ADULT LESSON GUIDE SUMMER 2024

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JESUS MINISTERS THROUGH US

The Disciples in Action

FAITH PASSAGES

The Heroes of Faith in Action

LAST THINGS

Living in the Last Days

Egypt: 'open thy mouth





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GOD'S WORD

FOR LIFE

ADULT LESSON GUIDE
SUMMER 2025

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*PS indicates Pentecost Sunday.

*HS indicates Heritage Sunday.

EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor in Chief: Robin Johnston Associate Editor in Chief: Lee Ann Alexander Curriculum Director: LJ Harry

WRITERS: Terry Baughman, Jonathan Copeland, LJ Harry, David Norris, Jacob Palma, Sarah Smith, Sean Smith

LESSON GUIDE

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HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE

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.



Series Overview

SG TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: What images and ideas first come to mind when you think of

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connecti

- HOMECOMING
- HOMECOMING
 A Jesus Tought in the Synapogue in Nazareth
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- IL JESUS SENT HIS TWELVE DISCIPLES

 - A. Although Rejected in Nazareth, Jesus Sent His Disciples to Minister
 B. Jesus Ministered through the Twelve to Preach and Work Wonders
 Discuss how you can work together with others in your church to serve C. I Will Surrender to Jesus to Minister through Me

Internalizing the Message

Payer Facue. Least the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus: - For food to enable us to believe His simple promises, both to receive His Spirit and to Anill His minision - For God to increase our faith to see everything He has spoken come to

SG 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.

LESSON CONNECTION

SUMMER LESSON 1.1

A young evangelist was exercising faith and boldly p veryone in the house who had not received the Spirit so that right. He carrestly desired to see people receiv Ghost, but he attempted to do it in his own strength, musterin hidden reservoir of power and authority. At the end of the sen people received the Spirit, while others did not.

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In the answer did not come quickly, the evangelist co g for all who came for healing. He also continued preach to J deux Christ and the born-again experience as the ge for all people today. Through zeveral years of ministry many respond to the gospel message and he has seen Ge es of healing and deliverance.

During one especially powerful worship service, Go him and it seemed like a momentary illumination a of faith in prayer: "God, it is the power of the Cross, break the bondage of sin to change lives."

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The evangelist finally realized God has never given us the power to head at our own discretion or to impart the Spirit to everyone in the house housing power working in those who believe, Mreades happen. Lives are changed. Bondage is broken. Healing begins. Jesus is exatled as we allow thin to be glorified in our ministry, in our working, and through

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

The Temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed by Nebuch in S86 BC, and the majority of survivors had been m Babylon to live out their lives in captivity. Israel could colleorate feast days at the Temple. Sabbath observar not the same. Possessions were few and the Jews memory to recite Scripture and pass on their tradition

he exact origins of the synagogues in Israel are un trality of the synagogue as a community meetin sed sometime around the third century BC. As th d from long years in Babylon, they longed to rebu

nty years after the first deportation. ty years after the first deportation, the exiles ing under Persian King Cyrus. Whithout a Temple for ional feasts and sacrificial workship, the people s ing in their communities for Sadbub where the pro-ing in their communities for Sadbub where the pro-end existing buildings to accommodate these gather inset word for synapogue means. "meeting or gather her." These community buildings became an imp for religious, social, and educational life. Even opuses were regarded as the central spaces for p course were regarded as the central spaces for p inseth communituration in the Lew, al what parts inseth communituration. ish co

A. Jesus Taught in the Synagogue in Nazareth

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and heal those who needed healing. so circulated about the mirscless and teaching in the returned home after spending time in what of a local here—or at least a curically commis Sababat. Josur, but interpreter to read, a commis Sababat. Josur, but interpreter to read, a commis Sababat. Josur, but interpreter to read, a prescribed weekly reading schedule with-ture from the Law, the Prophers, and the W iming makes this holy moment even more dar de the scrold lession (what we know as chapt

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

tal image is available in the Resource Kit. 🕅

hardes Mahaney (Charlie) was raised in poverty, the son of an alco World War II veteran. His more supported her four children by ydru as a child and grew u on the stretsk. A life of crime, gang, drugs, and al controlled his life. Eventually his crimes caught up with him and he served on a prison farm.

He was still a teenager when his mother died, and his life went from bad as he delved into the occult and began to be tormented by evil spirit his changed when a preacher knocked on his door and invited him to Pastor Derver Stanford mentored and discipted Charlie until he was fi Ho Spirit, his life was transformed, and God called Him into the minist

the Mahaney evangelized across North America and arc ty-four years, preaching revivals in local churches, crusa tings, and conferences. He presched in prisons and school is ministry and his influence was fell everywhere he trav-kely beginning, this man was raised up to minister to m, ut the grace of God and His power to change lives.

ul reminded the Corinthian believers: "For ye see your calling, bri at not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not man led: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to co se; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confoun ich are mighty:" (C corinthians 126-27).

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other end of the spectrum, some with extraordinary resources cation show incredible humility toward God and respond to th up fervor and passion. We do well not to judge who will or to God's message; salvation is available to all who will come to us anyone who is willing to be used by Him and give the glor;

- up in prayer and consider the following topics of focus: enable us to believe His simple promises, both to receive His
- ad the group in prays For God to enable us Spirit and to fulfill His For God to increase ase our faith to see everything He has spoken co

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 throughout to aid leaders in navigating the content.

Contains a suggested discussion question

Gives direction regarding a media callout that is available

- Signals the information can be used in a SG Small Group setting.
 - Shows a video component is available to help illustrate the lesson information.

Indicates an image is available to help (\mathbf{I}) illustrate the lesson information.

THE GOD'S WORD FOR LIFE PODCAST

LEARNING AND LIVING OUT GOD'S WORD FOR LIFE



Your disciple making toolbox has another tool. Each Friday at noon (Eastern), God's Word for Life airs a new podcast episode. Listen as LJ Harry, our podcast host, walks through the upcoming Bible story and discussion questions to help you to prepare for Sunday before Sunday. 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. Like the guides, each episode features discussion questions to help us apply what we are hearing and start holy conversations.

Together, let's learn and live out God's Word for Life.







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:





JUNE 1, 2025

EQUIPPED AND EMPOWERED

FOCUS VERSES Mark 6:4-7. 12-13 ⁴ But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house. ⁵ And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. ⁶ And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching. ⁷And he called unto him the twelve, and

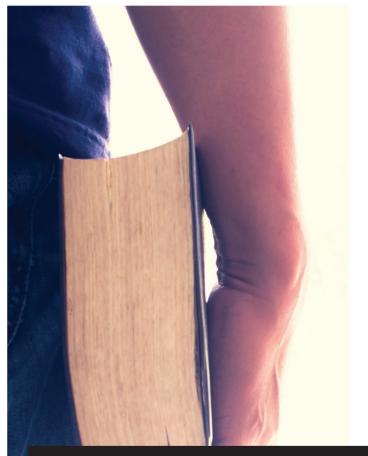
began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits.

¹² And they went out, and preached that men should repent. ¹³ And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.

LESSON TEXT Mark 6:1-13

TRUTH ABOUT GOD God is greater than all our preconceptions.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE I will surrender to Jesus to minister through me.



Series Overview:

In His grace, Jesus has chosen to minister through His people to other people who need Him. Watch as Jesus sent disciples to work miracles and even used them to serve lunch to a hungry city. Open your heart to ask Jesus to use you as He used them.

SG TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: What images and ideas first come to mind when you think of outreach?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

I. HOMECOMING

- A. Jesus Taught in the Synagogue in Nazareth
 - » What do you think was going through the minds of those in the synagogue as they heard Jesus claim to be the Messiah?
- B. Jesus' Family and Hometown Friends Rejected Him as Messiah igcup
 - » Have you ever experienced people close to you not seeing you for who you are? How did that make you feel?
- C. Nazareth Missed Out on Miracles because of Their Unbelief
 - » What would have been possible in Nazareth if their response had been acceptance and faith?
- D. I Will Believe Jesus Is Who He Said He Is
 - » How does our belief about Jesus affect our ability to believe in miracles, signs, and wonders?

II. JESUS SENT HIS TWELVE DISCIPLES

- A. Although Rejected in Nazareth, Jesus Sent His Disciples to Minister
- B. Jesus Ministered through the Twelve to Preach and Work Wonders » Discuss how you can work together with others in your church to serve.
- C. I Will Surrender to Jesus to Minister through Me

Internalizing the Message \blacksquare

Prayer Focus

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

- For God to enable us to believe His simple promises, both to receive His Spirit and to fulfill His mission
- For God to increase our faith to see everything He has spoken come to pass in our generation

LESSON CONNECTION

young evangelist was exercising faith and boldly proclaimed everyone in the house who had not received the Spirit would do so that night. He earnestly desired to see people receive the Holy Ghost, but he attempted to do it in his own strength, mustering up some hidden reservoir of power and authority. At the end of the service, some people received the Spirit, while others did not.

