love our families and spouses. We love our churches and great worship music. We also love ice cream, books, dogs, and the beach. Whatever the case, the concept of love has become so widely and frequently used that we rarely think about its depth.

Some have never experienced an unconditional love, yet because of this glorious gospel, we all can.

What does unconditional love look like to you?

Jesus shows us unconditional love. He does not throw us away when we make a mistake. He stands waiting for us, even if we walk away. His love never fails. Jesus inspired the apostle Paul to write of love: "Charity never faileth" (1 Corinthians 13:8). Jesus' love never, ever fails. We can count on it; we can believe in it; we can embrace it without hesitation.

II. JESUS' DEATH AND BURIAL

A. Jesus Was Crucified

The day Jesus foreshadowed came. Although He never condemned anyone, lied on anyone, cheated anyone, stole from anyone, did anything hateful to anyone, or even judged anyone unjustly for his or her sin, the mob still wanted Him crucified. When they were asked what He did to deserve such a heinous death, not one of His accusers could come up with an honest answer. Not even Pilate could find fault in Him, and Pilate was handsomely paid to convict and condemn criminals. Jesus suffered a great injustice: He was falsely accused.

Can you share an experience where you were accused falsely?

False accusation is its own kind of cruelty, but imagine if the penalty of that false accusation was not just a fine or jail time—

imagine if it was death. Even through the humiliation, lies, and scandal, Jesus still carried the cross up Calvary's hill. He was bloodied and bruised where the Romans waylaid Him with their fists and their whips. Jesus allowed the man whose hands He created to use those hands to nail Jesus to a cross. Some of the most telling words of Jesus were spoken on the cross when He prayed: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Truly, they did not know what they were doing. First Corinthians 2:8 reads: "For had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

B. Jesus Was Buried

After Jesus breathed His last, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate to give him Jesus' body. Pilate agreed and Joseph took Jesus' bruised body to prepare it for burial. Then Nicodemus—yes, the same Nicodemus who was worried about his reputation in John 3—showed up in John 19 with a mixture of myrrh and aloes to anoint Jesus' body according to Jewish burial custom. We can assume Nicodemus was at the Crucifixion. He had spent his money ahead of time to pay for all the balms with which he would anoint the body of God in human flesh. What must Nicodemus have felt as he wrapped the body of Jesus, remembering the night Jesus spoke to him? Did Nicodemus then understand what Jesus meant when He said He would be lifted up just like the serpent in Moses' day was lifted up?

C. I Will Praise Jesus for His Sacrifice

Nicodemus surely wept as he anointed the body that was broken for us all. Jesus wanted nothing more than to love us, heal us, and restore us, yet we crucified Him. He came to redeem us unto Himself. It is hard to understand, but it is true that God wanted to redeem us from our sins. That is why He came in flesh to lay down His life to pay the penalty for our sins. Normally, when someone pays such a high price, the beneficiary wants to pay the person back in some measure. But how could we possibly pay Jesus back for what He paid for us?


What do you think when you realize we don't have anything to offer Jesus to repay Him? What do you feel when you realize He doesn't ask us to repay Him?

III. JESUS' RESURRECTION

A. Jesus Resurrected from the Grave

No one truly expected what happened next. Mary Magdalene came to the tomb, but Jesus' buried body was not there. She ran to tell Peter and John, and they ran to the tomb to see for themselves. On a humorous note, John recorded that he outran Peter to the tomb. Jesus had told them He would rise from the grave, but they did not believe or understand. Luke recorded Jesus' prophecy of Himself:

For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again. (Luke 18:32-33)

Teacher Option:
A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. 

Scholars do not all agree on which tomb was the one in which Jesus was buried, but they do agree that the tomb was empty in the first century, and they testify that it is still empty today. Unlike a safe-deposit box or a safe, the tomb is only valuable because it is empty.

B. I Will Respond to This Glorious Gospel

Peter and John left the tomb, but Mary stayed a little longer. Soon she saw angels sitting in the tomb. Then Jesus Himself appeared to her, alive and rather well, but she thought He was the gardener. Then He called her by name. She could hear the tenderness in His voice as she heard the risen Jesus say, “Mary.” In that seminal moment, we see the Lion of Judah who just conquered death, Hell, and the grave. At the same time, we see the Lamb of God who knows us and calls us by name. And we have hope in a good, gracious God who has power over the tyrannical reign of death and the grave. Jesus is the omnipotent one. This story teaches us that Jesus will do exactly as He promised. He has proven Himself tried, true, trustworthy, and alive forevermore.

Others saw Jesus after His resurrection, but they did not recognize Him either. Why?

Perhaps they were blinded by the impossible thought that Jesus could rise from the dead under His own power, especially after such a brutal beating and public crucifixion. Surely, Jesus could not come back to life after all He had suffered. Or did they just go on their way to the next current event in the news even after hearing that Jesus had risen because it was too good to be true?

We cannot just go on our way after hearing this glorious gospel. We will be judged by the Word of God. And the Word of God centers on this glorious gospel: this good news that Jesus died, was buried, and rose from the grave. Once we’ve heard this glorious gospel, we must respond to what Jesus has done for us. We cannot afford to ignore it or just rush off to the next appointment in our calendar. By our actions, we either receive this truth or reject it. Jesus laid down His life so we could live. Our response is our responsibility.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Let us make Jesus' story our story. He died for us, He was buried, and He rose from the grave. The way we make His story our story is to die out to our sin through repentance; we identify with His burial by being baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of our sins; just as He rose, we rise to new life in Christ when we receive His Holy Spirit. Jesus' sacrifice of love is the greatest gift we could ever receive. If we have everything in this world except the gospel of Jesus Christ, we are poor. But if we have nothing in this world except the gospel of Jesus Christ, and we have allowed the gospel to change our lives, we are immeasurably rich.

Nicodemus was. Certainly, so were the 120 followers who followed Jesus' instructions to go to Jerusalem and wait until they were endued with power from on high. Acts 2 tells us they prayed and waited for ten days, and suddenly, a sound like the blowing of a mighty wind came from Heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what appeared to be tongues of fire rest on each of them. And all 120 of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (See Acts 2:1-4.) The Spirit of Almighty God filled them all. That same day, three thousand more became part of the first church, allowing God's great gift to change their lives—all through this glorious gospel.

By making Jesus' sacrifice personal, our way of living shifts drastically. We walk with more confidence. We love others deeper. We believe what Jesus says about us, and our love for Him and for others grows. Our worship deepens. We become better disciples of Jesus. On this Resurrection Sunday, we are reminded of the newness of life available to us, and that newness of life is available to all humanity. God does not want anyone to perish but for every one of us to come to repentance. (See II Peter 3:9.)

Let us allow the love of God that is shed abroad in our hearts to help us love our neighbors enough to share this glorious gospel with them. The power of the Resurrection should compel us to extend love and forgiveness to others just as Jesus extended love and forgiveness to us. Thank God for His goodness. Thank God for His grace. Thank God for this glorious gospel.

Prayer Focus

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

- For God to help us rightly respond to this glorious gospel
- For God to help us share this glorious gospel with others

2.1

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS

FOCUS VERSE

Matthew 17:2

And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.

LESSON TEXT

Matthew 17:1-13;
II Peter 1:16-21

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

The transfiguration of Jesus indicates He is the express image of God.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will worship Jesus for who He is: my Lord, my God, and my Savior.



Series Overview:

The sovereignty of God can be seen in His transfiguration, which Peter saw as a testimony to Jesus' majesty; in His calming the storm, which is linked to three psalms; in His triumphal entry into Jerusalem; and in Revelation with its singular throne in Heaven occupied by one who is both Lord and God.

SG TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: Give an example of a time when you spoke before you thought.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

» *How do you picture the Red Sea crossing? Do you think God used the weather and creation to part the sea and bury the Egyptians?*

- I. THE ROLE OF THE TRANSFIGURATION IN THE CONFIRMATION OF FAITH
 - A. Transfiguration Is Metamorphosis **I**
 - B. The Kingdom of God Is the Kingdom of the Son of Man
 - C. I Will Worship Jesus as Almighty God in Flesh
 - » *When you think of Jesus, how do you picture Him?*
- II. THE TRANSFIGURATION WAS A MORE SURE WORD OF PROPHECY
 - A. Peter's Second Letter Affirmed the Significance of the Transfiguration
 - » *What moments in your life have shown you the majesty and glory of God? How have those moments confirmed Scripture to you?*
 - B. Peter's Second Letter Affirmed the Deity of Jesus Christ
 - » *What difference does it make if we see Jesus as Almighty God or as one person in a triune Godhead?*
 - C. Jesus Is Our God, Lord, and Savior **V**
 - D. Worshiping Jesus
 - » *How do we keep adding godly qualities to our faith?*

Internalizing the Message

Prayer Focus

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

- For understanding to comprehend how the Hebrew Scriptures testify of Jesus
- For help sharing our understanding of Scripture with people we meet

LESSON CONNECTION

When we think of Israel crossing the Red Sea, we often imagine the water simply parting without a thought of an earthquake, lightning, or thunder. Although the language of this psalm is poetry, it is rooted in history. The details of Exodus 14:21-15:13 prove that Psalm 77 did not overdramatize the miracle when God parted the waters. Moses did not simply stretch out his hand over the sea and voila, the waters parted. Moses' obedient act of faith unleashed a chain of events that led to deliverance.

A strong east wind blew all night, powerful enough to divide the waters and reduced the soggy seafloor to dry land. As the Egyptians chased the Israelites, "the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians" (Exodus 14:24). God may have caused an earthquake to trouble the Egyptian pursuers. The lyrics Moses and the people of Israel sang later in Exodus suggest God disturbed creation to deliver His people. (See Exodus 15:3, 5, 8, 10-13.)

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke's telling of Jesus' transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus, talking with Him about "his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31). Before Jesus' ascension, He opened His disciples' understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures when He said, "All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me" (Luke 24:44).

When we read the Old Testament carefully, we discover clues pointing to Jesus, the promised Messiah. One example is found in Psalm 77:15-20, an account of Israel's Exodus from Egyptian bondage, which Psalm 77:15 describes as redemption. The final five verses recall the waters, clouds, thunder, lightning, and earthquakes all participated in Israel's deliverance.

The writer Luke provided an intriguing clue in Luke 9 that Psalm 77 may be messianic. In the conversation Moses and Elijah had with the transfigured Jesus, the word translated "decease" is *exodos*. This conversation was more than a discussion about Jesus' death; it is reminiscent of Israel's Exodus from Egypt.

Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection were accompanied by signs and wonders, including the Temple veil tearing, the earth quaking, rocks splitting, graves opening, and saints resurrecting. The veil in the Temple was rent from top to bottom, indicating it was torn by God. In like manner, the Red Sea was parted by God. (See Exodus 14:21-22.) "The violent tearing suggests the anger of God, whose Spirit burst forth from the sanctuary, and His sovereign reaching out to save His people and engulf their enemies" (*Apostolic Study Bible* note for Matthew 27:51).

How do you picture the Red Sea crossing? Do you think God used the weather and creation to part the sea and bury the Egyptians?


BIBLE LESSON

I. THE ROLE OF THE TRANSFIGURATION IN THE CONFIRMATION OF FAITH

Transfigured is a five-dollar word, but what does it mean? When Jesus was transfigured, His “face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light” (Matthew 17:2). As Mark described it, “His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them” (Mark 9:3, NKJV). Luke told us all this happened as Jesus prayed: “The appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening” (Luke 9:29, NKJV).

A. Transfiguration Is Metamorphosis

The English word “transfiguration” is translated from the Greek word *metamorphoō*, which appears two more times in the New Testament. In elementary school science class, we learned about metamorphosis as a caterpillar wondrously changes into a butterfly. By definition, *Merriam-Webster* explains metamorphosis as “a change of physical form, structure, or substance especially by supernatural means.” As always, we must pay careful attention to the biblical context in all of Scripture’s references to Jesus’ transfiguration, including each of the three Gospel accounts and Peter’s treatment of it in his second letter.

Teacher Option:
A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. 

B. The Kingdom of God Is the Kingdom of the Son of Man

Although the chapter and verse divisions in the Bible make it easy for us to find a passage, they were not in the original Hebrew or Greek text. Matthew’s account begins with Jesus’ words in the final verse of Matthew 16: “Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom” (Matthew 16:28). Mark added his pen, “And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power” (Mark 9:1). Luke agreed with both Matthew and Mark when he recorded Jesus’ words, “But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:27).

These three Gospel accounts inform one another. Some of the people who heard Jesus’ words would not die before they had seen the kingdom of God. These people turned out to be Peter, James, and John. Clearly, other people lived to see the kingdom of God as well, but Jesus was specific that these three would see the kingdom of God with their own eyes.

We glean so much about Jesus by comparing the terms used in each of the Gospels. The kingdom of God in Mark 9:1 and Luke 9:27 is the same as the kingdom of the Son of Man in Matthew

16:28. When Peter, James, and John saw Jesus transfigured, they saw Him in His coming. This does not mean the Transfiguration was Jesus' second coming; it means what Peter, James, and John saw genuinely anticipated Christ's second coming. They saw a glimpse of what would occur after Jesus' resurrection. (See Matthew 17:9; Mark 9:9.)

C. I Will Worship Jesus as Almighty God in Flesh

Moses and Elijah, who appeared with Jesus to His three followers, represented the Law and the Prophets. Both had experienced their own interaction with God on Mount Sinai, known also as Horeb. (See Exodus 19:20; 1 Kings 19:8.) These two Old Testament men of God were present with Jesus on this high mountain, discussing His pending "exodus" and how He would soon redeem and deliver His people. Seeing Moses, the Law giver, and Elijah, the consummate prophet, left the three disciples virtually speechless. They finally saw Jesus as more than a wonder worker or water walker; they saw Him as Almighty God in flesh.

We must see Him the same as they saw Him. Jesus is more than a good, moral man as some world religions claim He is. He is more than a miracle worker or wise prophet; He is Almighty God who came in human flesh to redeem us from our sins. When we worship Him, we worship Him as God. Let us bow before Him and sing to Him as the God of all creation, the Maker of Heaven and Earth; He is our sovereign God.

When you think of Jesus, how do you picture Him?

II. THE TRANSFIGURATION WAS A MORE SURE WORD OF PROPHECY

Lest we esteem Peter as super human, Peter was a lot like many of us. Peter often spoke before thinking. Doubtless we sometimes do the same. When he saw the transfigured Jesus, Peter wanted to do something extravagant for Him. Peter offered to make three tabernacles (tents): one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. Mark's Gospel footnoted Peter did not know what to say. His intentions were right, but Moses and Elijah were not divine; only Jesus. Building a tabernacle for each of them could be tantamount to idolatry.

Suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed everyone on the summit. A voice cried out from the cloud, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matthew 17:5). The voice fell silent; the disciples fell on their faces. When they looked up, they only saw Jesus. Moses and Elijah were gone. Jesus touched them and told them not to be afraid. As they made their way back down the mountain, Jesus commanded these three followers, "Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead" (Matthew 17:9).

A. Peter's Second Letter Affirmed the Significance of the Transfiguration

Nearly thirty years later, this selfsame Simon Peter penned a letter we know as "The Second Epistle of Peter." That miraculous mountaintop vision never left his memory. Peter recognized it as an event that confirmed messianic prophecy. It was even more convincing to Peter than Scripture alone. When he, James, and John saw Jesus in His glory, they had seen the majesty of God Himself, for they had seen the kingdom of God. Peter even referred to himself as an eyewitness of Jesus' majesty (Luke 9:32; II Peter 1:16).

What moments in your life have shown you the majesty and glory of God? How have those moments confirmed Scripture to you?

Second Peter 1:16–21 indicates false teachers criticized Peter's teaching concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ as based on clever fables. However, Peter testified that he, James, and John spoke with the authority of eyewitnesses because they were there. Jesus' transfiguration was a precursor of His second coming, therefore they knew they would see Jesus coming in glory and majesty because they already had. The apostle Peter wrote a beautiful defense of the deity of Jesus as he wrote, "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (II Peter 1:16–21).

B. Peter's Second Letter Affirmed the Deity of Jesus Christ

Peter's second letter is thick with the affirmation of the deity of Jesus Christ and the authority of inspired Scripture. Second Peter 1:1 identifies the writer as "a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ" and identifies Jesus Christ as "God and our Saviour" (II Peter 1:1). Peter considered himself a servant (a slave), testifying to his belief in Jesus' deity. After God delivered Israel from Egyptian slavery, Jews would never confess that they were slaves to simply another human being. (See Deuteronomy 6:13; 10:20; Matthew 4:10; John 8:33.)


In the King James Version, II Peter 1:1 reads, "God and our Saviour Jesus Christ," but this phrase is more precisely translated "our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (NKJV, ESV, NIV, CSB, LEB) or "our God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (NET, NASB, NRSV) or "Jesus Christ, our God and Savior" (NLT). Peter saw Jesus on the mountaintop glorified as Almighty God, the Father, who came in human flesh.

What difference does it make if we see Jesus as Almighty God or as one person in a triune Godhead?

C. Jesus Is Our God, Lord, and Savior

The deity of Jesus Christ fills Peter's second epistle. If we recognize the words "God," "Lord," and "Savior" as essentially synonymous in II Peter, we see at least ten references to the deity of Christ in this short, three-chapter letter. (See II Peter 1:1, 2, 8, 11, 14; 2:1, 20; 3:2, 15, 18.) These references are in addition to Peter's account of the Transfiguration as described in II Peter 1:16-21. Clearly Peter saw Jesus as God, Lord, and Savior.

Teacher Option:

A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit. 

D. Worshiping Jesus

Peter saw Jesus as sovereign on the Mount of Transfiguration. He saw Him as sovereign when Jesus walked on water. He saw Him as sovereign when Jesus cured diseases, cast out demons, and raised the dead. He certainly saw Him as sovereign when Jesus resurrected. And when Peter saw Jesus as the sovereign God, he worshiped Jesus. What does it mean to truly worship our sovereign God?

The word *sovereign* typically refers to a king or kingdom. As we have discovered, references to the kingdom of God are also referred to as the kingdom of the Son of Man. Worshiping our sovereign God calls us to live a godly life as described in II Peter 1:5-9. This way of living begins with faith, to which believers add virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love (II Peter 1:5-7, NKJV). This list in II Peter 1 appears remarkably similar to the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5. These qualities assure spiritual maturity and fruitfulness for us as believers. However, a lack of these qualities indicates we are spiritually shortsighted, blind, and forgetful.

By the grace of God, let us continue to add to our faith. Let us continue to grow in our relationship with Jesus and with His church. As we do, we make our calling and election sure, and God makes our footing sure so we do not stumble away from the faith; rather, we enter the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (II Peter 1:10-11).

How do we keep adding godly qualities to our faith?

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

When Apostolic worship is written about favorably in a local newspaper, it demonstrates the powerful influence of such worship even on those who may know little or nothing about it before the event. This is what happened in the Monday, February 4, 1974 issue of *The Whig-Standard*, a newspaper in Kingston, Ontario, Canada.

An article titled “AMI choir from Picton visits Queen’s” was published on this date. “AMI” represents the Apostolic Missionary Institute, a school then located in Picton, Ontario, and that was endorsed by the United Pentecostal Church, Incorporated. Queen’s University was established by the Church of Scotland in October 1841, via a royal charter from Queen Victoria.

The article read:

The Apostolic Missionary Institute choir from Picton performed at Queen’s University recently.

The choir, under the direction of Mrs. Susan Fuller, differs from most church choirs, both in its choice of songs, as well as their presentation. Spirited songs of worship were punctuated by raised hands and shouts of “hallelujah.” Charlene Leeman of Kingston, also a member of the AMI choir, sang “The King and I.” A trio sang “Happiness In Jesus All the Time.”

Following a medley of songs by the choir entitled “Wonderful Story of Love,” the guest speaker for the evening, Rev. F.E. Beaudrie, pastor in Picton, addressed the audience. He chose as his text the remarks that Jesus made to the Jewish religious leader, Nicodemus, found in St. John’s gospel, chapter three, verse six: “that which is born of the flesh is flesh; that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

Mr. Beaudrie emphasized that almost everything in the world is directed toward satisfying the fleshy nature of man. God, however, has not overlooked the spiritual needs of man. He has provided a spiritual re-birth through Jesus Christ.

That the community recognized the power of worship is remarkable, and no doubt that special night reaps eternal fruit. Many missionaries are alumni of the Apostolic Missionary Institute, including those who are currently serving around the world. Multitudes of people of various tribes, kindreds, cultures, and tongues have heard their spirited songs of worship, seen their raised hands, and heard their shouts of “hallelujah,” not only those present that night at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario. Let us join with them and with multiplied millions around the world to worship Jesus Christ for who He is: our Lord, our Savior, our sovereign God.

Prayer Focus

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

- For understanding to comprehend how the Hebrew Scriptures testify of Jesus
- For help sharing our understanding of Scripture with people we meet

2.2

JESUS CALMS THE STORM

FOCUS VERSE

Matthew 8:27
But the men
marvelled, saying,
What manner of
man is this, that even
the winds and the
sea obey him!

LESSON TEXT

Matthew 8:23-27;
Mark 4:37-41;
Luke 8:23-25

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

Jesus is the Lord
God who rules the
raging sea.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

Since Jesus can
sleep during a
great tempest, I do
not need to fear a
storm.



Thinking about Last Week:

Have students refer to their Daily Devotional Guide to answer the following questions:

1. What most affected you as you read through the Lesson Text and the Biblical Insights?
2. How did it shape your prayers and thoughts throughout the week?
3. Do you feel you grew closer to the Lord this past week? Why or why not?

SG TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: If you could have one masterpiece painting hanging in your home, what would it be?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection. **I**

- I. THE PSALMS ANTICIPATE THE CALMING OF THE SEA
 - A. Psalms and Songs
 - B. God Is the One Who Calms the Seas and Waves
 - C. I Will Trust God to Calm the Storms in My Life
 - » *What storm has God stilled in your life?*
- II. THE OLD TESTAMENT MEETS THE NEW TESTAMENT
 - A. The Storm's Fury and the Disciples' Fear **V**
 - » *Have you ever wondered if God cares about what you're going through? How does He show you He does?*
 - B. Jesus' Authority over Nature
 - » *When the disciples woke Jesus, what do you think they expected Jesus to do?*
 - C. I Will Trust Jesus with My Storms
- III. AFTER THE STORM
 - A. Jesus' Rebuke and the Disciples' Response
 - » *How would you have responded if you were one of the disciples?*
 - B. I Will Worship Jesus as Lord
 - » *What verse(s) gives you peace that Jesus is in control of all life's storms?*

Internalizing the Message

Prayer Focus

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

- Expressing our thanks to God for His rescue from danger
- Praying that we will trust Jesus regardless of life's circumstances

LESSON CONNECTION

A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. 

The famed artist Rembrandt van Rijn painted hundreds of scapes on canvas, but he only painted one seascape. He painted his renown “Christ in the Storm on the Sea of Galilee” in 1633. In the *Lexham Geographic Commentary on the Gospels*, Gordon Franz tells the story of this especially special work of art.

A keen eye for geography and theology may pick up a few interesting features in Rembrandt’s depiction of the storm. He was painting in Amsterdam, not at the Sea of Galilee. He didn’t have the luxury of watching a ship toss and list in Israel, but he painted what he thought it might have looked and felt like. Further, although the biblical account tells us Jesus was on board with His twelve disciples, we count fourteen men on board the boat in the painting. Since Jesus was already on board, we conclude this painting is a depiction of the storm He calmed with only His word. (See Matthew 8:23–27; Mark 4:35–41; Luke 8:22–25.)

Franz describes the painting as depicting “the panic-stricken disciples in their fishing boat trying to regain control of the vessel after being caught in a sudden fierce storm on the Sea of Galilee. A huge violent wave is crashing over the bow, and the sail is ripping as the boat draws perilously close to some rocks.

“There are fourteen people in the boat: the Lord Jesus, his twelve disciples, and a fourteenth individual, most likely Rembrandt himself because he was known to paint himself into his pictures. One of the disciples is shown leaning over the edge of the boat, apparently seasick and vomiting. It was probably Judas, since he was the only non-Galilean among the twelve disciples, from the city of Keriot south of Hebron in the Negev of Judah. He was not accustomed to sailing in a boat; the Galileans were.”

Rembrandt’s masterpiece prominently hung in Boston’s Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum until March 1990, when two men posing as police officers stole it along with another dozen works of art. To date, none of the works of art have been recovered. It is fitting that one of the stolen works of art was Rembrandt’s “Christ in the Storm.” We all know what it is like to feel displaced and fearful as we face life’s storms. Thankfully, like the disciples, we do not face those storms alone.

BIBLE LESSON

I. THE PSALMS ANTICIPATE THE CALMING OF THE SEA

A. Psalms and Songs

The New Testament is rich in its use of Old Testament Scripture—quoting, paraphrasing, or alluding to the Hebrew Scriptures approximately eight hundred times. Both Testaments are Christ centered: the Old Testament points ahead to the coming Messiah; in the era of the New Testament, He has come. To help Jesus’ disciples understand the Scriptures, Jesus said, “All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me” (Luke 24:44).

New Testament writers quoted the Book of Psalms more than any other book. Two hundred six references to the psalms punctuate the New Testament. The Book of Psalms was the hymnal for the children of Israel. It is interesting and important to note how the psalms are intentionally arranged. Many English translations indicate the Book of Psalms consists of five smaller books:

BOOK ONE	BOOK TWO	BOOK THREE	BOOK FOUR	BOOK FIVE
Psalms 1-41	Psalms 42-72	Psalms 73-89	Psalms 90-106	Psalms 107-150

B. God Is the One Who Calms the Seas and Waves

Psalm 65:7 speaks of God: “Which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people.” As the disciples aboard the ill-fated boat marveled at the great calm, it is not hard for us to imagine them saying, “What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!” (Matthew 8:27). They knew this calm was a wonder only God Himself could work.

Psalm 65 identifies God three times as *Elohim* in verses 1, 5, and 9. We even read brilliant flashes of messianic hope in verses 2, 3, and 5: “O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come. Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away. . . . By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation; who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea.”

Only God stills the noise of the seas and waves. Wondrously, when we cross into the New Testament, Jesus stilled the noise of the seas and the waves. The Book of Psalms and the Gospels sing a duet of the divinity of Jesus Christ as God Himself in human flesh.

C. I Will Trust God to Calm the Storms in My Life

Storms in our lives look different than they did for the disciples. Their storm in Matthew 8 was an actual storm—wind, waves, rain,

thunder, lightning. Certainly, we still have thunderstorms, but we also have storm shelters, umbrellas, windshield wipers, and sandbags to stave off the storm's effects. But windshield wipers cannot stave off a terminal disease. Or a divorce notice. Or a foreclosure notice. Or a termination notice. Or a policeman and a chaplain on our doorstep at 3:00 AM to deliver devastating news.

We row through those storms in our lives, but just as God stilled the storms for the psalmist, He still stills our storms. Even if you hear the roaring waves and feel the stinging rains, ask God to still the storm in your heart. God can, but if He does not still the storm altogether, He can give us peace through it. Let not your heart be troubled, neither be afraid. God still stills storms.


What storm has God stilled in your life?

II. THE OLD TESTAMENT MEETS THE NEW TESTAMENT

Calming the sea is only in God's job description. Many fishermen and sailors have cursed the wind and waves, hoping to calm them to assure safe passage. But no matter how fervent or sincere, their best efforts could not dry a single raindrop. However, when God speaks, creation listens. Perhaps this is why the disciples were in awe of Jesus because they had wished away the waves in time past, but the waves kept crashing. But when Jesus spoke, the sea was as still as glass.

A. The Storm's Fury and the Disciples' Fear

Let's go back to the day Jesus stilled the storm to watch it unfold. Jesus had just set sail aboard a boat with His dozen disciples. These weren't the seven seas, but the Sea of Galilee was unforgiving. At any minute without warning, the warm air from the water danced with the cold air from the mountain and produced an instant hurricane. But this night, all was calm, all was bright. A handful of the disciples were fishermen, so they knew their way around the water.

Teacher Option:
A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit. 

But without warning, they spiraled from a calm cruise to rowing for their lives in minutes. Perhaps in the reverent quiet of the synagogue, they had heard the rabbi read of the "noise of the seas" and "of their waves" recorded in the sixty-fifth psalm, but now they were living it. The disciples worked their rescue mission, but they were none safer. After all attempts to save themselves proved futile, the disciples staggered to find Jesus somehow sleeping. The rigors of ministering to hurting humanity the day before had left Jesus exhausted. They woke Him with a start and a startling question, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" (Mark 4:38).

B. Jesus' Authority over Nature

Jesus did care. He was on the boat with them, so Jesus fully appreciated the danger they perceived they were in. However, He knew what they did not: He knew He could speak a simple sentence and calm the storm. As far as we know from biblical

Have you ever wondered if God cares about what you're going through? How does He show you He does?

history, this miracle had never happened before. God used nature in the Old Testament to do His work. We discovered last week that God may have called on the weather to help deliver His people out of Egyptian bondage. God discomfited the Philistines with thunder during one battle, and the stars and the river fought against Sisera and his army in the days of the judges during another battle. (See I Samuel 7:10-11; Judges 5:20-21). God had proven He can send the storm, but the disciples had not heard a story where He had stilled the storm.

When the disciples woke Jesus, what do you think they expected Jesus to do?

Novelist Charles Dudley Warner quipped that “everybody talks about the weather, but nobody ever does anything about it.” Jesus woke to the pleas of His faithless followers, and He did not just speak about the weather; He spoke to the weather: “Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm” (Mark 4:39). This was no minor miracle. Jesus just spoke to a raging tempest in the middle of the night while He and His followers were in a fishing boat in the middle of the dark Sea of Galilee, and He calmed the storm.

C. I Will Trust Jesus with My Storms

For Florida residents, 2004 was known as the year of the hurricane. Four hurricanes struck the Sunshine State in one year. Hurricane Charley was the first named storm to make landfall that year.