Everywhere he went he prayed for those who were sick, deaf, unable to walk, and blind. Though some claimed healing, there were no significant physical signs that miracles had taken place. The evangelist had never seen the notable miracles he believed were promised in Scripture. Did not Jesus say, "Greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father" (John 14:12)?

Though the answer did not come quickly, the evangelist continued praying for all who came for healing. He also continued preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and the born-again experience as the biblical message for all people today. Through several years of ministry, he has seen many respond to the gospel message and he has seen God work miracles of healing and deliverance.

During one especially powerful worship service, God's Spirit moved on him and it seemed like a momentary illumination as he spoke a word of faith in prayer: "God, it is the power of the Cross, and You alone can break the bondage of sin to change lives."

Immediately, a newcomer rushed to the altar and began calling out to God. Across the altar area, others began to weep and rejoice. An older gentleman diagnosed with cancer walked to the front and began weeping in the presence of God as others prayed for him. No doubt miracles were taking place. In that moment an understanding came to the evangelist: any great miracle is from God. God uses us to preach, pray, worship, and respond to the moving of His Spirit, but God alone heals, and only Jesus fills hungry hearts with His Spirit.

The evangelist finally realized God has never given us the power to heal at our own discretion or to impart the Spirit to everyone in the house. God has called us to proclaim the good news of the gospel and God's healing power working in those who believe. Miracles happen. Lives are changed. Bondage is broken. Healing begins. Jesus is exalted as we allow Him to be glorified in our ministry, in our worship, and through our faith.

BIBLE LESSON

I. HOMECOMING

The Temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC, and the majority of survivors had been marched to Babylon to live out their lives in captivity. Israel could no longer celebrate feast days at the Temple. Sabbath observances were not the same. Possessions were few and the Jews relied on memory to recite Scripture and pass on their traditions to their families.

While the exact origins of the synagogues in Israel are uncertain, the centrality of the synagogue as a community meeting place developed sometime around the third century BC. As the exiles returned from long years in Babylon, they longed to rebuild their community and their disrupted traditions.

Seventy years after the first deportation, the exiles began returning under Persian King Cyrus. Without a Temple for their traditional feasts and sacrificial worship, the people started meeting in their communities for Sabbath where the practice of reading from the scrolls started. They built structures or adapted existing buildings to accommodate these gatherings. The Greek word for synagogue means "meeting or gathering together." These community buildings became an important place for religious, social, and educational life. Eventually synagogues were regarded as the central spaces for prayer, Scripture reading, and instruction in the Law, all vital practices in the Jewish community.

A. Jesus Taught in the Synagogue in Nazareth

In these community gathering places Jesus interacted with the people and began His teaching ministry, as well as performing numerous miracles, often on the Sabbath Day. Not only did Jesus demonstrate He was Lord of the Sabbath, but in a practical sense, this would be the day most people gathered together in the community, giving Jesus the greatest opportunity to teach them and heal those who needed healing.

Stories circulated about the miracles and teaching of Jesus, so when He returned home after spending time in surrounding communities, He attended the synagogue in Nazareth as somewhat of a local hero—or at least a curiosity. During that homecoming Sabbath, Jesus volunteered to read, and the scroll of Isaiah was brought to Him. It has been suggested that there was a prescribed weekly reading schedule with passages of Scripture from the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. If so, the timing makes this holy moment even more dramatic. Jesus opened the scroll of Isaiah (what we know as chapter 61):

And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:17-19)

Jesus abruptly stopped reading, closed the scroll, and announced: "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21). He had everyone's attention. The room grew quiet. What was Jesus saying?

B. Jesus' Family and Hometown Friends Rejected Him as Messiah

The crowd in the synagogue in Nazareth was in awe of Jesus' words, but they were stuck on His lineage: "Is not this Joseph's son?" (Luke 4:22). They could not regard Him as a prophet or anything more because they had seen Him grow up as the carpenter's son. Plus to say Jesus was "Joseph's son" reminded them Mary had been pregnant before they were married. How many believed Mary's story that Jesus was born of a virgin?

In Mark's Gospel more questions were recorded: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us?" (Mark 6:3). The familial connection was made to humanize Jesus. They were making the point: He was just one of them. They knew His family. They knew His siblings from their birth, and they knew Jesus was conceived before marriage. It was all there boiling beneath the surface of their questions. Mark's last statement sums up their questioning: "And they were offended at him" (Mark 6:3).

Jesus' own family members may have been embarrassed by His bold claim to be the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. But if it were not true, it was tantamount to blasphemy.

Jesus "read the room" and responded: "A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, among his own kin, and in his own house" (Mark 6:4). He may have looked at some of His brothers when He said that last line. Then He referenced two examples from the Scripture where the outsiders (Gentiles), not the people of Israel, received miracles and the favor of God. Those gathered in the synagogue understood Jesus' implication that they would be passed over and replaced by the Gentiles.

Their amazement plunged to anger. They all rose up, forced Him out of the city and to the edge of the hill, intending to throw Him over the cliff. They had to put the blasphemer to death because they understood Jesus was claiming to be their Messiah.

In a simple passing phrase, Luke recorded how Jesus escaped the angry crowd: "Passing through the midst of them went his way" (Luke 4:30). Did He freeze time? Did He make Himself

What do you think was going through the minds of those in the synagogue as they heard Jesus claim to be the Messiah?

Have you ever experienced people close to you not seeing you for who you are? How did that make you feel?

Teacher Option: A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. **1** invisible? Did He just blend in with the crowd? How did He just "pass through their midst?" Luke did not record it so we do not know, but it must have been miraculous to have simply walked through the angry mob bent on His death.

C. Nazareth Missed Out on Miracles because of Their Unbelief

Mark's Gospel account reveals the sad truth that Jesus only performed a few miracles in Nazareth. In fact, Mark wrote: "And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And he marvelled because of their unbelief" (Mark 6:5-6). His lack of miracles was laid at the feet of their lack of faith.

Everywhere Jesus had been, He taught from the Scriptures and healed the sick. Surely people in Nazareth had the same spiritual afflictions and physical maladies. If only they could have embraced the good news of the Savior and believed the same wonders could happen in their town, they would have seen many more miracles.

D. I Will Believe Jesus Is Who He Said He Is

Faith in Jesus yields powerful testimonies. According to Hebrews 11:6, we need to believe Jesus is and He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Even today people are skeptical of reports of miraculous healings and deliverance from addictions through prayer and faith in the name of Jesus. To many people, Jesus was just a man who lived long ago and is no longer relevant to our lives. However, those who have come to believe in Him have confidence He lives and He is ever present in our lives. He is more than an ancient teacher, a wise prophet, or a spiritual leader; He is the Lord of Glory, the one holy God who came in flesh and lived among us. He came to fulfill all righteousness and provide access to a spiritual kingdom and the promise of everlasting life in that glorious day. (See Matthew 3:14-16; John 1:1, 14.)

II. JESUS SENT HIS TWELVE DISCIPLES

After His icy rejection in Nazareth, Jesus went on to another town and continued His ministry. The mob's intent to push Jesus over the cliff to the rocks below was just the first attempt on His life. There would be other attempts, but Jesus understood His mission and His purpose would not be thwarted. Without missing a beat, Mark 6:6 transitions from "he marvelled because of their unbelief" to His continuing mission: "he went round about the villages, teaching."

A. Although Rejected in Nazareth, Jesus Sent His Disciples to Minister

Jesus multiplied His ministry when He called His closest disciples, the Twelve, and empowered them to spread the message of the Kingdom. He sent six ministry teams out by twos into the surrounding areas. The multiplication of His ministry through the What would have been possible in Nazareth if their response had been acceptance and faith?

How does our belief about Jesus affect our ability to believe in miracles, signs, and wonders? Twelve increased the spread of His influence, and many more learned of Jesus and became His followers. His fame spread through the disciples' travels and the powerful results of their ministry. They preached that people must repent. Through them, Jesus healed the sick and cast out demons. (See Mark 6:12-13.)

B. Jesus Ministered through the Twelve to Preach and Work Wonders

Jesus taught the disciples to go out in faith. He instructed them to travel light, to leave behind extra clothing, money, and food provisions. They would learn to depend on God to provide for them, relying on the kind hospitality of those to whom they ministered. The teams of disciples went out in obedience to Jesus and began to see miraculous results of their obedience and faith. They anointed the sick and saw miracles of healing. When demons manifested themselves, the disciples spoke with authority and God delivered the oppressed. They learned Jesus could also work through them to accomplish great signs and miracles they saw Jesus work.

Discuss how you can work together with others in your church to serve.

Teacher Option: A supplemental

video is available in

the Resource Kit. V

C. I Will Surrender to Jesus to Minister through Me

We can also learn what the disciples learned: Jesus can work through any obedient follower. This assignment for ministry was not just for the Twelve, or for the seventy Jesus sent out another time, or just for the first generation of believers; Jesus is still calling and commissioning disciples to go in the power of His Spirit. He has empowered and equipped us in this world to fulfill the commission and continue the purpose for which He came.

From the beginning, while Jesus was still with His disciples, He declared: "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father" (John 14:12). After giving the commission, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," Jesus assured His followers, "these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:15, 17-18).

Jesus Christ is present in every person who receives His Spirit. His promise before His ascension was: "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me . . . unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). As much as the promise of the gift of the Spirit is to "you, and to your children," so also is the calling of God to fulfill the mission of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:39). He is working in us to fulfill His purpose.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. 🕕

harles Mahaney (Charlie) was raised in poverty, the son of an alcoholic World War II veteran. His mom supported her four children by driving a taxi and cleaning hotel rooms. Charlie himself became addicted to alcohol as a child and grew up on the streets. A life of crime, gangs, drugs, and alcohol controlled his life. Eventually his crimes caught up with him and he served time on a prison farm.

He was still a teenager when his mother died, and his life went from bad to worse as he delved into the occult and began to be tormented by evil spirits. But all this changed when a preacher knocked on his door and invited him to church. Pastor Denver Stanford mentored and discipled Charlie until he was filled with the Spirit, his life was transformed, and God called Him into the ministry.

Charlie Mahaney evangelized across North America and around the world for thirty-four years, preaching revivals in local churches, crusade meetings, camp meetings, and conferences. He preached in prisons and schools. God was evident in his ministry and his influence was felt everywhere he traveled. From a most unlikely beginning, this man was raised up to minister to multiplied thousands about the grace of God and His power to change lives.

Paul reminded the Corinthian believers: "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;" (I Corinthians 1:26–27).

Some of the most seemingly unqualified people have gone on to become the most capable leaders. Some have become strong in faith and God has given them inspiring ministries of healing and deliverance. God is glorified in our transformation. He knows what we can become through His power working in us.

On the other end of the spectrum, some with extraordinary resources, talents, and education show incredible humility toward God and respond to the gospel with equal fervor and passion. We do well not to judge who will or will not respond to God's message; salvation is available to all who will come to Him, and God can use anyone who is willing to be used by Him and give the glory to Him.

Prayer Focus

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

- For God to enable us to believe His simple promises, both to receive His Spirit and to fulfill His mission
- For God to increase our faith to see everything He has spoken come to pass in our generation

THE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF PENTECOST



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?



FOCUS VERSES Acts 2:1-4

¹And when the dav of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. ² And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. ³ And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

LESSON TEXT Acts 2:1-11, 38-39

TRUTH ABOUT GOD God offers salvation to all who obey.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE I will obey God's plan of salvation.

SG TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: If you could speak any language instantly and fluently, which would it be? Why?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

- I. THE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF PENTECOST
 - A. One-Hundred-Twenty Followers of Jesus Were Unified 🕕
 - » What are some life events we as Christians live through together that bring us closer to one another and to God?
 - B. Cloven Tongues like Fire and a Rushing Mighty Wind
 - C. Everyone Was Spirit Filled and Spoke with Tongues
 - » Has anyone you know been waiting for a long time to receive the Holy Spirit? What words of encouragement can you offer to believers who are still waiting?
 - D. I Will Live Spirit Filled
 - » What are some practical ways we can demonstrate Kingdom values in our communities as individuals or as a church?

II. THE SERMON AT PENTECOST $oldsymbol{V}$

- » Without changing the forever settled message, what new methods can we try in order to reach our world today with Apostolic truth?
- A. Peter Preached the Gospel to the Crowd
- B. The Crowd Was Convicted and Responded
- C. Peter Preached God's Plan of Salvation
 - » Thinking back to your conversion, what was the fruit of your repentance?
- D. I Will Obey God's Plan of Salvation

Internalizing the Message

Prayer Focus

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

- For God to pour out His Spirit anew and afresh in our churches and in our cities
- For God to give us a spirit of unity like the 120 on the Day of Pentecost

LESSON CONNECTION

n a chapel service at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, historian and theologian Justo González preached a sermon titled "The Disempowering Spirit." In his message (accessible via the Fuller Curated podcast) González compared the diverse and cosmopolitan population of Southern California to the multicultural setting in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. González reminded the audience that, like the first church, God calls the church in all generations to bear witness to His kingdom across cultural, ethnic, and linguistic barriers.

According to him, the answer to the multicultural challenge is not in better planning, greater effort, or more resources. As important as organization is, our efforts are useless without the power of the Holy Spirit. This is precisely what the story of Pentecost is about. The Spirit, not human strategizing, empowers the church to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). To accomplish His plan, God could have caused everyone to understand the language of the disciples or allowed the various cultural groups to hear the sounds of Pentecost in their languages. As we see in Acts 2:8, God chose the latter.

González emphasized the point by explaining the necessity of the specific way the Spirit empowered the disciples and their audience on the Day of Pentecost for the future shape of the church. If God had chosen the first option, then the language of the disciples would have become the proper or normative language of the gospel. This would have given the language and culture of one group power and control over the message and tradition. By choosing the second option, God showed us that all languages and cultures are capable of hearing and sharing the truth equally.

As González put it, Pentecost was God's rejection and "final no" of any such effort to make one language or culture dominant over another in His church. Humility, not human power, is the mark of God's church. Christians should not be surprised. The Epistle to the Philippians shows us how Jesus voluntarily humbled Himself to become our Savior. Paul wrote: "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:6-7).

Pentecost is a promise for the whole human race, which comprises a diversity of languages, customs, colors, and sounds. It disempowers those who might wish to control God's kingdom, and it empowers the faithful to live as witnesses of what God is doing in the world.

BIBLE LESSON

I. THE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF PENTECOST

Jerusalem is at the center of Luke's two-volume *magnum* opus. The Gospel of Luke moves toward the holy city and ends with Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and post-resurrection commission. The Book of Acts begins in the same place with Jesus' post-resurrection message, ascension, and Pentecost. Though Acts 2:1-4 recounts the outpouring of the Spirit in fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28-32), readers can see the Spirit at work beginning in Acts 1, empowering individuals to speak and act in accordance with God's plan. However, the Spirit poured out at Pentecost marks the dawning of a new day of collective Spirit-empowerment in which "as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39) receive power to come together, organize, and testify of the resurrected Christ.

A. One-Hundred-Twenty Followers of Jesus Were Unified

People from all over the known world traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Weeks, which took place seven weeks and one day after the Passover. Hebrews called this festival *Shavuot*, but the New Testament calls it by its Greek name *Pentecost*. This festival celebrated the beginning of the harvest and commemorated the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. In his book *Pentecost and Sinai*, Sejin Park draws parallels between the Pentecost and Sinai stories, arguing that Luke clearly wanted his readers to see their connection. For example, in Exodus Moses ascended the mountain and came down with the Law; in the Book of Acts, Jesus ascended into Heaven and sent His Spirit at Pentecost. The difference is clear: Moses descended with a Law etched in stone, but at Pentecost, Jesus returned in the Spirit and wrote a new law "in their hearts." (See Jeremiah 31:33.)

Approximately 120 of Jesus' followers gathered "with one accord in one place" (Acts 2:1). Many of them had made the long trek with Jesus to Jerusalem and witnessed His death, resurrection, and ascension. Living through these events together likely unified them in a special way. The festival they were celebrating reminded them that God called them "a peculiar treasure . . . a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Exodus 19:5–6). The atmosphere was one of celebration, thanksgiving, and unity the perfect recipe for revival.

B. Cloven Tongues like Fire and a Rushing Mighty Wind

Suddenly the Spirit descended on Jesus' followers, who were united in celebration and thanksgiving. The text provides additional allusions to Sinai. Exodus 19:16–19 records similar sights and sounds at the giving of the Law: fire, smoke, and a sound like a trumpet. At Pentecost, there was an appearance of flames shaped like tongues and the sound of a violent wind. The symbolism tied this Day of Pentecost to Sinai, thus signifying a new development **Teacher Option:** A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit.

What are some life events we as Christians live through together that bring us closer to one another and to God? in God's covenant with us. Further the New Testament elsewhere uses fire and wind in relation to baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Earlier in his work, Luke cited John the Baptist's prophecy that the Messiah would baptize "with the Holy Ghost and with fire" (Luke 3:16). Writing thirty to forty years later, the apostle John recorded Jesus' description of what it means to be born of the Spirit when He told Nicodemus: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). Since Hebrews 12:29 teaches us our God is a consuming fire, it makes sense that the sights and sounds of Pentecost included fire and the sound of a rushing mighty wind (Acts 2:2).