A young couple had just bought their house in 2003 and were doing their best to keep it intact through their first hurricane. As the storm swirled outside, they heard shingles flying off the roof. They didn't know what to do. They were afraid to do anything, but they were more afraid to do nothing. The husband went to the patio door and held his ear up to the wall of glass to see if he could hear how intense the rains and winds were growing. The door was shaking in its track. After the outer bands of the hurricane passed overhead, the eye of the storm was directly over them. While there is a temporary calm, the worst is yet to come. The tail of the hurricane stings more than the head. This time it surely stung.

It was terrifying for the couple to sit through a storm inside a 1,071 square-foot house. It would have been paralyzing to sit through a storm inside a thirty-foot fishing boat on the water in the middle of the night. As the boat tossed and listed, the disciples thought they were as good as gone. But Jesus was on board the boat, and He calmed their storm. Doubtless life's storms are terrifying, but our comfort is that Jesus is with us. He is well able to calm every tempest; He is also well able to calm every fear. Sometimes He calms one or the other; sometimes He calms both. But at all times, He is in control, and we can trust Him in our storms.

III. AFTER THE STORM

A. Jesus' Rebuke and the Disciples' Response

In nearly the same breath that Jesus rebuked the wind, He rebuked His fellow seafarers in the boat with Him. Jesus asked them, "Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?" (Mark 4:40). In Mark's Gospel, the disciples had already witnessed Jesus deliver a demoniac in Capernaum, heal Peter's mother-in-law of a fatal fever, touch a leper and heal him, heal and forgive a paralytic who was lowered through the roof, and restore a man's withered hand. While they were awed that Jesus could heal others, they were not sure He cared about them enough to save their lives. But He did, and this miracle on Galilee's stormy sea proved Jesus is able and willing to heal. It also proved how quickly faith can be shaken.

How would you have responded if you were one of the disciples?

They looked at one another and asked a telling question that indicates they still did not understand who Jesus was: "And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (Mark 4:41).

Their question betrays their misunderstood theology. They thought Jesus was just a man who had come to do a work for God. They had His mission turned around: He was God who had come in human flesh to do a work to save humanity. He saved the disciples from their storm, and later He saved them from their sins.

B. I Will Worship Jesus as Lord

Although none of the Gospel writers tell us how the disciples responded once the boat hit the beach, two demoniacs who appeared to be untamable aforesaid ran to Jesus and worshiped Him. The storm brewing on the Sea of Galilee was just a drizzle compared to the storm brewing within the city limits of Gadara, but Jesus was about to prove He is greater than the devil. On that day, the disciples had all-access passes to witness Jesus calm the storm that threatened two demon-possessed men just as miraculously, yet easily, as He calmed the storm that threatened them. Jesus truly is Lord and God, and when we see Him as such, the only right response is worship.

What verse(s) gives you peace that Jesus is in control of all life's storms?

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Not enough paper exists in all the trees in all the forests in the world to write of all the miracles Jesus has worked. John stated, “The world itself could not contain the books that should be written” (John 21:25). We will not exhaust in one lesson all the Bible tells us about His miracles, but we have been given a glimpse into seeing Jesus for who He is: the sovereign God who performed the specific miracle that the Old Testament identifies as something only the Lord can do. He calmed the stormy seas. In another miracle, He even walked on water.

We know not all storms are in boats on seas. The writer tells his story:

When my wife and I learned, much to our surprise, that our family was in crisis, it seemed to me that we came to the end of our rope very quickly. The crisis involved the dissolution of the marriage of one of our children. We did everything we could think of to try to intervene so that divorce would be avoided. Nothing seemed to help. Tensions developed not only between us and our in-laws but between us and our parents. The storm raged with ever-increasing fury.

It seemed to me that my ministry had come to an end. Since our family was falling apart, what credibility would I have left? Who would want to listen to anything I had to say? As I sat in our home one Saturday afternoon, the phone rang. I did not recognize the caller’s voice. He identified himself. He was calling from about two thousand miles away. I didn’t know him. He said God had awakened him during the night about two weeks before his call and strongly impressed my name upon him. God had given him two verses of Scripture for me. Here is the first one: “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you” (Isaiah 43:2, NKJV).

I was amazed. As a student of Scripture, I realize Isaiah wrote these words to Israel, but it seemed they perfectly described my situation. But there was a second verse. Here it is: “But Israel shall be saved by the LORD with an everlasting salvation; you shall not be ashamed or disgraced forever and ever” (Isaiah 45:17, NKJV).

If God loves Israel, He loves me and you. Regardless of the kind of storm we face, He is able to speak peace. The sea may not be named Galilee, but when the waters calm, our response will be much like that of the disciples of Jesus. I marveled at that phone call and those Scriptures. So will you.

Prayer Focus

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

- Expressing our thanks to God for His rescue from danger
- Praying that we will trust Jesus regardless of life’s circumstances

2.3

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

FOCUS VERSES

Matthew 21:4-5,
NKJV

⁴All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying:
⁵“Tell the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

LESSON TEXT

Matthew 21:1-11

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of being the meek Messiah.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will praise Jesus with what I have.



Thinking about Last Week:

Have students refer to their Daily Devotional Guide to answer the following questions:

1. What most affected you as you read through the Lesson Text and the Biblical Insights?
2. How did it shape your prayers and thoughts throughout the week?
3. Do you feel you grew closer to the Lord this past week? Why or why not?

SG TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: If you could farm any animals, what would they be?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

- I. THE OLD TESTAMENT FULFILLED
 - A. Zechariah and Matthew
 - B. Zechariah and Genesis
 - » *What are other biblical examples of intertextuality?*
 - C. I Will Believe God's Word

- II. THE MEEK MESSIAH **I**
 - A. The Unbroken Colt and Makeshift Saddle
 - B. Coats and Palm Branches
 - » *What does it feel like to arrive at a reception or party without a gift?*
 - C. I Will Praise God with What I Have **V**
 - » *What do you have to worship God with? Are you worshipping Him with what you have?*

- III. THE PARADE
 - A. Hosanna to the Son of David
 - » *What is your favorite word or phrase to use in worship?*
 - B. The Religious Response
 - C. I Will Have a Relationship with Jesus for Myself

Internalizing the Message

» *With whom do you most identify in the Bible?*

Prayer Focus

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

- That we will understand how the Scriptures speak of Jesus
- To express our thanks to God for the salvation He provides in Jesus, the Son of David

LESSON CONNECTION

This is it. This is the last week of Jesus' life. In just over one hundred hours, Jesus will stand trial for crimes He did not commit and be sentenced to a public crucifixion He does not deserve. He knew it, but His dream team had no clue. They were busy selling "Jesus for Messiah" T-shirts. When they arrived in Bethphage, two miles from Jerusalem, Jesus sent two of His twelve disciples into town with a strange shopping list: "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me" (Matthew 21:2, NKJV).

The two disciples probably shrugged and headed into town. Sure enough, just like Jesus said, they found a donkey and its colt hitched to a post. As they were loosing them, the owner came out. "Can I help you fellas?"

These men of God had been caught hot-wiring the donkeys, but Jesus had given them an answer for when the owner asked the question: "The Lord hath need of them" (Matthew 21:3; Mark 11:6). I doubt the owners had ever heard that excuse. "The man we call Messiah wants to take these two for a spin."

The disciples led the donkey and colt back to Jesus. They threw their coats on these beasts of burden for saddles, and Jesus sat on the colt. Mind you, Jesus sat on a colt whose owner had yet to ride. It would be dangerous to jump on an unbroken colt and ride it around the parking lot, but it would be deadly to jump on an unbroken colt and ride it two miles into a cramped Jerusalem.

No one knew what to think. Jesus was great at stopping funerals and unstopping deaf ears, but they had never seen Him tame an untamed donkey. They were surprised when that little colt stood there and allowed Jesus on its back. Jesus chose a baby donkey, not because the rental car company was out of full-sizes. He was fulfilling a five-hundred-year-old prophecy of Zechariah, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9, NKJV).

For the last three years, Jesus had worked wonders and preached to thousands outside of Jerusalem, but on this day, Jesus would introduce Himself to His people in His holy city. He was about to ride in a one-float parade into the holy, capital city into a crowd of nearly three million.

BIBLE LESSON

I. THE OLD TESTAMENT FULFILLED

The New Testament is the beautiful unveiling of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. As we seek to know Jesus more, we do well to look back to the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures. As we have learned, the New Testament is filled with quotations, allusions, and paraphrases of Old Testament texts. We find one such reference in Matthew 21, “All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: ‘Tell the daughter of Zion, “Behold, your King is come to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey””’ (Matthew 21:4–5, NKJV).

A. Zechariah and Matthew

Matthew was quoting from the prophet Zechariah from over five hundred years earlier. Zechariah wrote, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9, NKJV). This verse is an example of intertextuality, where a later writer in Scripture quoted from an earlier writer in an interpretive way. Here, Matthew crowned Jesus as the King whom Zechariah prophesied would come riding on a donkey. But Matthew was not the first to proclaim Christ as King. Jesus Himself claimed to fulfill this prophecy by sending His disciples to find the donkey and colt.

B. Zechariah and Genesis

Zechariah pulled from a prophecy Jacob had made in his last words to his twelve sons. Jacob gave less than rave reviews to Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. Then Jacob solemnly told Judah, “You are he whom your brothers shall praise; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s children shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion’s whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people. Binding his donkey to the vine, and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine, he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk” (Genesis 49:8–12, NKJV).

Genesis 49:11 and Zechariah 9:9 are the only two places in the Old Testament where we read of a foal and a colt together. Then Jesus called the disciples to bring the foal and the colt to Him, and they obeyed—another textbook example of intertextuality. The words are found first in Genesis, then found and further

clarified in Zechariah, and finally found again in Matthew, where they are specifically fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

C. I Will Believe God's Word

Jacob believed God's word. Zechariah believed God's word. Of course, Jesus believed God's word because He wrote it. The disciples believed God's word and found the foal and the colt. Every prophecy God has ever made has or will come to pass just as God declared it. Let us believe God's word. Perhaps He made you a promise in prayer, or He gave you infallible Scripture to hold onto as you face a battle for your faith. Certainly, He has spoken to you while the pastor has preached God's Word. However you hear God's voice, believe Him. God always keeps His word.

II. THE MEEK MESSIAH

When the duo of disciples returned with the donkey and the colt, they were fulfilling Zechariah's messianic prophecy. Everyone watched, waited, and wondered if Jesus would be able to ride an unbroken colt. They were in Bethphage headed to Jerusalem. Could Jesus ride a colt for two miles that had never been ridden?

A. The Unbroken Colt and Makeshift Saddle

Before Jesus could saddle up, the disciples doffed their coats and cloaks and spread them on the back of the colt for a saddle. The one who sits on the throne in Heaven sat on some tattered clothes on a colt just outside Jerusalem. Even if He insisted on riding this unbroken beast, surely someone affluent could have paid for a proper saddle, but He sat on a makeshift saddle of His itinerant disciples' coats. Jesus was proving what He preached one chapter earlier: "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).


Perhaps His humility is one reason so many rejected Him as their Messiah. He was born among the animals, laid in a manger where the animals fed. Shepherds, who stepped where sheep stepped, were first to receive His birth announcement. He was brought up in the humble home of a blue-collar carpenter in the ordinary town of Nazareth. He recruited twelve ordinary men to follow Him. Jesus was not the portrait of a conquering king who had come to overthrow the overreaching Roman government. He was the portrait of a meek Messiah who had come to overthrow the tyrannical reign of sin and Satan. Yet somehow, the crowd understood that day to be monumental in their generation.

B. Coats and Palm Branches

People left home in a hurry when they heard Jesus was in town. They either did not have the time or the money to bring an appropriate gift to Him. They came only with the clothes on their backs, but when they saw Jesus, they knew they could not come

What are other biblical examples of intertextuality?

Teacher Option:

A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. 

empty-handed. Some of them took off their coats and cloaks and spread them on the road. A few worshipers cut down palm branches and spread them on the road in front of Jesus.


What does it feel like to arrive at a reception or party without a gift?

We call that Sunday Palm Sunday because the crowd cut down palm branches and waved them or laid them down as worship. But we would do no injustice to the Scripture to call that Sunday “Coat Sunday,” “Cloak Sunday,” “Shawl Sunday,” “Light Jacket Sunday,” or simply “This Is What I Have Sunday” because the crowd worshiped Jesus with what they had. During the Intertestamental period, Israel reentered Jerusalem with praise and palm branches, but there is no Old Testament command to praise God with palm branches. The Jews outside Jerusalem on that day praised Jesus using what they had.

C. I Will Praise God with What I Have

We clap our hands on the fast songs and raise our hands on the slow ones because that’s what we have. And we do have a biblical command to clap our hands (Psalm 47:1) and to lift our hands (Psalm 134:2). We sing unto the Lord because we are commanded to sing (Psalm 96:1-2) and because our song is what we have. Some people accidentally sing in three keys on one song, yet they sing because God has given them a song, and they sing it for the glory of God.

Teacher Option:

A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit. 

During the pandemic of 2020, churches throughout the world were shuttered and unable to hold services like they held prior to the pandemic. They could not play instruments they had paid thousands of dollars to play. Some pastors recorded services in their living room or family room around an upright piano without microphones, yet they worshiped God because that’s what they had. And God was pleased with their worship. Let us give God what we have in worship. He is worthy of our best, but our best does not have to be professional or polished, only sincere and honest.

What do you have to worship God with? Are you worshiping Him with what you have?

III. THE PARADE

A. Hosanna to the Son of David

It must have been a sight to see Jesus sitting high atop a colt riding into Jerusalem as people went ahead of Him, behind Him, and beside Him, spreading coats and palm branches. It must have been quite a sound to hear as the people cried out, “Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest” (Matthew 21:9). The word *hosanna* appears thrice in the Bible: Matthew 21, Mark 11, and John 12. All three occurrences tell the story of the triumphal entry.

Hosanna comes from a Hebrew word meaning “save now” or “save us, we pray.” This Old Testament prayer was a prayer of salvation. However, by the time we come to the New Testament, this prayer turns to praise, and the people along Jesus’ parade

route were praising Him for salvation. Perhaps they were praising Jesus for saving them from the Romans, from their sins, or both. Either way, they had witnessed enough wonders to know Jesus was sent from God, for no man could work the wonders Jesus worked unless God was with Him. (See John 3:2.)

Their designation of Jesus as the “Son of David” gives us deeper insight that they saw Jesus as the Messiah. They viewed Jesus as the one who would one day sit on the throne of David as a descendant of their royal hero, King David. Of course, Jesus’ genealogy found in Matthew 1 traces His lineage all the way back to King David, making Him eligible to be called a son of David. Further, the people’s praise stemmed from Psalm 118 where the children of Israel called out, “Save now, I beseech thee, O LORD: O LORD, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD: we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD” (Psalm 118:25–26).

What is your favorite word or phrase to use in worship?

B. The Religious Response

Once Jesus made His way into Jerusalem, it seemed everyone was happy. Jesus was happy. The disciples were happy. The people along the parade were happy. But the religious were unhappy. In fact, they were “sore displeased” when they saw everyone—especially the children—crying out “Hosanna to the Son of David” (Matthew 21:15). They could not conceive how a mere man such as Jesus of Nazareth could accept praise and worship like He did. If only they would have had a relationship with Him and understood He was not just a mere man.