C. Everyone Was Spirit Filled and Spoke with Tongues

If God's plan was to form a group of privileged Christians in the early church with authority to limit the power of God for future generations, we might expect to see the Spirit descending only on the twelve apostles in Acts 2. Thankfully that is not the case. The Spirit descended on *all* the people who had gathered together in "one accord in one place" (Acts 2:1).

Furthermore, if God reserved the supernatural sign of speaking in tongues for a select few, we would expect to read that only *some* of them spoke in tongues. But the text is clear that "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). God does not discriminate based on position, age, experience, or gender. The gift of the Holy Spirit is for all and God has an outpouring ready for churches today that recognize the same.

D. I Will Live Spirit Filled

Understanding Sinai's significance in light of Pentecost should help our understanding of what it means to live a Spirit-filled life. At Sinai God revealed Himself to His newly freed children, covenanted with them, and commissioned them with the task of mediating His rule and reign in the world—to be "a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Exodus 19:5–6).

At Pentecost (the new Sinai) God equipped His priestly kingdom and holy nation with His empowering presence so they could carry out His mission for them. Similarly Jesus promised the gift of the Spirit would empower us as witnesses (Acts 1:8). A Spirit-filled life means much more than speaking in tongues and enjoying personal communion with God. In addition to those blessings, living a Spirit-filled life means living as witnesses of God's kingdom in all we say and do. It means showing the world what God's kingdom looks like by how we live.

Has anyone you know been waiting for a long time to receive the Holy Spirit? What words of encouragement can you offer to believers who are still waiting?

What are some practical ways we can demonstrate Kingdom values in our communities as individuals or as a church?

II. THE SERMON AT PENTECOST

Peter's sermon at Pentecost has all the features of a persuasive speech in Luke's day, but his sermon was much more than a speech. Now that Peter was freshly Spirit filled, he was preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Peter was in Jesus' inner circle, and from Matthew 16:19, we see Jesus entrusted him with the "keys of the kingdom." Peter preached his sermon in Jerusalem, the geographical center of Luke-Acts, right after the outpouring of the Spirit. This was a sermon delivered by an important figure at a critical moment. Luke could have narrated what happened while giving the gist of what Peter preached, but instead the Spirit inspired him to arrange the narrative in the most effective way possible for his audience. Missiologists would say Luke contextualized the message: using contemporary methods without changing the timeless message.

A. Peter Preached the Gospel to the Crowd

The Greek word from which *gospel* derives signifies a proclamation of good news. According to René Padilla, author of *Misión Integral* (Integral Mission), the gospel "is the good news that God has put himself within reach of humanity... by inserting himself into human history through a gap in time-space reality" (translated from the original Spanish to English). For Padilla, this understanding provides the basis for an interpretation of the gospel that is good news in all social and cultural contexts.

This is precisely the news Peter proclaimed when he announced: "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16). The Spirit poured out on all flesh—indiscriminate of age, gender, and social status (Acts 2:17-18)—brings God close to all people regardless of where we are from. As Jesus said in John 14:17, He would go from dwelling *with* us to dwelling *in* us. This news is abundantly good news indeed.

B. The Crowd Was Convicted and Responded

Many in the crowd never believed Jesus was God manifested in flesh. For those who denied the recent news of His resurrection, Jesus' death validated their opinions of Him. Peter's sermon corrected this misunderstanding by taking his listeners back to the Scriptures. He reminded them of David's prophecies about the Messiah's suffering and vindication. Popular interpretations applied David's words to his own life experiences; however, Peter correctly interpreted the Scriptures by pointing out that David could not have been talking about himself because he was dead and buried in a tomb (Acts 2:25-29).

Peter preached that David was speaking prophetically about the promised Christ, declaring: "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses" (Acts 2:32). Peter's Spiritempowered sermon convinced the hearers of their sin. God had come in flesh as their Messiah and they crucified Him. The power Without changing the forever settled message, what new methods can we try in order to reach our world today with Apostolic truth?

Teacher Option: A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit. **V** they felt, saw, and heard was the very Spirit of the resurrected Christ. This caused them to ask, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37).

C. Peter Preached God's Plan of Salvation

This same question appeared earlier in Luke-Acts at another pivotal moment. As John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus' ministry, he also preached the dawning of a new day in fulfillment of prophecy (Luke 3:1-9). John's audience responded by asking, "What shall we do then?" (Luke 3:10). Both groups understood the urgency of the moment. Both were essentially asking, "How can we join in what God is doing?"

John responded that their repentance—change of direction would manifest as compassion for the needy, generosity, fairness, and nonviolence. (See Luke 3:11-14.) After Jesus' resurrection Peter told his audience they must repent, be baptized in water in the name of Jesus, and they would receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38). Although the responses to the "what shall we do" question may seem unrelated, they are certainly connected.

The Book of Acts shows how the early church integrated and embodied these commandments in their preaching and practices. Directly following Peter's sermon, Luke summarized the life of the early church, writing: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers... And all that believed were together, and had all things in common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need" (Acts 2:42, 44-45). John's and Peter's responses to the "what shall we do" question show us both the plan and fruit of salvation.

Thinking back to your conversion, what was the fruit of your repentance?

D. I Will Obey God's Plan of Salvation

Acts 2:38 clearly teaches us what it means to follow Jesus as part of a global community of faith by showing us how to join what God is doing in the world. In repentance, we change direction by pledging our allegiance to Jesus as our King. This involves asking God, and sometimes others, to forgive us. We then pursue a life that reflects our commitment to loving God and our neighbors. Water baptism brings us into God's covenant community through the invocation of the name of Jesus. (Compare Numbers 6:23-27 with Acts 22:16 and James 2:7.) Spirit baptism seals us as His people and empowers us for a life on mission (Ephesians 1:13-14; Acts 1:8).

Repentance, baptism in Jesus' name, and Holy Spirit infilling with the initial sign of tongues bring us into right relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul beautifully wrote it: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (II Corinthians 5:17). God forgives our past and gives us a new family and a new future. What amazing grace!

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

There was once a great civilization that united around a singular vision. The people wanted to make a name for themselves by reaching God on their own terms. They began constructing a tower so tall it could reach into Heaven. This was nothing new. These people were only repeating what began in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve yielded to the temptation to do things their way rather than God's. In response to the arrogant tower builders, God descended, dispersed them, and confused their language so they could no longer continue their harmful project (Genesis 11:1–9).

Several millennia later, God descended upon another group united around a singular vision. But this group was not bent on making a name for itself by trying to reach God on its own terms. These people waited for God to reach them. The place of God's first visitation became known as "Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth" (Genesis 11:9). At Babel, God scattered the nations and confused their languages, but at Pentecost, God gathered the nations together and empowered them through language. In his book *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World*, Ghanaian theologian Emmanuel Lartey suggests that despite judgment on one hand and blessing on the other, Babel and Pentecost both affirm God's divine love for cultural diversity.

A recent study out of Wheaton College reports that over one-fourth of Christians speak in tongues. In 1970 there were approximately sixty-three million Pentecostals in the world; current trends indicate Pentecostals to now number around 800 million. Other studies show the largest centers of Pentecostal revival are in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. One of the defining characteristics of Pentecostalism is its ability to contextualize, meaning the Pentecostal experience makes itself at home in local cultural expressions. Anyone who has experienced Pentecost in these parts of the world or in a multicultural congregation in North America understands the diversity of sights and sounds that make up the global church. In song and dance, cadence and tradition, people all over the world see the wonders of God and hear of His mighty works in their native tongues while being united across all borders by the supernatural power of Pentecost.

Prayer Focus

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

- For God to pour out His Spirit anew and afresh in our churches and in our cities
- For God to give us a spirit of unity like the 120 on the Day of Pentecost



TWELVE TAKE-HOME BOXES

FOCUS VERSES Mark 6:40-41

⁴⁰ And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties.
⁴¹ And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided he among them all.

LESSON TEXT Mark 6:30-44

TRUTH ABOUT GOD God wants to involve us when He works miracles.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE I will serve God and allow Him to minister to others through 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: Do you ask for a box to take home leftovers, or do you leave them at the restaurant?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

- I. THE NEED
 - A. The Disciples Returned from Their Missionary Journeys, and a Hungry Multitude Gathered
 - B. The Disciples Gave Jesus What They Had
 - » What are you willing to give to Jesus? What talents, finances, or other assets can you give to Jesus for Him to bless?
 - C. I Will Give Whatever I Have to Jesus 💟
 - » How can we ever reach the population of the world? What will it take to reach them with the gospel?
 - » When have you seen sacrificial giving that exceeded all expectations?
- II. THE MIRACLE
 - A. Jesus Involved His Disciples in Serving the Multitude
 - B. Jesus Multiplied the Bread and Fish as They Served
 - C. I Will Trust Jesus Even When I Do Not Understand His Ways
 - » What simple things does God ask of us that often result in tremendous outcomes?
- III. THE MIRACLE AFTER THE MIRACLE
 - A. Twelve Baskets Were Left Over
 - B. God Rewards Those Who Serve
 - C. I Will Serve God and Allow Him to Minister to Others through Me » What are some ways we have been rewarded in our service for Christ?

Internalizing the Message 🚺

Prayer Focus

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

- For God to give us confidence that He will help us share the gospel with the world
- For God to awaken faith in us to know His Spirit is reaching for the hungry in our world

LESSON CONNECTION

rancine Jones was one of those people who could instantly make you feel at home and welcomed. Southern hospitality was her middle name. As a pastor's wife, she was accustomed to frequent visitors to their home, which usually involved gathering around the dining room table for a meal.

It was never enough to have just a meat, a vegetable, and a salad. She provided a choice of vegetables, potatoes, and perhaps a Jell-O salad or fruit salad, in addition to a garden salad. Frankie had a secret ingredient for a common garden salad. She sprinkled in about a teaspoon of granulated sugar during preparation.

She offered yeast dinner rolls or buttermilk biscuits at every meal, along with butter, honey, and jam. If that was not enough, no meal would be complete without dessert, so there were at least two or three from which to choose. It might as well have been a buffet line right there on the dining room table.

The entire table was taken with hot serving dishes, cold salads, and large dinner place settings. Any small spot remaining was filled with a pickle jar, olives, or some other condiment. Of course, there was always sweet iced tea by the gallon. Cold sweat formed on the outside of the glass tea pitcher with an abundant supply of ice cubes so refills remained just as cold as the first glass.

Then there were leftovers. Of course, there were leftovers. It would have been an embarrassment to run out of food before everyone was stuffed, so leftovers were the evidence that Francine supplied sufficient quantities of food for her guests. Anyone within driving distance went home with containers of plentiful leftovers. This wonderful display of generosity, often repeated throughout the South, created the timeworn label of "southern hospitality." It is not unique to southerners but frequently applied to anyone who displays extravagant hospitality and a warm welcome.

Actually hospitality is an ancient art modeled in Scripture. It is a biblical principle both exampled and taught as an attribute of Christian behavior. Leaders were instructed to be hospitable right along with other attributes of right living. Paul wrote: "For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate" (Titus 1:7-8).

In this lesson, we find Jesus calling for His disciples to demonstrate hospitality to the crowd gathered on the lakeshore. He taught them to honor those who made sacrifices to come to their meetings and to repay them with kindness and provisions. The resulting effect of their hospitality produced another jaw-dropping miracle at the hands of Jesus.

Who comes to mind when you hear the quality of hospitality mentioned?

BIBLE LESSON

I. THE NEED

A. The Disciples Returned from Their Missionary Journeys, and a Hungry Multitude Gathered

The excitement was electric as the disciples gathered around Jesus, eager to share the experiences of their first ministry assignment. They were talking over each other trying to tell their stories to the others and to Jesus. A few weeks prior to this reunion, Jesus had paired up the twelve disciples and sent them out into the surrounding villages and countryside. Everywhere they went, they proclaimed the message of the kingdom of God and made an appeal to repentance. Those who welcomed them and received their message witnessed miracles, healings, and spiritual deliverance in their towns. Now the disciples recounted every victory and rejoiced together that at last they were able to do the work for which they had been trained.

In the furor of their excitement, no one had taken time to prepare a meal or arrange for places for them to rest from their travels. Jesus gathered His disciples away from the crowds, and they took a boat to find a quiet place to rest. However, the gathering crowd on the shore anticipated where they would disembark and rushed around the lake to the place they were likely to land. More people joined the migration hoping to get a glimpse of Jesus and perhaps see a miracle. They had heard so much about Jesus and the amazing miracles that were happening in His ministry.

A massive crowd gathered along the lake and were already spilling over the hillside when Jesus and the disciples made landfall. Rather than rebuke them or send them away, Jesus was touched by their needs, seeing them as sheep without a shepherd. He began teaching them along the shore.

As the hours grew long, the disciples were weary and concerned for their Master. They asked Jesus if they should send the people away to find food and places to rest. Jesus' response was unexpected. He said, "You feed them." As they gazed over the huge crowd, calculating the numbers to be well over five thousand men plus women and children, the disciples recognized it was beyond their means to supply even a little food for each one. After a quick inventory of resources, they only came up with five barley loaves and two small fish. It was so meager, one of the disciples asked, "What are they among so many?" (John 6:8–9).

B. The Disciples Gave Jesus What They Had

In John's account of the story, a lad in the crowd had the foresight to bring his lunch. Perhaps others had brought food, but by now they had already eaten their dinner. Andrew found the lad and asked for his lunch. The lad was willing to share what he had with Jesus. Almost apologetically, Andrew presented What are you willing to give to Jesus? What talents, finances, or other assets can you give to Jesus for Him to bless?

How can we ever reach the population of the world? What will it take to reach them with the gospel?

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

> When have you seen sacrificial giving that exceeded all expectations?

the small amount of food to Jesus. He recognized how small it was compared to the massive crowd. However, Jesus graciously received the lad's gift and instructed the disciples to organize the people, preparing them for a meal.

C. I Will Give Whatever I Have to Jesus

God's blessings come when we willingly devote our meager possessions, gifts, and talents to God for His service. Certainly, when we see the size of our world and the vast population of our field, it becomes more than a little overwhelming. The world population has grown from one billion in 1800 to over eight billion now. The growth rate continues at an accelerated pace. Current projections are that the world population will exceed nine billion people in about ten years and reach ten billion another ten years later.

The answer to reaching our rapidly growing world is in the Master's multiplication. He took a lunch for one, and it became adequate to feed the crowd. God had done something like this before. He multiplied a little bit of food for a widow in I Kings 17 to feed her in the throes of a famine. Jesus also taught that the widow's two mites in Luke 21 exceeded the value of all the other donations. Our little truly can be much in God's hands. Whatever our gift or sacrifice, let us give it in full confidence that Jesus will use it to match the mission.

Paul wrote about the Macedonian believers who were generous in giving beyond their expected ability. Even in the middle of their own trials, they gave generously to bless the church in need in Jerusalem. When the need is presented and we give generously, we will never lack the finances or be deficient in personnel to fulfill the commission. This is Kingdom work, and when we embrace the mission, the Spirit works through our efforts to accomplish greater things than we can imagine. Ephesians 3:20 declares: "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us."

II. THE MIRACLE

A. Jesus Involved His Disciples in Serving the Multitude

Jesus asked the disciples to bring the food to Him. He then asked them to organize the crowd into separate groups, between fifty and one hundred in each. They obeyed His instructions but with little understanding of how this would help feed this hungry crowd. Even this task of organizing the crowd into smaller groups was no minor task because of the number of people. If all the groups were one hundred people each, there were still more than fifty groups. The logistics of distributing an adequate amount of food to that many groups is staggering. Think of what it is like to serve a wedding reception or church banquet, and then multiply that effort thirty times or more. Only then can we begin to understand the tremendous challenge Jesus put before His followers. Despite the questions and challenges that filled their minds, the disciples prepared the people for a miraculous provision. Obedience to God's voice was a demonstration of their faith. As they followed Jesus' instructions, their faith began to build in anticipation of what Jesus would do.

B. Jesus Multiplied the Bread and Fish as They Served

Jesus simply took the loaves and blessed them, gazing into the heavens. Then before their eyes, He multiplied the meal. The more bread Jesus tore apart and placed into the baskets, the more remained. Likewise, the fish were replicated in the hands of Jesus as the disciples distributed the food. Baskets full of bread and fish were passed among the groups of people. Disciples brought back empty baskets and exchanged them for full ones as the process continued until everyone was fed. There was more than enough for everyone to be filled and satisfied.

C. I Will Trust Jesus Even When I Do Not Understand His Ways

We often see miracles in small steps of obedience. Faith initiates action even when we cannot see the outcome. When we take Jesus at His word, pray a simple prayer, speak a simple sermon, encourage a needy person with a simple passage of Scripture, or speak a simple word of faith, incredible things happen. Unexpected miracles occur when we simply follow Jesus' teaching and speak His Word with confidence.

Trusting in God does not require us to know the outcome or how it will all work out. Just preparing for the miraculous is an act of faith. We can do the simple things and get ready for the greater things we only dream of.

III. THE MIRACLE AFTER THE MIRACLE

A. Twelve Baskets Were Left Over

More than enough—that is just the way God works. Not only did Jesus feed the entire multitude of people, but there were also leftovers—lots of leftovers. It was like the abundance of a holiday meal, and the magnitude of blessing exceeded their expectation. The remnants of the miraculous dinner were more than what Andrew initially brought to the Lord as a donation. After five thousand families ate, the remaining supply filled twelve baskets—not eight, ten, or twenty, but twelve. It is interesting, considering there were twelve disciples.