C. I Will Have a Relationship with Jesus for Myself

As early as the end of this selfsame chapter, the religious rulers looked for ways to arrest Jesus without inciting a riot. It is interesting how such heartfelt praise and worship exacted such ire from religious rulers. We would do well to understand it is not enough just to be religious; we must have a close relationship with Jesus for ourselves. Today, let’s seek to be closer to Jesus than we were yesterday. And if Jesus does not come back before tomorrow, we ought to seek to be closer to Him tomorrow than we are today. The closer we get to Jesus, the more we will see Him for who He truly is: the Son of David, the Savior, the Messiah, the almighty God in human flesh.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Charles Haddon Spurgeon read about a man who dreamed about religion while he was in great distress of mind. He thought he stood in the outer court of Heaven and saw a glorious host marching up the steps of light, singing hymns, and bearing the banners of victory. They passed by the dreamer and entered through the gates. He heard sweet strains of music in the distance.

“Who are they?” he asked someone standing near him.

The reply came back, “Don’t you know? They are the goodly fellowship of the prophets, who have gone to be with God.”

He heaved a deep sigh, as he said, “Alas! I am not one of them, and shall never be, and cannot enter there.”

By and by there came another band, equally lovely in appearance and equally triumphant, all robed in white.

“Who are these?” he cried with wistful expectancy.

“They are the goodly fellowship of the apostles.”

“Alas,” he said, as they passed by him, “I belong not to that fellowship, and I cannot enter there.”

He still waited and lingered, hoping he might yet go in, but the next multitude did not encourage him, for they were the noble army of martyrs. He could not go with them nor wave their palm branches. He waited and saw the next was a company of preachers of the gospel and faithful Christian workers, but he felt he could not go in with them.

Hope of ever entering Heaven seemed gone. But at long last, as he watched, he saw a larger host than all the rest put together marching and singing gloriously. In front of them walked the repentant woman who was a sinner and the repentant thief who died on the cross next to Jesus. He looked long and saw once-wretched sinners like Manasseh and the like; and when they entered, he could see who they were, and he thought, *There will be shouting about them.* To his astonishment it seemed as if all Heaven was rent with sevenfold shouts as they passed in. The angels said to him, “These are they that were mighty sinners, saved by mighty grace.”

Then he sighed and said, “Blessed be God! I can go in with them.” And he woke up.

With whom do you most identify in the Bible?

Prayer Focus

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

- That we will understand how the Scriptures speak of Jesus
- To express our thanks to God for the salvation He provides in Jesus, the Son of David

2.4

WORSHIPPING THE ONE WHO SITS ON HIS THRONE

FOCUS VERSE

Revelation 4:8

And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

LESSON TEXT

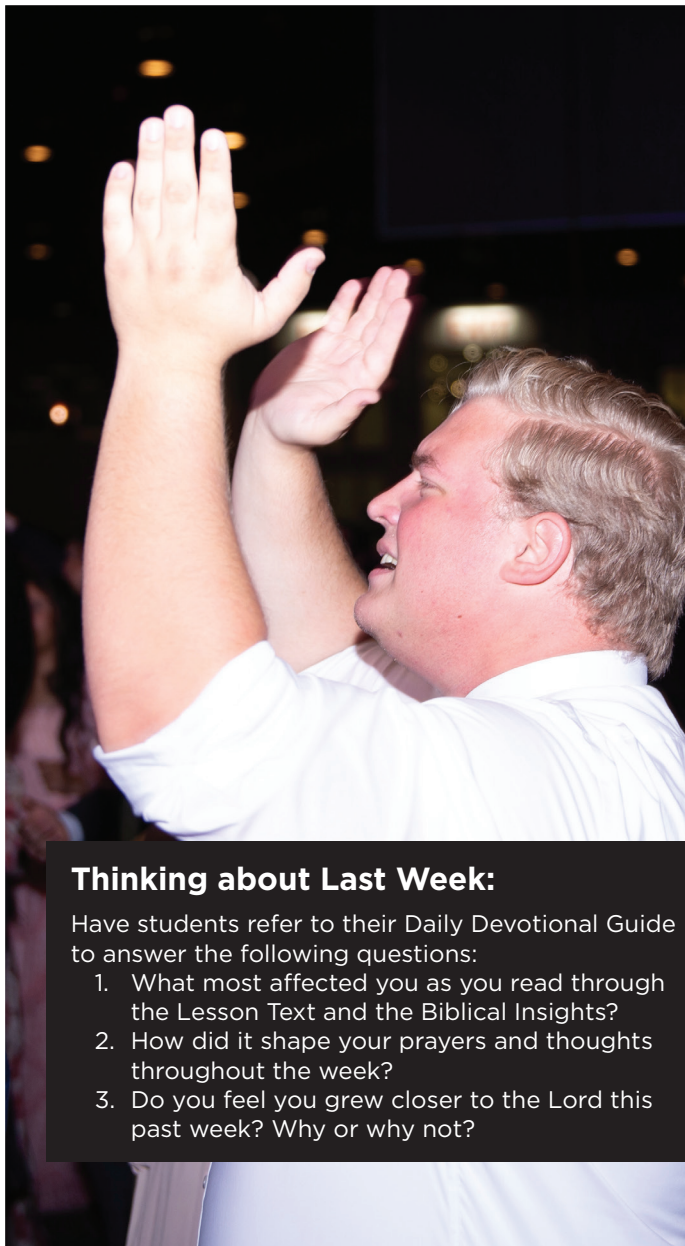
Revelation 4

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

The Creator of all things, the only Lord God Almighty, occupies a single throne in Heaven.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

It is my privilege and responsibility to worship my Creator, the Lord God Almighty.



Thinking about Last Week:

Have students refer to their Daily Devotional Guide to answer the following questions:

1. What most affected you as you read through the Lesson Text and the Biblical Insights?
2. How did it shape your prayers and thoughts throughout the week?
3. Do you feel you grew closer to the Lord this past week? Why or why not?

SG TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: Describe God using just one word.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection

I. THE REASON FOR REVELATION

A. The Unveiling of Jesus Christ

» *When you think of apocalypse, what do you think of? How has this understanding of Revelation changed your thinking?*

B. The Coming of Jesus Christ

C. I Will Be Ready for Jesus' Coming

» *How do you feel when you think about the coming of the Lord?*

II. THE OUTLINE OF REVELATION **V**

A. The Throne

B. Around the Throne

» *How would we live differently if we understood how truly holy God is?*

C. I Will Worship Jesus Because He Is Holy

III. THE TESTIMONY OF TWO TESTAMENTS

A. Ezekiel's Vision

B. Symbols in Both Testaments

» *What symbol(s) in Revelation causes you the most confusion?*

C. I Will Fix My Eyes on Jesus

Internalizing the Message **I**

» *Can you recount a time when worship exploded and changed the atmosphere?*

Prayer Focus

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

- For God to help us see Him as holy
- For God to help us worship Him as holy

LESSON CONNECTION

The young couple had just bought their new home. It was time to bring all those boxes off the moving truck and into the house to unpack. Thanks to online shopping and searching, they bought their home without ever seeing it in person. They saw the photos and read about its amenities: bay windows, ten-foot-tall ceilings, first-floor laundry, corner lot. It seemed like it would be a wonderful place to call home for the next several years.

When they finally stepped foot onto their property, they toured the house to see all it had to offer. The rooms were somewhat smaller than they appeared online, but the ceilings were as tall as advertised. As they walked through the house, the husband walked down the creaky, wooden basement steps to see what lay beneath. As he looked around, he noticed what appeared to be a small room inside the basement. What was that room? Who needs a room in an unfinished basement? He could have opened the door, but he just turned around and walked back upstairs. He thought it was better not to open the door because he had no idea what—or who—might jump out.

The Book of Revelation is like a creepy closet for far too many people. People will gladly walk around and take photos of the Gospels and the Book of Acts. But they will scarcely crack open the door to the Book of Revelation because they are afraid a ten-horned beast will jump out. However, God inspired John to write Revelation, not to scare us, but to reveal Himself to us. Revelation is the unveiling, the revealing of Jesus Christ to the world and to His church. And when we see Him in Revelation, He is seated on His throne as elders, living creatures, angels, and saints of God alike surround Him and sing holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.

As we walk into this lesson, don't be afraid. Take a deep breath and open the door. We are about to see the greatest sight human eyes will ever see. We are about to see the unveiling, the revelation, of Jesus Christ.

BIBLE LESSON

I. THE REASON FOR REVELATION

A. The Unveiling of Jesus Christ

Maybe Revelation's fearsome reputation stems from its name. The name Revelation comes from the Greek word *apokalypsis*, from which we derive our word "apocalypse." When people think of apocalypse, they often think of the end of the world: stars falling from the sky and beasts rising from the sea. While all those things are recorded, Revelation was recorded so we could fully see and know Jesus Christ in His glory.

Jesus is everywhere from the first chapter to the last. The name of Jesus appears all throughout the book. He is also referred to as the Christ three times, the Son of Man twice, and the Son of God once. (See Revelation 1:13; 2:18; 11:15; 12:10; 14:14; 20:6). The Antichrist and his religious counterpart, the false prophet, are only seen in the shadows compared to the brightness of the brilliance of the glory of God we see in the face of Jesus Christ.

B. The Coming of Jesus Christ

This book is filled with passages and images that leave us scratching our heads. But one of the oft-overlooked passages that still leaves us somewhat puzzled is the curious phrase: "which is, and which was, and which is to come." This phrase appears twice in the first chapter (Revelation 1:4, 8) and once in the fourth (4:8), presenting an interesting, grammatical oddity. We would expect to read of the one "which is, and which was, and which is to come." But God inspired John to see another beautiful facet of His beautiful nature: Jesus Christ is coming back.

When you think of apocalypse, what do you think of? How has this understanding of Revelation changed your thinking?

C. I Will Be Ready for Jesus' Coming

Entire libraries of books have been written about the coming of the Lord. Jesus came as a lamb, laid in a manger in Bethlehem. And He was crucified as a lamb in Jerusalem. However, when He comes the second time, He will come in all His glory with the angels and the saints. According to I Thessalonians 4, He will come back for the saints when He comes in the clouds. And according to Revelation 19, He will come back with the saints when He comes to the earth. Both times, He will come back in power and glory. (See Matthew 25:31.)

Ours is not to determine the date Jesus will return but to be ready when He does. He provided the way for us to be ready through the gospel: His death, burial, and resurrection. And we respond to that glorious gospel through repentance from sin, water baptism by immersion in the name of Jesus Christ, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the initial sign of speaking in other tongues (Acts 2:38). We await the coming of the Lord like

How do you feel when you think about the coming of the Lord?

a bride awaits her wedding day. Let's be sure to be ready for that day because one of these days, this day will be that day.

II. THE OUTLINE OF REVELATION

Revelation was not really written to be a book; it was written as a letter to seven churches. And it comes complete with a built-in, God-inspired outline. Jesus told John to write "the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter" (Revelation 1:19). In Revelation 1, John wrote what he saw. He saw Jesus as the King of kings, the Judge of the Earth. In Revelation 2-3, John wrote the things which are. He wrote to the seven churches in Asia Minor. From Revelation 4-22, John wrote what will happen after this: after the age of the church.

Teacher Option:
A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit. **V**

A. The Throne

Revelation 4:1 opens with: "After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter." Twice in one verse, John wrote that everything he wrote after this point would describe events that would happen after the church age.

Once John was caught up to look around the heavenly throne room, the first sight he saw was Heaven's throne. This throne, which belongs to God, is mentioned nearly forty times in Revelation because of the one who sits on it. John even wrote of kings and rulers of the earth who will abandon their own thrones because of their fear of the Lord who sits on His (Revelation 6:16). When the world's last king is no longer king, Jesus will still be seated as King of kings on His throne, high and lifted up.

B. Around the Throne

Others are in the throne room as well. John wrote of twenty-four elders seated around the throne (Revelation 4:4). We cannot read their name tags, and John did not write their names in this letter. They sit in front of the throne of God, wearing white robes and crowns. They hold palm branches in their hands for worship, and they worship the one who sits on the throne.

But who are these twenty-four elders, and how did they get such good seats? The number twenty-four is the clue. There were twelve tribes of Israel and twelve apostles. It is likely these twenty-four represent the saints from the Old Testament and the saints from the New Testament. In this case, they would represent the complete picture of the people of God. And they are not alone. They are joined by four living creatures. The Greek word for these living creatures is *zoon*. As we may suspect, this Greek word is the origin of our word "zoo."

What are these living creatures, and what can we learn from them? They were "full of eyes in front and in back" (Revelation 4:6, NKJV). The first one was "like a lion," the second "like a calf,"

the third had a face “as a man,” and the fourth was “like a flying eagle” (Revelation 4:7). Each creature had six wings. Without a break day or night, they cry, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come” (Revelation 4:8). Interestingly, early manuscripts record these living creatures crying “holy” nine times, not just three. Surely, those who live in the presence of God truly appreciate how holy He is.

How would we live differently if we understood how truly holy God is?

There is an interesting relationship between these living creatures and the twenty-four elders. When the living creatures worship the one who sits on the throne, the elders fall down before Him, cast their gold crowns before His throne, and worship Him saying: “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Revelation 4:11). Most English translations identify the one on the throne as Lord and God since that is the reading of the most ancient and the majority of Greek manuscripts. For example, the ESV reads: “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”

C. I Will Worship Jesus Because He Is Holy

We rarely see a bumper sticker or plaque touting the holiness of God. Most of the verses on our walls testify of the grace, the mercy, the faithfulness, the goodness of God. To be sure, God is beyond gracious, rich in mercy, forever faithful, and always good. And He is holy. We do not only worship Him for the goodness He shows us; we worship Him simply because He is holy.

We can never afford to clutch to the mercy of God and let go of His holiness. Every time we come into His presence, whether in prayer in our house or in worship in His house, we need to come into His presence in awe and reverence of His holiness. He is not just our heavenly buddy; He is the holy God of glory.

III. THE TESTIMONY OF TWO TESTAMENTS

In language drawn from the Old Testament books of Daniel, Zechariah, Psalms, Isaiah, Proverbs, Hosea, and Exodus and influenced by the Book of Ezekiel, the Book of Revelation unveils major, long-standing prophetic themes.

A. Ezekiel’s Vision

Ezekiel seemed to see the same living creatures John saw. Some of the details differ, but the central point seems the same. Ezekiel wrote, “As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle” (Ezekiel 1:10). The similarities are evident: representations of humanity, lions, cattle, and eagles. When we read visionary accounts of winged creatures covered with eyes, with multiple faces and wheels within wheels, our imagination

takes flight. We are tempted to uncover the meaning of every detail. But that is not why God gave us a glimpse into these living creatures. Meaning will be found in simplicity, not in complicated conjecture.

B. Symbols in Both Testaments

Symbols abound in the Book of Revelation, but they are also widely found in the Old Testament. Many of these symbols stem from Hebrew sources. In both places, we see:

1. a rod of iron and a potter's vessel (Psalm 2:9; Revelation 2:27),
2. the key of David (Isaiah 22:22; Revelation 3:7),
3. a horn makes war (Daniel 7:21; Revelation 17:7).

The “rod of iron” represents the firmness of the Messiah’s rule. Breaking the “potter’s vessel” in pieces refers to an ancient practice of kings writing the names of their enemies on a piece of pottery and smashing that pottery before going into battle, anticipating their victory. The “key” of David symbolizes the Davidic covenant’s promise that the Messiah would descend from David. The word “horn” is used in the Old Testament to represent “power.”

What symbol(s) in Revelation causes you the most confusion?

C. I Will Fix My Eyes on Jesus

We could easily spend the rest of our lives trying to figure out who the Beast is and which nations will rise to power in the last days. At the end of our study, we may be right, and we may be wrong. But the certitude seen in Revelation is seeing Jesus Christ for who He is. He is the main character in the entire Bible, especially in its first and last books. He created it all in Genesis, and He will reign and rule over it all in Revelation. Let us fix our eyes on the one who sits on the throne, and let us worship Him like the elders and the living creatures do by crying, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come” (Revelation 4:8).

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. 

The experiences of Theodore and Patricia Grosbach, pioneer missionaries appointed by the United Pentecostal Church International to Zaire and Zambia, demonstrate the transforming power of worship. The Grosbachs struggled with family pain almost beyond description. They began to question whether they should continue their work for God in Zambia. But the tide turned when they rented the largest indoor hall available in Lusaka. As they described it, “Worship exploded in the services.”

Amid tears of repentance, people even crawled to the altar. Two hundred and eighty-eight people received the gift of the Holy Ghost. Later that year, three hundred people received the Holy Ghost at the Zambian General Conference. With the faith of the Zambian church rising, a crusade was planned in Lusaka. When crusade time arrived, thousands of people came in buses, prepared to sleep and cook for themselves on the stadium grounds.

By the second day, six thousand people had arrived, the altars filled with seekers, and 2,122 people were filled with the Holy Spirit. The next year the Zambian church held crusades in five areas of the country with seven hundred receiving the Holy Ghost. Thirty-eight local pastors were trained to hold their own crusades. On two weekends, 1,050 people were baptized with the Holy Spirit.

When the elders, the living creatures, the angels, and all the saints of God in Heaven give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, worshiping the one who lives forever and ever, lightning and thunder and voices proceed from the throne. Here on earth, when we worship God in like manner, God does for us what He did for the Zambian people. He pours out His Holy Spirit, He changes our circumstances, and He accomplishes His wonderful work with astonishing power and authority.

Can you recount a time when worship exploded and changed the atmosphere?

Prayer Focus

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

- For God to help us see Him as holy
- For God to help us worship Him as holy

3.1

THE FIRST LAST MEAL

FOCUS VERSE

1 Kings 17:14

For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.

LESSON TEXT

1 Kings 17:1-16

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God rewards our sacrifice.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will obey God's call to sacrifice.



Series Overview:

God used Elijah to work a miracle for a widow, and then He used Elijah to call down fire from Heaven. After Elijah anointed Elisha to follow him, God used Elisha to work a miracle for a Syrian soldier. Like Elijah, let us be courageous and stand for God. Like Elisha, let us hear and follow God's call in our lives.



SG TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: What is the hardest step of faith you have ever taken?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection. **I**

I. THE DROUGHT

» *Why do you think God sometimes has to resort to extreme measures?*

A. The Widow's Desperate Situation

B. The Prophet's Unusual Request

» *How should we respond when God's command doesn't seem to make sense?*

C. I Will Trust in God Even When I Don't See His Plan

» *What do you need the Lord to provide for you right now?*

II. GOD'S PROVISION AT ZAREPHATH **I**

» *Why do you think God sometimes reaches outside the walls of the church to provide miracles?*

A. The Widow's Faith-Filled Response

B. God's Miraculous Provision

C. I Will Obey God's Call to Sacrifice

» *What do you need to step out by faith and do right now?*

Internalizing the Message **V**

Prayer Focus

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

- To trust God for miracles He wants to work
- To obey God even when we don't understand

LESSON CONNECTION

A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. 

Although we often desire to focus on God's blessings, He sometimes asks us to sacrifice. In these instances, we need to obey His call. His command to sacrifice may appear even in difficult times. Elijah knew this truth firsthand. When the Lord led him to proclaim no rain or dew throughout the land, Elijah knew he would not completely escape the ravages of famine. Its evil tendrils would touch even him. But God had a plan. He miraculously preserved Elijah and honored his sacrifice. The Lord also honored the sacrifice of a widow who provided food for Elijah. Although this story had a happy ending, at times God requires His people to go above and beyond the normal call. Sometimes the Lord calls for the ultimate sacrifice.

Such was the case in 1943 when the military ship *The Dorchester* ferried over nine hundred soldiers and other military personnel across the Atlantic. The soldiers onboard knew they might be required to make the ultimate sacrifice, giving their lives for their country. They likely expected to face the specter of death on the battlefield. Little did they know that death stalked them on the waters as they journeyed to Europe.

These soldiers could provide a strategic advantage by turning the tide against the Germans in World War II. The Germans had experienced a season where Americans had not engaged in battle, and they realized they could ill afford this infusion of warriors into the European theater. Fearing the reinforcements provided by the vessel, a German U-boat attacked the ship by firing three underwater torpedoes. Two missed the mark; however, one damaged the ship beyond repair. Orders spread throughout the freezing night to abandon ship. Much like the tragedy of the *Titanic* that preceded it in history, *The Dorchester* lacked enough lifeboats and life jackets to save everyone.

Amid the chaos of the sinking ship, four military chaplains sprang into action. They assisted the injured and tried to assuage the fears of those who worried they would soon meet their Maker. The chaplains also did the unthinkable. They went above and beyond the call of duty by removing their life jackets and giving their only hope for survival to four soldiers who did not have hope. The sacrifice of the chaplains led to them receiving the reward of Heaven earlier. The chaplains were posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and the Purple Heart.

God may not call us to make the ultimate sacrifice and show the greatest type of love by giving our life for another (John 15:13). Nevertheless, we may be called to sacrifice in the face of difficult circumstances. In these cases, remember the faith and commitment of these military chaplains as well as the act of faith demonstrated by the widow who followed the direction of the Lord and sustained Elijah with food. The Lord rewarded her sacrifice by providing for her and her son throughout the famine.

BIBLE LESSON

I. THE DROUGHT

Famine occurs due to drought, crop-eating insects, blight on farms, or other environmental factors. The famine recorded in 1 Kings 17 appeared in the land for an entirely different reason—divine punishment. The prophet Elijah the Tishbite proclaimed to wicked King Ahab that neither dew nor rain would fall on the earth for the next few years. Ahab and his evil wife Jezebel had sinned so egregiously that God had even refused to send life-giving dew to the land.

God commissioned Elijah to declare this severe judgment because too many people worshiped a false god called Baal. Many in the northern kingdom of Israel devoted themselves to Baal, believing he gave them rain and made their crops fertile. God intervened to show the people the identity of the one true God. If the people would not hunger and thirst after righteousness, they would find themselves starving and in desperate need of water.

Why do you think God sometimes has to resort to extreme measures?

A. The Widow's Desperate Situation

Our text reveals the terrible plight of the people, showing that even innocents suffered for the guilty. We read of a widow woman and her son facing the scourge of famine. Meager meals had kept them alive so far, but they suffered hunger pangs and feared they would soon run out of food. They wondered what they would do.

When Elijah encountered the woman, she was gathering sticks. As she picked up each stick, she may have felt that she was counting down the days to her death rather than preparing to build a fire. She would take the small amount of her remaining food stores and make a final meal for her son and herself. Their last supper would likely precede a slow, agonizing demise as malnutrition slowly ate at them. The future looked bleak. In fact, they might have wished for an invading army to end their lives more quickly.

B. The Prophet's Unusual Request

While the widow and her son faced a daily struggle for food, Elijah benefited from divine intervention. Elijah drank from a brook, and God sent ravens to feed him breakfast and dinner. In contrast, the widow struggled for meals. Those encountering the story for the first time might wonder if miracles only happen for prophets. Can ordinary people also partake of miracles?

The story takes an odd turn when the prophet encounters the widow. Rather than immediately giving her the miracle she so desperately needed, he made a strange and seemingly unusual command. He told the widow to take the last of her ingredients

and bake a small loaf of bread for him before making a “final” meal for her son and herself.

Most people might have refused such an outlandish request. Scripture, however, provides an interesting clue that may explain why the widow agreed to the outrageous command. First Kings 17:9 states that the Lord had directed the woman to provide food for the prophet.

When the Lord impressed upon the woman to take care of the prophet, perhaps she thought her hunger pangs had caused her to hear things. She may have wondered if her unplanned fasts had made her delusional. Then the prophet appeared on the scene.

The outrage some readers feel when listening to Elijah command a starving widow to feed him is normal, but we do not see what God sees. Our understandable human reaction to criticize the prophet for such an egregious breach of etiquette and common sense must bow the knee to the sovereign plan of God. We must look past our natural responses and see spiritually. God had a greater plan in mind that went far beyond the widow’s current circumstances. She needed to trust in the Lord despite the overwhelming feeling that the situation made no earthly sense. Remember, God had already spoken to the widow to sustain the prophet.

How should we respond when God’s command doesn’t seem to make sense?

C. I Will Trust in God Even When I Don’t See His Plan

We too face the challenge of seeing past our present plights. Like the woman, we might see the man of God approaching and feel that a miracle is walking down our parched, dusty road. The Almighty, however, may put our trust to the test.


We can easily talk about our faith and trust in the Lord when living in prosperous times. But we must exercise our faith and trust in difficult circumstances as well. Since we walk by faith and not by sight (II Corinthians 5:7), we must not allow our situation to overwhelm us.

Sometimes we must also look past logic. Like most people, the widow likely would have had difficulty seeing a good reason to make bread for the prophet. But for a miracle to occur, we must walk beyond the boundaries of logic. Of course, we should walk wisely when we step out by faith, but we must walk by faith. We must be sensitive to God’s voice in order to prepare to do His will and receive His provision.

II. GOD’S PROVISION AT ZAREPHATH

God provided for the woman and her son through the prophet’s unique and strange demand. And if the story sounds odd so far, look a little further at the location of Zarephath. Her city, Zarephath, forms the northern boundary of Canaan (Obadiah

What do you need the Lord to provide for you right now?

Teacher Option:
A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. 

1:20). We might think God miraculously intervened for an Israelite woman, but Scripture points us toward the widow being a Canaanite, perhaps even a Phoenician.

Jesus' teachings may shed further light on the woman's identity. After declaring that no prophet is accepted in his own country, Jesus spoke of many widows living in the days of Elijah during the three-and-a-half-year drought. Nevertheless, God sent Elijah only to this Sidonian woman. Jesus coupled her story with the cleansing of another Israelite outsider, the former leper, Naaman the Syrian. In the New Testament, Jesus' teaching ignited the wrath of the people in the synagogue. They did not like hearing about the faith of people they viewed as outcasts from the kingdom of God.

Why do you think God sometimes reaches outside the walls of the church to provide miracles?

A. The Widow's Faith-Filled Response

Knowing that the widow likely did not have an Israelite pedigree makes her story even more compelling. She responded in faith to the prophet's request, leading us to wonder if none of the Israelite widows would have done the same. While people in Jesus' day might have considered themselves superior to others, Jesus showed them they should humble themselves. The possibility exists that only this widow would have responded in faith to Elijah's request. Most likely, the Lord did not send Elijah to anyone else because the Almighty knew that only this widow would demonstrate great faith.

With the direction of God to sustain her faith, the widow heeded Elijah's words. She took her last bit of meal, flour, and oil to make a loaf for Elijah. We speak about something being an "act" of faith because faith requires action. An act of faith also requires follow-through on our part. At any point, the widow could have chosen a different course of action. She could have made the bread and given it to her son, hoping he would survive. Perhaps the widow had to choose to trust in the Lord again and again. As the fire got hot, she trusted. As she mixed the ingredients, she trusted. When she turned over the bread to cook the other side, she trusted, all the while refusing to flip on her decision. When the food finished cooking, she trusted. As she carried it to the prophet, she trusted, until the last moment when she set the bread before him and he ate—a meal she could have given her own son.

B. God's Miraculous Provision

God rewarded the widow's sacrifice with miraculous provision. She started out with only the hope of a last meal. Afterwards, she had a perpetual meal ticket. The Lord kept filling up her barrel of meal and cruse of oil. Because they were not consumed, neither she nor her son fell prey to the ravages of famine.

Each time the woman prepared a meal, she saw evidence of the power of trusting God. When she walked over to the meal barrel,

God strengthened her faith once again. When she poured oil out of the cruse, she saw the anointed power of trust. When she gathered sticks for the fire, she did so with joy, not fear. When she carried the meals to the table for her son and herself, her heart felt full of love and trust for God.

C. I Will Obey God's Call to Sacrifice

The widow's outstanding example of faith and trust in God should encourage us to obey God and sacrifice according to His divine will. We never know when the Lord may direct us to meet a need for the church or someone in our community. The call to act may be a call to sacrifice.

In some cases, we may readily see the value of sacrifice. The need may be clear. We know that God has spoken to us to dig deeper into our barrel of meal or to shake our cruse of oil a bit more, tapping it like we tap a ketchup bottle to get out the last bit.

In other cases, we may feel uncertainty about the future. We may see a need, but our own needs may seem larger than the situation in front of us. In such circumstances, we must trust the Lord. We need to know that God has directed us to sacrifice before we proceed. While we may view these situations as great challenges, they also represent wonderful opportunities to exercise our faith. Our faith grows stronger when we exercise it.

Therefore, we should carefully seek the Lord and obey His call to sacrifice. The situation may not be easy. We may think God is being unreasonable, but faith will show us that God had good reason for what many would deem unreasonable. So, let's step out in faith and show God we trust Him. Just like the widow, we will receive a promise that will not fail.

What do you need to step out by faith and do right now?

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit. 

S*acrifice* is not the most popular word in the English language. In most cases, the connotations are less than ideal. One of the few positive ideas associated with sacrifice occurs when a baseball player hits a sacrifice fly for the good of the team. That player immediately receives high fives and pats on the back. Sacrifice does not usually result in such a quick return on one's investment.

In most cases, sacrifice takes time before rewards arrive. Delaying gratification often proves essential to accomplishing the goals God has set for us. For example, families might sacrifice in the short term to reap long-term benefits. In the moment, sacrifice is never fun as families trade burgers for bologna, national brands for generic cereal, and designer clothes for thrift-store specials. Sometimes Goodwill is God's will, but we may wonder why the Lord is asking us to wear used clothes in order to be used. The results will pay off, but it will take time.

In many cases, those who sacrifice have chosen to step out by faith. They trust that God will do something great in their lives. And that reveals the best part of sacrifice—the testimonies we hear from those who have stepped out by faith to sacrifice.

A woman tells of paying her tithes and faithfully giving her offerings. Although she knew the Lord required tithes, she struggled with offerings. But God rewarded her with an unexpected refund. The Lord directed a young person to attend college and serve in a church in a new area. The student acted in faith. God miraculously supplied tuition, gas money, and rent.

A man worried about having enough gas money for the next week. He gave for a special need in a Sunday evening service. God miraculously gave him the best gas mileage in the history of the automobile.