B. God Rewards Those Who Serve

While the crowd went away filled and satisfied, the disciples left with something extra, a material reminder of this bountiful blessing. Jesus met their present need and provided something extra for their future provision. Under the Law there was a provision even for the oxen who were used to grind the grain from harvest: "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth What simple things does God ask of us that often result in tremendous outcomes? out the corn" (Deuteronomy 25:4). Paul was convinced this provision was written with the ministry in mind. He wrote: "For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope" (I Corinthians 9:10). He wrote about it again to Timothy when he said: "The labourer is worthy of his reward" (I Timothy 5:18).

C. I Will Serve God and Allow Him to Minister to Others through Me

For many people a favorite part of eating out is bringing home the takeout boxes. The leftovers will provide a snack or lunch for at least the next day. Some restaurants capitalize on the trend by offering add-on entrées conveniently provided in takehome boxes.

When we are open to God's leading and instruction, we will find God's provision is more than enough. God desires to minister to the hurting, the broken, and the needy. When His compassion becomes our motivation, anything is possible. We serve God by serving others, and God is delighted to work through us to minister to those who are desperate for Him.

What are some ways we have been rewarded in our service for Christ?

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. 🕕

Pastor Thomas was returning to America from a missions trip to India. He reflected on the cultural differences between the nation he had just visited and the nation where he lived. He noticed a vast difference in India's economy, standard of living, and the pressing needs there on the opposite side of the globe.

While ministering in the Western province of Gujarat, India, he was overwhelmed with the needs of hurting humanity. The country of India has almost one-anda-half billion people, which is nearly 18 percent of the world's population. They have surpassed China as the most populous country in the world. Many live in poverty and some suffer religious persecution if they embrace Christianity. While only 2.3 percent of the population claim to be Christian, those who have been born again are joyful and devoted followers of their faith. They have so little of the world's goods, but they are rich in faith, strong in their determination to follow Jesus, and joyful in their worship and service to the Lord Jesus Christ.

As one afternoon session ended and they prepared for dinner, the hosts insisted the guest ministers stay and eat with them. Their gracious hosts filled a huge aluminum stewpot with saffron rice and pieces of chicken cooked on an open fire. It was so large that two men were required to lift the pot from the fire when the rice had reached perfection.

A propane-fired flat iron griddle, about three feet in diameter, sat on the ground where attendants crouched close enough to flatten the balls of dough and cook them on the griddle. The freshly fried roti (similar to a tortilla) filled a large basket and more were tossed on top as they came off the griddle. Several hundred people were staying on the campground and were fed each day the simple fare of rice and roti. But this day was special because there was chicken in the rice and the guest ministers had joined them for the meal.

As the Boeing 777 began its final approach in a large metropolitan city, Pastor Thomas was relieved to return to American soil. When he gazed out the window, he saw his mission field in a whole new way—through the eyes of Jesus. The lights of the skyline stretched as far as he could see through the airplane window. Every light represented souls, thousands of them, and the darkness represented the spiritual blindness that smothered them. He thought to himself, *Hundreds of thousands of people fill this city, and we have yet to scratch the surface to fulfill the commission.*

If we can place our meager efforts into the hands of our mighty Savior, He can multiply our offering to minister to the multitude. Jesus ministers through us to reach the world He loves. He would not have called us if it were impossible.

Prayer Focus

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

- For God to give us confidence that He will help us share the gospel with the world
- For God to awaken faith in us to know His Spirit is reaching for the hungry in our world



FOCUS VERSES

Matthew 14:28-31 ²⁸ And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

²⁹ And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

³⁰ But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

³¹ And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

LESSON TEXT Matthew 14:23-33

TRUTH ABOUT GOD God will test our faith as we follow Him.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE I will ask God to involve me in the miracles He wants to work.

STEP OUT, THE WATER'S FINE



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 worst storm you have ever experienced? Where were you and how did you survive?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

- I. AFTER THE MIRACLE MEAL
 - A. The Disciples Were in the Boat in a Storm
 - » What "storm" has come upon you unexpectedly? How did you get through it?
 - B. Jesus Walked on Water to Get to the Fearful Disciples
 - C. I Will Trust That Jesus Sees Me When I Cannot See Him 💟
 - » What has the peace of God looked like in your life? How did you know it was God?
- II. PETER'S PRAYER REQUEST
 - A. Peter Asked to Walk on the Water; Jesus Granted His Request I » What is the most audacious prayer you have prayed?
 - B. All the Disciples Witnessed the Miracle; Only One Experienced It
 - C. I Will Ask God to Involve Me in the Miracles He Wants to Work
 - » What do you believe God is willing to do through us to show His authority over the elements around us?
- III. PETER'S WAVERING FAITH
 - A. Peter Walked on Water Until He Focused on the Storm
 - » Why do we forget the miracles of the past while in the crisis of the present?
 - B. Jesus Rescued Peter When He Cried Out for Help
 - C. I Will Fix My Eyes on Jesus

Internalizing the Message

Prayer Focus

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

- For God to increase our faith in Him to protect us *from* the storm or *in* the storm
- For God to give us compassion for others who may be experiencing the storms of life, helping them to trust in God

LESSON CONNECTION

urricanes are somewhat more predictable than tornadoes. They are massive systems observable from satellites or weather planes. Forecasters chart their movements, the wind speed, and their expected arrival. Various models indicate the anticipated path and intensity of the storm as they advance from a tropical disturbance to a named tropical storm and finally become a hurricane. It is still not an exact science, and the models seldom agree on every detail, so anyone in the vicinity of the storm should be prepared for an evacuation.

A young evangelist couple arrived in Laurel, Mississippi, with their truck and fifth-wheel RV, without knowing a tropical storm was brewing in the Gulf of Mexico. When they heard news of the approaching storm and the anticipated wind speeds, the evangelist was concerned. They really had no place to escape from the storm, so they decided to park the RV as close as they could to the church building, make sure everything was as secure as possible, and find a safe place to wait out the storm. They placed their rig and possessions in the hands of the Lord and prayed God would protect it all.

They spent the night with some other family members in a recording studio that was made of cement block construction with no glass windows. It was a perfect place to shelter. They worked on some recording projects until the power failed, and then they resorted to a few flashlights and candles for some light. They prayed, "God, You are in control of every storm. We do not know the outcome or the damage these winds may cause, but You are able to take care of us and what we have as we work for You and Your kingdom." Eventually, they were able to sleep some through the night on makeshift pallets on the floor.

The storm became a major Category 4 hurricane as it reached landfall one hundred miles away in Mobile, Alabama. The winds were gusting over one hundred miles per hour for several hours through the night and early morning. Even when the storm reached the city of Laurel, the winds exceeded ninety miles per hour. Numerous trees fell and power lines were destroyed. Some buildings were flattened along the coast, and many homes suffered damage. In all, \$2.3 billion worth of damage was sustained, and at least five people lost their lives in the powerful hurricane.

The next morning the winds subsided and people went out to assess the damage. Limbs and debris were scattered everywhere, but the roads seemed to be passable. The evangelists drove their truck into town, swerving around fallen trees and scattered limbs until they got to the church property. They were so amazed when their RV stood right where they had parked it and did not appear to have moved an inch in the midst of the storm. Thanksgiving welled up in their hearts and praise rose to their lips as they celebrated God's protection from the effects of the storm.

BIBLE LESSON

I. AFTER THE MIRACLE MEAL

A. The Disciples Were in the Boat in a Storm

What a day! The disciples were exhausted. They had ridden the emotional high of their recent ministry trip where Jesus performed miracles through them, but the mob of people made it impossible for them to find rest and solitude on the other side of the lake. Sure it was exciting to see all the people who came out to see the Rabbi and to witness the many miracles He performed that day. Jesus fed the entire crowd with just a lad's donated lunch. Jesus fed the people, the disciples gathered the leftovers, and finally they could relax.

What "storm" has come upon you unexpectedly? How did you get through it?

Jesus sent the disciples out in the boat, back across the lake, while He remained behind. He sent the multitude away, encouraging them to return to their homes. Finally Jesus went off to find some solitude of His own. It had been a long day for everyone.

It takes time to process highly emotional events and energetic experiences. The aftermath of such adventures can also be challenging at times; the pendulum of emotion swings from one extreme to the other. Some of our greatest tests may come right after some of our greatest victories. A Monday morning malaise may counter Sunday's stratospheric spiritual summit. The tempter never rests; he lurks in the valleys of our downturned emotional moments. Let us be aware.

This storm arrived unexpectedly on the Sea of Galilee. The turn of the wind, the drop of atmospheric pressure, and the collision of weather fronts scooped up the waves and began to rock the boat. Any intention to relax on board was quickly dispelled as the disciples responded to the squall on the sea. It was all hands on deck as they tightened the rigging, tugged on the oars, and bailed buckets of water. Men accustomed to the wiles of the water were seriously concerned they might not make it out of this storm.