A family endured an incredibly difficult year. Rather than small sacrifices here and there, life seemed like one giant sacrifice. As they waited for the bad year to end and the new year to begin, Christmas looked to be more bleak than blessed. Then, before they arrived home one day, someone left a care package on their porch full of presents for the kids and enough food for a holiday feast.

The stories could go on and on. In fact, we might even ask others their testimonies about sacrifice. We are likely surrounded by many stories just waiting to be heard. Sacrifice is no fun in the short term, but the long-term benefits of our testimonies are priceless.

Prayer Focus

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

- To trust God for miracles He wants to work
- To obey God even when we don't understand

3.2

FIRE FROM HEAVEN

FOCUS VERSE

1 Kings 18:21

And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

LESSON TEXT

1 Kings 18:20-39

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God demands exclusive loyalty and worship.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will only worship the one true God in my life.



Thinking about Last Week:

Have students refer to their Daily Devotional Guide to answer the following questions:

1. What most affected you as you read through the Lesson Text and the Biblical Insights?
2. How did it shape your prayers and thoughts throughout the week?
3. Do you feel you grew closer to the Lord this past week? Why or why not?

SG TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: How many other Apostolics work or go to school with you?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection. **I**

I. THE SHOWDOWN

» *Why do you think sinners often blame the people of God or the ministry for troubles caused by sin?*

A. Elijah Challenged Ahab

B. I Will Challenge Those Who Would Lead God's People Astray

» *When should we contend for the faith? When should we be silent?*

II. GOD'S PROVISION AT ZAREPHATH

» *Why do you think some people fail to make the obvious choice to serve God?*

A. Prophets Sacrificed to Baal

B. Elijah Sacrificed to Jehovah

C. I Will Stand for Jehovah Alone **V**

» *In what way can you stand up for God and demonstrate your faithfulness?*

III. JEHOVAH DEFEATED BAAL

A. Jehovah Answered by Fire

B. The People Recommitted

C. I Will Only Worship the One True God in My Life

» *What do you need to restore to your life in order to be more faithful?*

Internalizing the Message

Prayer Focus

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

- For courage to stand up for God
- For God to use us for His glory when we stand for Him

LESSON CONNECTION

A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. 

Billy Mitchell was angry. As a general in the United States Army, Billy knew the U.S. needed to move away from emphasizing traditional ground warfare and naval tactics and focus more on strengthening airpower. However, he faced colleagues, superiors, and politicians who wanted to maintain the old way of doing things. Billy was so disappointed in them, especially his superiors, that he proclaimed they knew “as much about the air as a hog does about skating.”

Perhaps Billy Mitchell had a right to be angry and concerned for the future of the U.S. military. As a top gun, Billy had proven himself by serving as the combat leader in France for air missions in World War I. At that time, the Air Force did not exist, and many people wanted to keep it that way. Billy seemed like a prophet who could see the future, but he faced challenge after challenge. In addition to ignoring all of Billy’s good arguments, his detractors tried to embarrass him. The U.S. Navy did not want to believe that small aircraft could be more valuable to the American military than a battleship. Billy proved them wrong when his bombers easily sank the German battleship *Ostfriesland* in a demonstration originally designed to prove Billy wrong. Despite passing this test with flying colors—literally—even his own boss ignored his success.

Tired of Billy’s constant push for improving the military, the U.S. Army wanted to teach Billy who was in charge. They sent him to travel around to different bases just to stop his clamoring for the necessity and superiority of airpower. Rather than deterring Billy from his quest, his exile reinforced his beliefs about the importance of having a strong fleet of planes. Ironically, his superiors had reinforced his vision.

He continued to butt heads with the brass, which led to his court-martial. Billy Mitchell’s trial revealed that the military had tampered with witnesses. Despite this extreme lack of ethics, the court found Billy guilty. He became very depressed. He died without seeing his dream come true. Like true prophets before him, he was a man ahead of his time, a maverick who faced persecution. Today people know Billy Mitchell as the “Father of the Air Force.” All of Billy’s key ideas proved to be right. History supports him even though he technically lost the battle during his lifetime. But because of his sacrifice and willingness to stand up for truth, many American lives were saved.

Billy Mitchell has a great deal in common with the prophet Elijah. Both men found themselves fighting uphill battles. They both championed obvious answers and discovered that people are sometimes more loyal to a wicked king or the old ways than they are to doing what is right. Thankfully, neither man gave up on trying to make a difference.

BIBLE LESSON

I. THE SHOWDOWN

After proclaiming through the power of the Lord that God would shut up the windows of heaven and withhold rain and dew from the land, the prophet Elijah hid out to escape Ahab's bounty on his head. Three-and one-half years later, Elijah reappeared. Those who did not know him and had not seen his wanted poster must have wondered about the stranger in their midst.

When the stranger identified himself as Elijah, the people knew trouble was brewing. Perhaps they thought Elijah was not from these parts and did not understand that the northern kingdom of Israel worshiped the false god Baal. In Hebrew, Elijah's name means "my God is Jehovah." Elijah immediately stood out like a sore thumb. Whether Elijah had come looking for trouble or not, the people did not know. But having a name like Elijah in Baal's territory meant trouble would certainly find him.

Why do you think sinners often blame the people of God or the ministry for troubles caused by sin?

A. Elijah Challenged Ahab

As king of the northern kingdom of Israel, Ahab thought he ruled the roost, but Elijah would soon show the wicked king and his cronies that there was a new sheriff in town. This lawman did not kowtow to popular opinion. Elijah definitely did not worship that low-down, dirty, no-good false god named Baal.

The meeting between Elijah and Ahab was overdue. It was also over dew and rain. When Elijah encountered Ahab, the renegade king accused the man of God of troubling Israel. Like the sidewinder he was, old Ahab sought to deflect all the blame on Elijah. While the prophet had declared the loss of rain and dew, his actions were not responsible for the dusty, parched earth. Instead, Ahab, his wife Jezebel, and his Baal-worshipping gang of miscreants were to blame for the drought.

Ahab had waited a long time to find Elijah, hoping to punish him. The king had even put together a posse to find the prophet. But no one saw Elijah until the prophet returned in God's timing to challenge the vicious and pervasive sin of the Baal worshippers.

B. I Will Challenge Those Who Would Lead God's People Astray

Like Elijah, we must stand ready to counteract the would-be sheep rustlers who try to lead God's people astray. While we should take care not to act offensively or overstep our boundaries, we must realize that the Lord God Almighty has authorized and deputized us to earnestly contend for the faith (Jude 1:3). In doing so, we should exercise great wisdom and common sense.

We should heed the words of Jesus and avoid casting our pearls before swine in specific instances (Matthew 7:6). In other cases,

defense of doctrine and holiness requires us to speak up for the good of all. The Bible tells us there is a time to be silent and a time to speak (Ecclesiastes 3:7). We must recognize whether God is truly calling us to speak up for the faith or if He is calling us to be silent and assess the situation more fully. If God has called us to act, we should put on our boots, our helmet, and take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. We do not use the Bible recklessly, but with honor and honesty.

When should we contend for the faith? When should we be silent?

II. GOD'S PROVISION AT ZAREPHATH

Elijah boldly challenged the prophets of Baal. While 450 to 1 odds seemed like the contest was stacked against him, the prophet knew he would easily defeat the prophets of Baal with God's help. As the challenger, Elijah established the rules of play. In the Baal vs. Jehovah contest, the deity who answered by fire would prove Himself to be the one true God. The fire in question here most likely refers to lightning. A stele (ancient carved monument) featuring a picture of Baal holding a thunderbolt reveals this connection to nature. Like other false gods such as the lightning-wielding Greek god Zeus and the Norse god of thunder Thor, Baal was associated with weather phenomena.

Surprisingly, the people had yet to blame Baal for their sad state of affairs. If Baal truly served as the storm deity, the people should have wondered why no rain or dew had fallen. Therefore, Elijah challenged the people to recognize Jehovah as the one true God. The people should have responded with resounding support for Jehovah. Sadly, the people remained silent. They halted between two opinions, ignoring one of the most obvious answers in history. So the showdown continued.

Why do you think some people fail to make the obvious choice to serve God?

A. Prophets Sacrificed to Baal

The prophets of Baal prepared a bullock as a sacrifice for Baal, putting no fire under it or under the wood. They desperately hoped the fire of lightning would descend from the heavens and ignite the offering. Attempting to get Baal's attention, they jumped on the altar.

At high noon, the prophet Elijah began mocking their unsuccessful efforts. He joked that Baal might be busy talking, taking a journey, or sleeping. Some scholars have even argued that one of Baal's potential actions could even be translated to refer to Baal having stepped aside (gone to the restroom). Elijah was taunting the prophets of Baal and even Baal himself. His ridicule made the prophets of Baal even more desperate. They cut themselves with knives until their blood ran. The blood only served to wet their sacrifice, but still the fire did not fall.

B. Elijah Sacrificed to Jehovah

After the failed attempt by the prophets of Baal, Elijah drew the people unto him. He repaired the altar of the Lord, taking twelve

stones to represent the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he laid wood and the sacrifice on the altar and made a trench around the altar. Then the prophet did the unthinkable. To raise the stakes even higher, Elijah told the people to pour water over the sacrifice and wood and into the trench three separate times.

So desirous were the people for a miracle that they traded their most precious commodity for a show. With little water in the land after three-and-a-half years of no dew or rain, the people responded without hesitating. Readers of the story may wonder how people who refused to speak up or stand up for the Lord could give away their desperately needed water.

C. I Will Stand for Jehovah Alone

We must stand up for the Lord even if it means we stand alone. We cannot be afraid to be the only one to do the right thing, even in the face of 450 opponents. Like Elijah, we must take a stand.


Like Elijah, to take a stand, we need the spirit of restoration. Elijah rebuilt the altar of the Lord and opened the door for God to act. When we stand up for God, He will stand up for us. If we refuse to take a stand for the Lord, we will fall for anything.

In what way can you stand up for God and demonstrate your faithfulness?

III. JEHOVAH DEFEATED BAAL

The contest between Jehovah and Baal never seemed in doubt. In fact, the people should have declared Jehovah the hands-down winner based on the lack of rain and dew alone. The situation reveals how far people can fall away from the Lord.

When leaders choose to worship false gods, people will follow. When so many false prophets arise, a true prophet will have difficulty counteracting their false teachings. Although Elijah likely felt alone, God stood with him to provide the victory.

Teacher Option:
A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit. 

A. Jehovah Answered by Fire

At the time of the evening sacrifice, Elijah brought more restoration to Israel by praying to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The prophet had proclaimed the greatness of the one true God, but he needed the Lord to demonstrate His identity as the God of Israel.

Because Elijah had demonstrated his faithfulness and obedience by doing all things according to word of the Lord, the Lord responded with fire. Jehovah not only answered—He answered decisively. The fire of the Lord consumed the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and even the dust. The fire was so intense that it licked up the water in the trench.

B. The People Recommitted

After witnessing the miracle of God answering by fire, the people immediately fell on their faces and proclaimed the Lord Jehovah to be God. The Lord answered Elijah's prayer by sending fire from heaven, and He turned the hearts of the people back to God.

Because one man stood up for the one true God, others recognized the error of their ways and bowed before that same God. The people took a lot of convincing, but neither the Lord nor Elijah gave up on them.

C. I Will Only Worship the One True God in My Life

We must make the commitment to worship the one true God. Like Elijah, we may need to restore some missing items. We may need to rebuild our personal altars and commit to creating a stronger prayer life. We need to read the Word and put God first in our lives. Although we may not worship a false deity like Baal, we may have put other things in front of the Lord.

Some of our problems may have arisen from feeling like we are the only one serving God. Some of us may be the only person in our family who lives for God. Some of us may attend a school or college where we see few believers. Still others may work in a non-Christian environment that daily challenges our faith. Even in these difficult circumstances, we must worship the one true God.

What do you need to restore to your life in order to be more faithful?

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

A researcher once conducted a study about conformity, and other researchers have repeated this same experiment with different parameters. He put a large group of people in a classroom and showed them three different lines labeled A, B, and C. Then he showed a fourth line and asked the members of the group to identify the line that was the same size as the fourth line he presented. The correct answer was “A” because it was the same size as the fourth line. Line “B” was noticeably longer, and line “C” was clearly shorter.

However, to sway some of the participants, he had seeded the room with actors who would proclaim “A” to be the longest line. He called on them first to establish a wrong answer as the correct answer. At first, the choice likely looked like a slam dunk to many of the people in the study, but as more of the planted actors proclaimed another line to be the correct answer, those who lacked knowledge of the scheme might have thought their eyes had deceived them.

They thought they knew the right answer, but they wondered what they would do when questioned. Beads of sweat formed on their brows as their hearts beat faster in anticipation of having to respond in front of the group.

When the leader asked the subjects of his study, many of them conformed by identifying the wrong line. Even if they knew the correct answer, the desire to fit in overwhelmed common sense and the truth. Perhaps some did not want to feel like an outlier. Others may have felt they just made a mistake. Others counted on the advantages of siding with the group.

The researcher had formulated the test to see who would refuse to acquiesce to groupthink. Repeating the same study revealed that only a small number of people would actually defy the group. The average number of those who went against the grain of groupthink turned out to be a paltry twelve percent.

The Bible and the ministry can proclaim the truth about the Lord, only for politicians, celebrities, and influencers to support completely wrong positions. Rather than thinking for themselves, many people will give the wrong answer just to fit in. Today God is calling Christians not to fall into the trap of the world’s groupthink. Like Elijah, we must stand against the false prophets of our day. We must stand for truth when others remain silent. Sometimes our position may seem lonely. In many cases, we may feel as though only twelve percent have given the correct answer. But even if you are the only one standing up for truth, you are not alone. The Lord God Almighty stands with you.

Prayer Focus

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

- For courage to stand up for God
- For God to use us for His glory when we stand for Him

3.3

SUCCESS IN SUCCESSION

FOCUS VERSES

I Kings 19:19–20

¹⁹ So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him.

²⁰ And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee?

LESSON TEXT

I Kings 19:16–21;

II Kings 2:1–11

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God desires each new generation to follow His calling.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will not be discouraged from pursuing God's call.



Thinking about Last Week:

Have students refer to their Daily Devotional Guide to answer the following questions:

1. What most affected you as you read through the Lesson Text and the Biblical Insights?
2. How did it shape your prayers and thoughts throughout the week?
3. Do you feel you grew closer to the Lord this past week? Why or why not?

SG TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: Whom would you like to shadow for a day?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection. **I**

I. ELIJAH CHOSE ELISHA

» *What can we do to help a younger person grow in God?*

A. Elisha Accepted the Call

B. I Will Pursue God's Call **V**

» *Aside from sins and weights, what else might we need to remove from our lives in order to fully embrace God's call?*

II. THE MANTLE PASSED TO ELISHA

» *Why do you think God honors determination?*

A. Elisha Requested a Double Portion

» *What would you like God to do for you that goes beyond the ordinary and would be a great leap of faith?*

B. Elisha Took Up Elijah's Role

C. I Will Not Be Discouraged from Pursuing God's Call

» *What do you need to do to accept God's timing in your life?*

Internalizing the Message

Prayer Focus

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

- To actively pursue the call of God
- To be discipled by someone and to disciple someone

LESSON CONNECTION

A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. 

Although we should always believe in the future, many of us have heard too many stories of the next generation failing to live up to the previous generation's ideals and hard work. Numerous stories about family fortunes won through one generation's hard work and lost through the next generation's complacency appear throughout history. But such sad endings are not always the case. In fact, some individuals not only succeed the previous generation, but they also exceed their exploits.

Such was the case with Alexander the Great. He conquered the known world. He defeated the Persians by utilizing keen military strategies. He could move his army more than twice as fast as the Persians could travel. When Alexander encountered a foe that placed sentries along an uneven coastline, the great general instructed his men how to make flotation devices of their packs so they could float across a river and sneak up on the enemy. Alexander's exploits were legendary.

Alexander demonstrated sound reasoning from an early age. As a teenager, he encountered a black horse no one could tame. Rather than quickly jumping at the chance to win the prize horse, Alexander studied the horse and realized the mighty steed was afraid of his own shadow. Therefore, Alexander positioned the horse so he could not see his shadow. Alexander broke the horse and named him Bucephalus. Bucephalus accompanied Alexander in many battles and was buried with full military honors.

Alexander had some innate skills, but he was also willing to learn. He would not have achieved the tremendous success he enjoyed without the guidance and preparation of his father and mentor, Philip of Macedon. King Philip ensured Alexander had the best education. Aristotle taught Alexander. Aristotle had a great pedigree, having learned from Plato, who learned from Socrates.

Alexander learned much from his own father. Philip demonstrated sound military tactics and taught Alexander how to lead an army. While Alexander far exceeded his father, he would not have accomplished as much if his father had not paved the way for him. Similarly, Elijah served as the forerunner of Elisha, just as John the Baptist would one day be the forerunner of Jesus. God's mighty miracles through Elijah inspired Elisha to want a double portion. Although Scripture credits Elisha with twice as many miracles as Elijah, the younger prophet would have never accomplished so much if Elijah had not trained him.

Rather than generations fighting for supremacy, each should appreciate the other. Generational battles only yield strife. We should all pay attention to the good relationship between Elijah and Elisha. Elijah never thought that Elisha was trying to steal his influence. Instead, he recognized the divine call on the young man God had given to him. When generations work together, we will see more miracles.

BIBLE LESSON

I. ELIJAH CHOSE ELISHA

The prophet Elijah experienced great victory and great depression. The highs and lows had taken a toll on him. Although God walked with Elijah and granted him power, the prophet experienced feelings of loneliness and wondered about his calling. At one point, life had gotten so difficult that Elijah even wished to die.

But God was not finished with Elijah. Although Elijah heard from God and knew the Lord would send fire from heaven to answer his prayers, the prophet needed to understand the voice of God. The Lord showed that He was not in the earthquake or in the wind. Instead, the Almighty spoke to Elijah in a still, small voice.

Elijah believed he was the only person who truly served Jehovah. When he faced off against 450 prophets of Baal, he embraced the overwhelming odds against him with great faith and tenacity because he knew the Lord was on his side. God later informed Elijah that the Almighty had reserved to Himself seven thousand who had neither bowed down to Baal nor kissed him.

The odds seemed much better for Elijah. It felt good to know he was not alone, but the Lord knew that Elijah needed more than just knowledge of other believers; he needed a friend. He needed a young man to mentor. He needed to pass his mantle to the next generation. Therefore, God in His infinite wisdom met the need of Elijah by telling him to anoint Elisha.

What can we do to help a younger person grow in God?

A. Elisha Accepted the Call

When Elijah encountered Elisha, the young man had other ventures on his mind. In fact, Elisha had devoted himself to farming. Demonstrating the hard work that would make him a go-getter in the kingdom of God, Elisha plowed the fields right alongside one of his twelve oxen.

Rather than speaking to Elisha, Elijah simply cast his mantle upon him. After such an ostentatious showing in his defeat of the prophets of Baal, perhaps Elijah chose a more subtle means to communicate given his encounter with the still, small voice of God. When the mantle touched Elisha, he likely felt like God had sent a lightning bolt down from heaven. The miracle-working power flowing through Elijah's mantle was undeniable.

Elisha wanted to accept the call, but first he asked for permission to go back and kiss his father and mother. Elijah asked what he had done to Elisha and even told him to "go back." Elisha knew what God wanted him to do. He immediately slew his oxen and prepared them as a meal for the people around him. Elisha was so hungry to fulfill the call of God that he would not turn back.

B. I Will Pursue God's Call

We too must embrace God's call wholeheartedly. We must not only answer the call; we must also pursue it. We must be willing to give up everything that would hinder us from accepting what God has for us. Let us pursue our calling with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Callings require us to give up something. Elisha gave up his plowing. Later on in the New Testament, fishermen forsook their nets to follow Jesus. In both cases, God recognized the industriousness of the individuals. Both Elisha and the fishermen—who would become the apostles—demonstrated strong work ethic. When the prophet passed by, Elisha could not ignore the call. When one who was greater than all the prophets walked into those fishermen's lives, they could not continue their old lifestyles.

We should not nonchalantly accept God's call on our lives. Once we receive it, we must pursue it vigorously. Previous generations of Christians used to sing and talk about putting their hands to the "gospel plow." They recognized the hard work of plowing and sowing the seed of the Word. Like Elisha, they knew that God could give them a fruitful harvest.

II. THE MANTLE PASSED TO ELISHA


Elisha faithfully served Elijah. While some might have seen him as merely Elijah's servant, Elisha recognized the importance of being the apprentice to such a great mentor. Previous generations understood the value of an apprentice learning a trade from someone with mastery in a particular area. In fact, apprenticeships served as an informal education system for many cultures. Parents sought the best apprenticeships for their children. They considered it an honor for their progeny to work with the pros.

The mentor also benefited by being able to pass along a needed trade or skill. Therefore, society also benefited. The northern kingdom of Israel definitely needed a new prophet given all the apostasy in the land. In a world full of Baal worshipers and the prophets of Baal, Elijah appreciated having such a capable young man who would follow in his steps.

Many might have wished for such an honor. Second Kings 2 mentions the "sons of the prophets." These individuals represented a guild of prophets. Not everyone could gain entry into their organization. In fact, the prophet Amos is rather famous for stating that he was neither a prophet nor a son of a prophet (Amos 7:14). Amos did not mean that his father was not a prophet. Instead, he was stating that he was not a part of one of these groups.

Aside from sins and weights, what else might we need to remove from our lives in order to fully embrace God's call?

Teacher Option:

A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit. 

As Elijah prepared for the Lord to take him up into heaven in a whirlwind, even these sons of the prophets had enough knowledge to know what the Lord had in mind. But they lacked the steadfastness of Elisha. On three separate occasions, Elijah tried to separate himself from Elisha. Elisha consistently refused to go away. Elisha chose to cleave instead of leave. He demonstrated the same tenacity as when he felt the mantle of Elijah and embraced his calling.

Why do you think God honors determination?

A. Elisha Requested a Double Portion

Elisha not only showed himself to be tenacious, but he also exhibited the strong desire of someone who truly understood the power of God Almighty. Some of his determination may have arisen from the miracle he saw Elijah perform right before his flight took off. Elijah took his mantle, wrapped it together, and smote the waters of the Jordan River so they were divided. The miracle hearkened back to God parting the Red Sea for Moses. Even more importantly, the miracle brought to mind Moses' successor, Joshua, who led the Israelites across the parted Jordan. Just as Moses passed a metaphorical mantle to Joshua, Elijah would pass a literal and spiritual mantle to Elisha.

But Elisha could not be timid if he wanted to receive all the Lord had in store for him. When Elijah asked what was to be done for Elisha before Elijah departed into heaven, Elisha asked for a double portion of the spirit of Elijah to be on him. Appreciating his zeal while also recognizing the difficulty of the request, Elijah told Elisha he had asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, seeing Elijah taken up into heaven would grant Elisha's desire.

What would you like God to do for you that goes beyond the ordinary and would be a great leap of faith?

B. Elisha Took Up Elijah's Role

Elisha continued to show that he would willingly give up anything to embrace the call of God. At his initial calling, he had slaughtered his oxen. Back then, Elijah had told Elisha to "go back." Elisha respectfully and firmly refused. He felt power when the mantle touched him, and he would not give up.

At the Jordan River, Elisha tore his clothes and took up the mantle of Elijah. When he needed to cross the Jordan, he took the mantle of Elijah and smote the waters, asking, "Where is the LORD God of Elijah?" (II Kings 2:14). God immediately revealed that He was not only Elijah's Lord; He was also Elisha's Lord. God confirmed that He was with Elisha just as He had been with Elijah.

Elisha went on to perform many miracles. He saw God use him in similar ways as the prophet Elijah. He also saw God move in new ways in his life. While God empowered Elijah to perform seven miracles, He granted Elisha fourteen miracles. The double portion turned out to be quite literal. However, Elisha died not having seen the final miracle. Perhaps he thought the Lord had not fulfilled the request numerically but had essentially lived

up to the promise made by Elijah. It is also possible the Lord revealed the final miracle to Elisha before he died, but Scripture does not tell us.

Elisha was part of one final miracle after he died. A dead man was thrown into a cave and came in contact with the bones of the prophet Elisha. The dead man revived. Both Elijah and Elisha had prayed for the sons of two different women to be revived. God answered both times. With this final miracle in the cave, God had shown double resurrection power in the ministry of Elisha.

C. I Will Not Be Discouraged from Pursuing God's Call

Hopefully, the story of Elisha inspires us to pursue the call of God. We must not only seek the will and call of God; we must also pursue it. Along the way, we may get discouraged. No doubt Elisha experienced seasons when he longed to see his ministry take flight. While he faithfully and obediently served Elijah, he had big dreams. His aspirations had to be tempered until God was ready to call Elijah away.

The situation could have created some tension between Elijah and Elisha. Each time Elijah told Elisha to depart from him, Elisha could have taken it personally. He could have allowed hard feelings to seep into his heart. Instead, Elisha remained steadfast. He knew what the Lord had in mind, and he was doggedly determined to be at Elijah's side in order to reap a double portion of his spirit.

We too must avoid the trap of impatience. Pursuing the call of God requires tenacity, but sometimes patient tenacity is the order of the day. The Book of James tells us, "But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James 1:4). We may feel fully formed and ready to step out by faith. Yet God, our pastor, and mentors may recognize that we still need to grow in certain areas. We may also need to be pruned. The Lord and our spiritual leaders may see areas of our lives that could prove to be a hindrance to our ministry. Faithfully submitting to the people of God in our lives can sometimes be difficult, but we must honor them.

The situation, however, may feel exasperating. We may feel like we have passed test after test, yet the Lord and our spiritual authority may have more tests in mind so we can fully demonstrate our faithfulness. We must not give up.

What do you need to do to accept God's timing in your life?

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

The boy did things all other boys did. He played with his friends, rode his bike, and he collected baseball cards, amassing a collection of the all-time greatest. Some cards were completely off limits. He would never trade some of the best players in history who would live on in the American imagination long after their playing days ended.

As the young man began to mature, the Lord started talking to him and shifted his focus. He was still a kid, so he still acted like a kid, but the Holy Spirit began to move in his heart. The Lord started impressing him to consider what was truly important in his life. The boy started to wonder if he had put some things above God.

When his Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, and pastors talked about idols, the young man thought he had no idols. He had never bowed down to a statue or kissed it. The whole idea of anyone having idols seemed completely absurd.

But then they started talking about hero worship. Could heroes become idols? If that were so, he had some very real heroes in the baseball world. He imagined hitting the grand slam that won the World Series. But had his dreams and imagination turned his heart from simple play to entertaining idols?

The more the young man thought about all the time he devoted to collecting and trading baseball cards and listening to baseball games, the more he thought he might have some very real idols in his life. But what should he do?

He wrestled with these thoughts for a while. When he was truly honest with himself, he realized the baseball cards and the veneration of the players had gone beyond mere admiration and had become idolatrous. He made the difficult decision to burn his baseball cards. The cards went up in smoke like some sort of weird modern-day sacrifice to the Lord.

But God honored the young man's sacrifice. His willingness to destroy his idols demonstrated that the Lord could use him. He accepted the call to the ministry. He worked in Christian education, pastored, and held national ministries. In Bible trivia about who's who in the Christian world, he would be one of the answers to one of the questions. He continued to walk with God and be a shining example for others. Although sometimes in the spotlight, he encouraged others to be part of God's special forces.

Like Elisha, he was a special man who accepted the call by sacrificing what was important to him. He left it all behind. He pursued God's call with vigor, and future generations continue to reap the benefits.

Prayer Focus

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

- To actively pursue the call of God
- To be discipled by someone and to disciple someone

3.4

HEALING FOR THE OUTSIDER

FOCUS VERSES

II Kings 5:3, 14

³ And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy.

.....

¹⁴ Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

LESSON TEXT

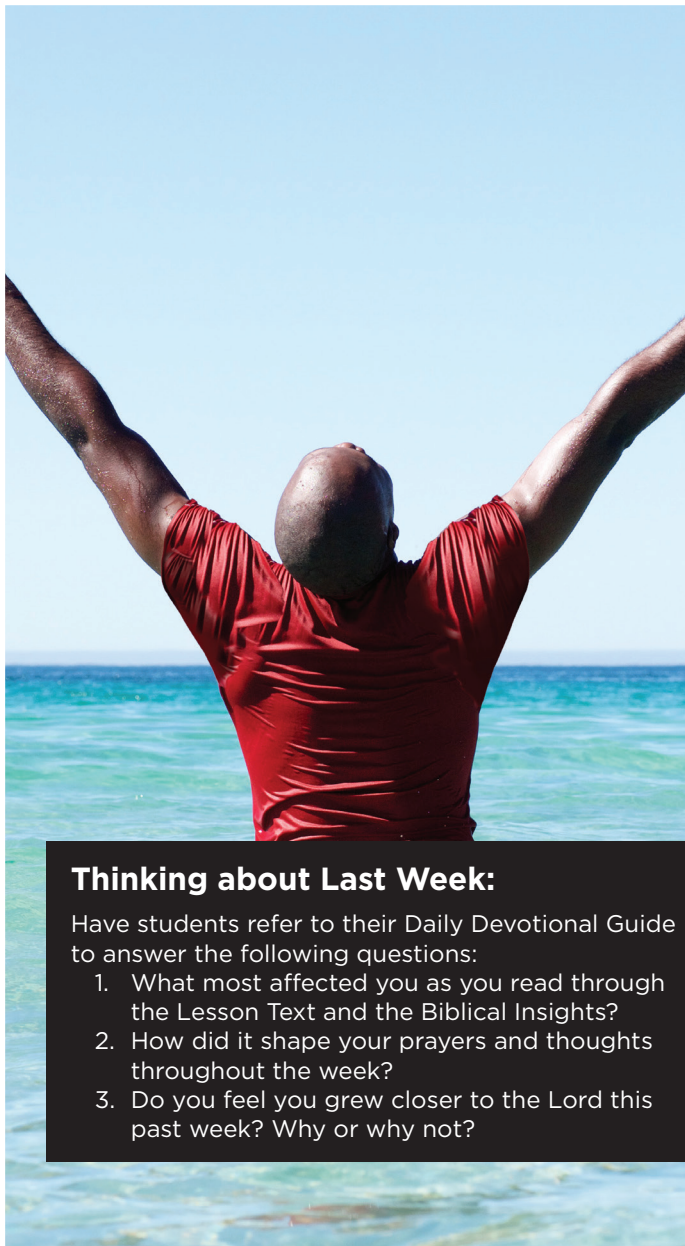
II Kings 5:1-14

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God honors obedience.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will obey even when God's commands are unusual.