B. Jesus Walked on Water to Get to the Fearful Disciples

Just when it could not get any worse, sporadic flashes of lightning revealed the silhouette of a figure hovering above the waves in the distance. The disciples saw it and cried out in fear, "It is a spirit" (Matthew 14:26). They stared across the bow into the darkness of the waves to see an apparition walking on the water in their direction. Surely this was a sign that death was coming for them.

Then a familiar voice rang out above the waves: "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid" (Matthew 14:27). The unmistakable voice of Jesus calmed their fears and brought them hope, even when they could not clearly see Him through the distance and

the dark. They were still in the storm, but there was something reassuring about knowing Jesus was out there in the darkness heading their way.

C. I Will Trust That Jesus Sees Me When I Cannot See Him

The disciples could not know, and we often forget, that Jesus saw them before the storm, during the storm, and afterward. He knew the lessons to be learned and the results of the storm. Even while Jesus prayed on the mountain, He was also aware of the pending danger into which His disciples sailed. He saw the first gusts of wind slapping the whitecaps against the hull and heard the creaks and groans from the boat in the water. He knew their mounting fear and the growing danger, and He knew His miraculous plan to meet them in the midst of their greatest fears.

May it be comforting that Jesus sees us in our darkest nights and will be with us in every storm. Our storms may not be on the water or from hurricane force winds, but our fears and concerns may match those of the men in the boat. However, we can be just as assured that the same Savior sees us in the middle of our storms and will come to us in miraculous ways.

II. PETER'S PRAYER REQUEST

A. Peter Asked to Walk on the Water; Jesus Granted His Request

As the disciples recognized Jesus walking on the water, in an incredible surge of faith, Peter called out, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." Jesus responded in the affirmative, "Come" (Matthew 14:28–29). Peter was over the railing and out on the water without really thinking about the impossibilities of physics. The surface of water will not support the weight of a person. Everyone who goes into the water understands the effort required to just stay at the surface of the water.

B. All the Disciples Witnessed the Miracle; Only One Experienced It

Our focus is frequently on Peter's failure rather than his faith to step out of the boat at Jesus' invitation. No one else dared step out into the storm. No one else felt the miracle of a firm footing on the water's solid surface. We may criticize Peter for his wavering faith, but he was the only one who asked Jesus if he might join Him. He was the only one to take that step of faith to experience a momentary miracle before plunging into the deep. Only Peter felt the strong hand of Jesus as He grasped his arm lifting him from danger and delivering him safely to the boat.

C. I Will Ask God to Involve Me in the Miracles He Wants to Work

Many miracles await those who are bold enough to ask God to use them in the demonstration of His glory, but the greatest deliverance follows a desperate need. Before we see Jesus come to the rescue, someone must be in danger. We love to see Jesus

What has the peace of God looked like in your life? How did you know it was God?

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

What is the most audacious prayer you have prayed?

Teacher Option: A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. 1 heal cancer, but first, someone has to have cancer. If we find ourselves in that storm, may we trust God to meet us there; when we see others in that storm, may we have faith God will meet them there.

III. PETER'S WAVERING FAITH

A. Peter Walked on Water Until He Focused on the Storm

Peter walked on water. No one else but Jesus can make that nearly incredible claim. As long as he kept his eyes on Jesus, he had no reason to fear. Jesus was performing a miracle. The evidence of God's authority over the elements was there before their faces. But when Peter focused on his fear, he lost faith. The distraction of the storm caused him to shift his focus: "When he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid" (Matthew 14:30). His eyes were no longer on Jesus but on the storm around him.

Admittedly, it was nighttime and Peter was in the middle of waves, wind, and the spray of water on his face. It was not easy to see Jesus in the dark night with thick storm clouds. We have all known fear in the darkness, so with the additional frightening elements around Peter, the dark made it difficult to focus on Jesus. Peter was overwhelmed and afraid as he sank beneath the waves. Peter cried out, "Lord, save me" (Matthew 14:30).

Peter was not the only disciple who struggled with faith. Every one of them missed the importance of the lesson they should have learned from the miracle of the loaves just a few hours earlier on the other side of the storm. The multiplication of the lad's lunch should have shown them Jesus is up to every challenge; He holds all power and authority in His hands.

In this crisis of the storm at sea, the disciples forgot Jesus' previous lessons. They longed for land and safety. Mark revealed the moment of revelation in this latest lesson when he wrote they "considered not the miracle of the loaves" (Mark 6:52).

B. Jesus Rescued Peter When He Cried Out for Help

God will not disregard a plea for help. Our natural response is His opportunity to answer. Just as Peter cried out for help without hesitation, we should do the same in our time of need. God is near, able, and willing to respond to our urgent cry.

In Jeremiah 23:23, God posed a question to the prophet: "Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off?" The answer was obvious, but the question provoked a response. We should never doubt God's *ability* or His *availability*. A simple prayer or a desperate plea will gain His attention when we call out to Him.

He is ready and willing to show us more than just an answer to prayer but a new understanding of who He is and a greater dimension of His power. God has so much more in store for those who will simply follow Him, calling out in faith for every need. What do you believe God is willing to do through us to show His authority over the elements around us?

Why do we forget the miracles of the past while in the crisis of the present? The psalmist David also found God to be near each time he turned to God. David's songs were filled with references of prayer and praise, themes of deliverance from the adversary, and assurances of the abiding presence of God to bring us into a safe place. The Lord said, "Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee; I answered thee in the secret place of thunder" (Psalm 81:7). We can be confident God hears us when we pray.

For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock. (Psalm 27:5)

Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy. I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever: I will trust in the covert of thy wings. Selah. (Psalm 61:1-4)

C. I Will Fix My Eyes on Jesus

Our eyes focus on the orientation of our surroundings, define the target of our mental attention, and develop our awareness of physical motion and direction. Jesus taught: "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness" (Matthew 6:22-23). It is vital our eyes are governed to stay focused on what is good and virtuous. To be filled with His light, our eyes must be focused on the Light of the World.

What we look at affects our thoughts and our faith. It is natural to look upward to the heavens when we reference God. Let it become as natural to look to God for help through every challenge of life. The psalmist said, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1-2).

Jesus is our source and our supply. All we need we will find in Him. As we keep our focus on Jesus, we are aligned to His purpose and available to participate in His ministry.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

elp, *heelllpp*!" The voice rang out across the shoreline from the swimmer flailing in the water. Then the scream and the splashing silenced as the swimmer sank beneath the surface.

The lifeguard was trained for these situations. He quickly sprang into action, leaping from the observation deck. He yelled for someone to call for an ambulance and he jumped into the water, swimming toward the spot where the swimmer was last seen. Seconds stretched into minutes as the lifeguard took long, full strokes attempting to reach the swimmer before it was too late. A body cannot function without air for long. Every second is critical.

The lifeguard dove beneath the wave and could barely see the form of the swimmer now limp and dazed in about ten feet of water. Grabbing air at the surface, the lifeguard dove again with a powerful thrust to reach the swimmer. He grabbed the unresponsive swimmer and shoved him upward where they both broke the surface together.

Others came with surfboards and life vests to assist in the rescue. They rushed the swimmer to the shore where lifesaving efforts began. There was a tremendous sigh of relief when the swimmer gasped for breath. As he coughed and gagged, he discharged seawater from his lungs and sucked in life-giving air.

The paramedics took over the medical response and loaded the swimmer into the ambulance. Though he was breathing again, they took him to the hospital for examination and observation to assure his full recovery. The exhausted lifeguard sat on a bench surrounded by others who had jumped in to help.

Congratulations were all around. With a tremendous sense of relief and satisfaction, the lifeguard realized he had been instrumental in saving a life. His training had paid off. When the emergency was sounded, his reflexes, his practice drills, and his desire to make a difference kicked in.

We never know when we will be called on to respond to an emergency. God has a way of preparing us to meet the needs of others. As we seek to share God's love and light, we are given opportunities to encourage others in their darkest storms.

Prayer Focus

- For God to increase our faith in Him to protect us *from* the storm or *in* the storm
- For God to give us compassion for others who may be experiencing the storms of life, helping them to trust in God

JUNE 29, 2025

1.4

FOCUS VERSES Mark 8:6-9

⁶ And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people. ⁷ And they had a few small fishes: and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before them.

⁸ So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets.

⁹ And they that had eaten were about four thousand: and he sent them away.

LESSON TEXT Mark 8:1-9, 14-21

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

Jesus shows compassion through the miracles He works.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE I will allow the miracles Jesus has worked to frame my faith for future miracles.