Thinking about Last Week:

Have students refer to their Daily Devotional Guide to answer the following questions:

1. What most affected you as you read through the Lesson Text and the Biblical Insights?
2. How did it shape your prayers and thoughts throughout the week?
3. Do you feel you grew closer to the Lord this past week? Why or why not?

SG TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: What's the best life advice you've ever received from an unlikely source?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

I. THE FAITH OF NAAMAN'S MAID

» *How can we know God is calling on us to speak up and give our testimony?*

A. Syria's War with Israel

B. I Will Share God's Good News Even with Those Who Hurt Me

» *How can we help hurting people receive healing for their wounds?*

II. NAAMAN'S ENCOUNGER WITH ELISHA

A. Naaman Sought for the Prophet **I** **V**

» *How can we recognize when someone is not seeking an opportunity to do evil to us, but God is creating an opportunity for healing and salvation?*

B. Elisha's Unusual Instructions

C. God's Plans Often Challenge Our Expectations

» *What happens when we make our expectations more important than God's plan?*

III. NAAMAN RECEIVED HIS HEALING

A. Naaman Listened to His Servants (Again)

B. Naaman Obeyed and Was Healed

C. I Will Obey Even When God's Commands Are Unusual

» *What miracle have you heard about where God moved in a mysterious way?*

Internalizing the Message

Prayer Focus

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

- To share God's Word even with people who have hurt us
- To obey God even when His commands are unconventional

LESSON CONNECTION

Military leaders prefer the predictable. They like to be strategic and set up a solid battle plan that will enable them to defeat the enemy decisively and efficiently. Sometimes, they can become resistant to different ways of doing things.

Generals and admirals carefully consider the field of battle. They plan for varying terrains. They account for land, sea, and air as they look for victory. But new settings of warfare have caused many problems. Jungles are odd terrain. Urban warfare introduces civilians into the battlefield. Warfare has greatly changed due to these new monkey wrenches being thrown into the mix.

Present-day generals cannot simply train their soldiers to match wits with enemies on the battlefield by having key knowledge of what the enemy will do because the knowledge changes over time. The tactics that worked in World War II did not work in the Vietnam War. Since the Vietcong did not have a centralized command, various ground leaders plotted their own ways of doing things. Similarly, insurgents in places like Iraq and Afghanistan do not look to a chief commander to plot all their objectives. Therefore, soldiers and military leaders find it very difficult to deal with these groups. The predictability of warfare disappeared a long time ago and will probably not reemerge. Even superior weapons, vehicles, and technology cannot ensure wins.

But one thing has not changed. Soldiers must be able to trust each other and their leaders. If they cannot, they will certainly lose the battle. Alexander the Great knew the value of trusting his men. One day Alexander received a letter as he lay in bed convalescing. He fought alongside his soldiers, so he often had to recover from wounds. The letter he read could have wounded him even further. It spoke of the Persians having swayed his personal physician to their side.

That same doctor soon appeared on the scene to provide Alexander with a remedy. As the doctor handed him his medicine, the general handed the doctor the letter he had received accusing the physician of being a spy. As the doctor read the letter, Alexander drank the medicine he had just received. He completely trusted the doctor and boldly swallowed the liquid that could have ended his life.

In life, we all face battles. The landscape of spiritual warfare and real problems has become increasingly unpredictable. Thankfully, our God knows all and sees all. No matter what new tactics the enemy tries, we must trust the Lord. We must honor the Lord with our obedience. Sometimes the enemy's new strategies may require the Lord to answer us in unconventional ways. God's commands may defy our expectations, just as they did for Naaman. But it is better to trust in the Lord and receive our healing than to defy God.

BIBLE LESSON

I. THE FAITH OF NAAMAN'S MAID

The story of Naaman focuses on an outsider to the faith of Israel. Naaman might have always remained an outsider to the things of God, not only because of his Syrian heritage, but also because of his leprosy. We would be hard pressed to find an individual more outside of the good graces of God than Naaman, but God had a beautiful plan for his life. The Lord strategically placed a young Israelite girl in his household. She was a slave as a victim of war, but she was part of God's plan.

The young maid had survived a great test, and when the opportunity presented itself, she shared her testimony. While she could have felt deep resentment toward Naaman and his wife since they were Syrian slave masters, she showed love and care for her captors. She told her mistress, Naaman's wife, that she wished her master could be with the prophet in Samaria. Surely Naaman would be cured of his illness.

Although slaves were often forbidden to speak, she spoke up at the right time. Her faith overcame her fear. Her knowledge of the prophet and the miraculous power he wielded by the authority of God set in motion a series of events that would see Naaman, the outsider, become an insider in the kingdom of God.

How can we know God is calling on us to speak up and give our testimony?

A. Syria's War with Israel

Naaman must have felt hopeless, but he was used to feeling in control. He possessed a high rank in the army, and Scripture describes him as a mighty man of valor. Nevertheless, all his might could not overcome the dreadful leprosy that plagued him.

Naaman's actions also come into question when we think about Syria's war with Israel. The Syrians were also known as the Arameans, a name associated with the Aramaic language. Throughout the pages of the Bible, the Syrians and the Israelites fiercely rivaled each other, often in war. They fought over territory and killed, slaughtered, and enslaved each other.

The situation would grow even worse. While II Kings 5 contains the story of Naaman, II Kings 8 features the narrative of Elisha proclaiming that Hazael would be king of Syria. When Elisha prophesied to Hazael, he could not help but weep for all the slaughter and devastation Hazael would cause. He would kill Israelite young men, dash their children to pieces, and rip open pregnant women.

All these tragedies reveal the deep-seated hatred between the two nations. The Lord showed extreme favor by even opening up the possibility for Naaman to be healed. But somehow a young maid who might have lost family to Naaman's sword shared the healing power of God with her captor.

B. I Will Share God's Good News Even with Those Who Hurt Me

We too face the challenge of sharing the good news of God with those who have hurt us. We may have solid reasons to withhold what we know about God from people who have treated us awfully. But those are human reasons. We must rise above our humanity and see spiritually. We must tell a bullying coworker about the power of God. We must show grace and mercy to a hard-nosed, unforgiving boss. We must speak up to help a complaining neighbor. Although we may think we have found a time to be silent, the Lord may actually be calling on us to speak.

God may be trying to teach these hard-hearted individuals something, and God may be trying to help us learn something, too. Hurting people hurt other people. Although we do not justify or condone the actions of those who hurt us, we must realize others may have hurt them. A poor upbringing or abusive people in their lives may have taught them the wrong way to interact with others. Sometimes the hurt and abuse people fling at us will not end until we refuse to pass along the hurt to someone else—until we choose to be part of the healing process.

How can we help hurting people receive healing for their wounds?

II. NAAMAN'S ENCOUNTER WITH ELISHA

Once Naaman heard about the wonder-working prophet, he wanted to meet him. Naaman did not care that he was a Syrian and Elisha was an Israelite. Naaman did not care that he only had secondhand information from a lowly maid. Naaman would do whatever it took to meet the prophet and receive his healing.

A. Naaman Sought for the Prophet

Given his elite status in Syria, Naaman could appeal to the Syrian king for help. Pleased with Naaman's military exploits, the king of Syria emphatically told him to go. The king also informed Naaman that he would send a letter to the Israelite king to grease the wheels of diplomacy and help Naaman to return to Syria free of leprosy.

Teacher Option:

A supplemental image is available in the Resource

Kit. I

Captain Naaman immediately set out on his 135-mile journey from Syria to Israel. Naaman spared no expense. He took ten talents of silver, six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of clothes. These gifts reveal his wealth and power. He had the means to try to buy his healing. He also had the ability to protect himself, his goods, and his entourage from bandits. No one would dare attack such a mighty warrior.

The trip did not go as planned because the king of Israel reacted very negatively to the letter. Incredulously, the king tore his clothes and asked if he were God to kill, make alive, and curse a man of leprosy. The bewildered king thought the king of Syria was picking a fight with him. If Naaman could not be healed, more wars might break out between the two nations. They

already coexisted in a very tenuous relationship—a powder keg that could explode into full-blown war at any moment.

B. Elisha's Unusual Instructions

Providentially Elisha heard about the king and stepped in to help out his poor, perplexed monarch. Elisha told the king to send Naaman to him. Although the king could not make alive or heal anyone, through the power of the Almighty, Elisha could raise the dead and be a vessel for healing. Elisha confidently proclaimed that Naaman would know that there was a prophet in Israel.

Naaman must have felt very excited as he approached Elisha's house. His miracle was in reach of his soon-to-be leprosy-free hands. No doubt Naaman made sure to follow all the proper protocols. As an elite official, he would treat the prophet with respect and reward him for his healing.

Naaman approached the house of the man of God with his horses and chariot. He stood at Elisha's door, preparing to show proper respect to the one he thought had healing power in his hands. Then the unexpected happened. The prophet did not even bother to come out and greet him. Instead, he sent out a lowly messenger with a strange command. If Naaman wanted to be healed, he needed to go and wash seven times in the Jordan River. If he did, his flesh would be restored, and Naaman would be cleansed of his leprosy. Naaman would be healed and made whole of his ravaging disease.

He was incensed. How dare this Israelite prophet so greatly disrespect him! How could he not be bothered to come out of his house and talk to Naaman? What gave him the right to tell a Syrian captain to go wash in the lowly Jordan given the far better Syrian rivers? Naaman's rage almost caused him to lose out on his miracle.


C. God's Plans Often Challenge Our Expectations

Before we think Naaman foolish for flying off the handle, let us realize that we too can come close to missing out on something God has for us because His plans fail to meet our expectations.

Although the Bible encourages us to come to the Lord expectantly, we should do so with a heart of faith and a hand to God that does not include a huge list of demands. We may think our promised miracle is coming down easy street with a parade full of angels. Then God sends us on a detour down a winding, dusty road and asks us to do something totally different. We can get angry. We can question God. We can lose our faith if we are not careful.

God has greater plans for us than we can begin to imagine. Our healing or the answer to our prayer will swerve into unfamiliar territory. Our questions will rise as our faith wanes. But we must

How can we recognize when someone is not seeking an opportunity to do evil to us, but God is creating an opportunity for healing and salvation?

Teacher Option:
A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit. 

What happens when we make our expectations more important than God's plan?

remain steadfast. We must not give up. We must be obedient even when God's plan challenges our expectations.

III. NAAMAN RECEIVED HIS HEALING

Furiously, Naaman prepared to leave right away. He could not believe he had wasted so much time on a fool's errand. Even worse, the prophet had taken advantage of the situation to make an idiot out of him. The prophet was probably inside his house, making jokes about the "mighty foolish" Syrian captain who thought an Israelite prophet would actually help a despised Syrian.

A. Naaman Listened to His Servants (Again)

Naaman thought Elisha would come outside, call on the name of his God, and strike his hand over the place of the leprosy to provide healing. But God once again used Naaman's servants to place him on the right path. Just as the words of the Israelite maid had set him on a course to be healed, his servants redirected their angry master. They might have feared his ire, but they stood up and spoke the truth anyway. They asked Naaman if he would have done the prophet's bidding if he had demanded some great thing. If Naaman would have gone the extra mile, his servants wondered why he would refuse to wash and be clean.

B. Naaman Obeyed and Was Healed

Common sense won the day. He had traveled all that way. Naaman's anger quelled as the captain went down to the Jordan River and dipped in it seven times. God miraculously provided his healing. His flesh was restored as though it were the flesh of a little child. Naaman was clean.

C. I Will Obey Even When God's Commands Are Unusual

We must make the commitment to obey the commands of the Lord even when they seem unusual. We should realize God was not asking Naaman to do something harmful to himself. Whenever we feel that God has spoken to us, we must be careful to listen for the right voice.

Still, the Lord's commands may be unconventional and unexpected. But that's what miracles are. They defy the laws of physics. They defy the understanding of doctors. They go beyond the natural. That is why miracles are supernatural.

What miracle have you heard about where God moved in a mysterious way?

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Workers at a power company in the Pacific Northwest gathered for a brainstorming session to address the issue of frozen power lines. Everyone in the meeting knew the cost and danger of frozen power lines. Families needed heat in the winter. Damaged power lines could cost lives and money. The perennial problem meant the team must work together to find a positive answer.

At the same time, the solution needed to consider worker safety. Workers already had a dangerous job in the best of times. Adding snow and ice to the mix exacerbated the situation. Several experienced power-line workers were available to offer suggestions for dealing with the problem of power lines made heavy by freezing rain.

The group brainstormed for a while. They recognized the challenge, considered various alternatives, and presented potential solutions. The meeting appeared to be going quite well. Yet in the end, none of the solutions voiced in the meeting would win the day. Their answer would come through an unpredictable route that began when the group took a break.

During the break, some of the power-line workers discussed weird things they had seen on the job. One told a harrowing story of being chased by a bear. Another worker humorously suggested they should just put honeypots on top of the power-line poles. A bear would shake the poles to get the honey. As a bonus, the power lines would be freed from the heavy ice. When someone wondered how they could get the honey on top of the poles, someone jokingly suggested a helicopter. The group laughed and returned to the meeting.

One of the meeting leaders heard the exchange about the bears during the break. He asked for workers to recount their conversation and share their suggestions. Everyone likely thought the story was just a good way to inject some positive feelings and inspiration into a hardworking group. Little could they know that the story would lead to the ultimate solution.

The jest of using helicopters to place honeypots on the poles reminded a woman in the meeting of her time working in a M.A.S.H. unit in the army. Helicopters often landed to pick up the wounded and take them to the military hospital. These whirlybirds kicked up a lot of wind. She wondered if the wind generated by helicopter blades would be powerful enough to knock ice off power lines. It turned out she was right. Helicopters could solve the problem, ensure that families had power, and keep workers safe.

As in the story of Naaman, sometimes the solution that seems like a joke or something completely unpredictable turns out to be the right answer.

Prayer Focus

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

- To share God's Word even with people who have hurt us
- To obey God even when His commands are unconventional



SERIES 1: JESUS TEACHES US TO PRAY

Jesus invites us to pray, and He even shares a prayer request of His own: pray for laborers. In His compassion, He invites those laborers to come unto Him and rest, and ultimately prays for all of us—even with our personality differences—to be one.

SERIES 2: JOHN - I AM SAYINGS

This series explores four of the seven “I am” statements of Jesus found in the Gospel of John. These sayings have been the focus of countless studies and for good reason. They reveal much about Christ, the human manifestation of the invisible God. These proclamations are important to Oneness believers, for they explicitly identify Jesus as the “I AM” of the Old Testament. Furthermore, they are vital for believers who desire to be Christlike. This series will teach us much about the Godhead but much more about what it means to be like Christ, the incarnation of the I AM.

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