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: When you go on a trip, what is your packing routine? Do you use a list to make sure you don't leave anything behind?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

- I. ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER CROWD
 - A. The Disciples Seemed to Have Forgotten Jesus' Earlier Miracle igcup
 - B. Jesus Compassionately Fed the Multitude Again
 - C. I Will Remember the Miracles Jesus Has Worked for Me \boxed{V}
 - » What are some ways to recall the miracles we have witnessed?
- II. FORGETFUL FOLLOWERS
 - A. The Disciples Forgot to Bring Provisions
 - » How can one person's response affect how others receive the message of Jesus?
 - » What is the most important item you left behind when you went on a trip?
 - B. The Disciples Did Not Understand Jesus' Warning Concerning the Leaven of the Pharisees
 - » How do you feel when you realize the disciples didn't "get it" much of the time?
 - C. Jesus Reminded Them of His Previous Miracles
 - » How does our understanding of Jesus' identity affect our faith?
 - D. I Will Allow the Miracles Jesus Has Worked to Frame My Faith for Future Miracles

Internalizing the Message

Prayer Focus

- For God to help us remember the many times He has touched, healed, delivered, and restored us, and to share those stories with others
- For God to help us be sensitive to what He is teaching us through miracles or through trials and suffering

LESSON CONNECTION

veryone was buzzing with excitement as the Johnsons prepared for their annual camping trip to the Colorado Rocky Mountains. This would be their third time to take this adventurous vacation with their growing family. They knew everything they would need for the campout. They packed the tent along with a tarp for the ground cover. The portable grill, briquettes, and lighter fluid were ready for loading. They packed clothes for seven days, as well as hiking boots, tennis shoes, and swimwear.

Sarah planned out the meals and made a detailed grocery list. They kept all the perishable items in the refrigerator until the last minute. The ice chest was packed with frozen milk jugs of water so it would be pre-cooled and ready for the cold food. The car was filled with gas. They checked the tires for wear and proper air pressure. They made arrangements for a friend to take care of their dog.

The morning to start their vacation finally arrived. It was the beginning of their next great adventure, and everything was a little chaotic. The dog sensed their excitement and expressed his own nervousness by running from one family member to another, barking for attention. The family took several trips in and out of the house to carry clothes, food boxes, and the ice chest to their car. All the camping gear was stowed in a small utility trailer. They almost forgot the lawn chairs and folding table. Fortunately, they remembered sunscreen, a first aid kit, and most important, insect repellent. So many details needed to be remembered.

Finally, everything was loaded. They quickly ran through the checklist to make sure they had gotten everything: check, check, and check. It looked like everything was checked off. Let vacation begin.

It was a full day of travel, stopping only for fuel, bathroom breaks, and some fast food for lunch. They did not waste a lot of time along the journey because they were all excited to get there and set up their campsite. Their favorite spot was about thirty minutes from the small community of South Fork, Colorado, where they set up camp near the banks of the Rio Grande. They unloaded the small trailer first so they could set up their tent before dark. The lawn chairs were arranged around the fire pit, the grill was set up for cooking, and the briquettes were ignited. Everything was ready for a wonderful retreat.

Sarah reached over and opened the ice chest to prepare for their first supper, burgers on the grill. As she lifted the lid, her heart sank. In all the rush to get everything out of the house and into the car, they failed to get all the produce, fresh ground hamburger, and perishable items out of the refrigerator. All they had were three jugs of frozen water. Now what? It was too late to go back to the community store tonight; it was unlikely anything would be open. Well, peanut butter and honey sandwiches would have to do for their first evening meal in the great outdoors.

BIBLE LESSON

I. ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER CROWD

A. The Disciples Seemed to Have Forgotten Jesus' Earlier Miracle

In Mark 8 we see another crowd in another setting gathered around Jesus. This was not just a long day; it was three long days. Any food supplies they may have brought were long gone, and they were famished. As Jesus continued teaching, no one wanted to leave. Just like the miracle in Mark 6, Jesus was concerned about the well-being of the many people who had gathered, so He turned and spoke to His disciples. Jesus knew if He sent the crowd away now, some would faint from hunger along the way home.

Regretfully, the disciples responded in much the same way as they had earlier in a strikingly similar situation. They looked at the size of the crowd compared to the meager supplies they had and concluded the need was much greater than their limited resources. Jesus asked the disciples: "How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven" (Mark 8:5). Unfazed, Jesus commanded the people to sit as He prepared to feed the crowd.

B. Jesus Compassionately Fed the Multitude Again

In identical fashion to the previous miracle of feeding the multitude, the disciples brought the bread to Jesus, He gave thanks, and began breaking and distributing it through the disciples. Then verse 7 mentions they also came up with a few small fish, and likewise Jesus began to multiply them for the people. The outcome was identical: the multitude, four thousand this time, ate until they were satisfied. The disciples again gathered the fragments remaining, and they filled seven large baskets with leftovers.

Remember these leftovers because they will come up again soon. In these two very similar occasions, Jesus had compassion on the crowds and miraculously provided food for them with leftovers to spare. Not only was He concerned about their spiritual needs and the importance of His teaching to transform their lives, but He was also touched by their physical hunger and moved to satisfy their need for food.

C. I Will Remember the Miracles Jesus Has Worked for Me

How quickly we forget the miracles of God and the incredible stories of His work among believers. Before we judge others for their forgetfulness, we would do well to examine our own lapse of faith and short-term memory of answered prayers. The further removed we are from a miracle, the dimmer our memory grows. The details are lost and the experience fades in our minds. If we are not careful to rehearse the stories of God's provision, healing, or deliverance, we may lose the ability to recall them. **Teacher Option:** *A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit.* Sharing our story not only encourages someone else to have faith in God, but we also renew our own memory of these miraculous events. As we recall these moments that brought us to God, we can relate them to other people. The details are kept in sharp focus as we share the thoughts and feelings we experienced during a time of need and then the joy and excitement that comes with the realization that God has worked a miracle in our lives.

Take time to record these great moments in a journal, a phone memo, or a digital recording. Save pictures of the before-andafter experiences. Make it a priority to save these moments for the future. Though we think we will never forget, time has a way of dulling our memories and robbing us of the vivid details of our deliverance.

God knows our forgetful frame, so He cautioned Israel to remember their covenant with Him. Following the Exodus, God gave Moses guidance for their lives and the promise of blessings if they continued to live in right relationship with Him. It was vital they share their story of oppression in Egypt, but more importantly to celebrate their great deliverance from bondage and the miracles of salvation and provision in the wilderness. As they prepared to enter the Promised Land, the Book of Deuteronomy is devoted to bringing the people back to remembrance of these things.

Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons. (Deuteronomy 4:9) (See also Deuteronomy 4:23; 6:12.)

We must continually share the testimony of our salvation, the transformation that took place in our lives when we experienced the new birth. Take time to write down the details of your personal Pentecostal experience. We record those noteworthy moments to remind ourselves and to inform those who will follow.

What are some ways to recall the miracles we have witnessed?

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

II. FORGETFUL FOLLOWERS

Leaving the crowds well-fed, Jesus and the disciples boarded a boat and made their way across the lake to Dalmanutha. One translation notes the Aramaic word for Dalmanutha means "the land of oppression." Upon His arrival, Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees who pressed Him for a visible and miraculous sign from Heaven to prove His ministry. In their efforts to discredit Jesus, they continued questioning Him and distracted others from being blessed by His ministry. After some time, Jesus gathered the disciples, and they sailed back across the lake.

A stark contrast exists between the two events on opposite sides of the lake. In one location the people received Jesus and embraced His teaching. They experienced the miraculous supply of bread and fish to sustain them. In another location Jesus

A. The Disciples Forgot to Bring Provisions

Despite our best efforts, we frequently forget. We set reminders on our phone, computer, and post sticky notes to remind us not to forget. The disciples wished they had an app to help them remember. As they rowed along, Jesus started talking about the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod. The disciples had just come from a miraculous feeding of the multitude where they had baskets full of bread. But those were gone. Now here they were with one piece of flatbread, and nothing to go with it. If Jesus was talking about bread, hinting He was hungry, they had nothing to offer Him. They had forgotten to bring bread.

B. The Disciples Did Not Understand Jesus' Warning Concerning the Leaven of the Pharisees

But Jesus wasn't hinting at hunger; He was warning the disciples against the hypocrisy of the self-righteousness of those who refused to acknowledge Him as the Messiah. The same people became a hindrance to others who desperately needed Jesus. However, the disciples misunderstood the reference to the leaven, thinking perhaps He was upset they had failed to bring bread on the boat.

Perhaps one of them nudged another and gave him a disappointed look. After their unproductive visit resulting from the Pharisees' roadblock, the disciples completely missed the lesson Jesus was teaching. They thought only of their appetites and their forgetfulness to prepare for this trip. Among the entire group of twelve disciples plus Jesus, they only had one loaf. Not only did the people of Dalmanutha miss out on the teaching of Jesus, apparently His own disciples had failed to learn the lessons of the previous days and weeks as well.

C. Jesus Reminded Them of His Previous Miracles

As a reminder to the disciples, Jesus recounted the two occasions when He had multiplied the bread and fed the hungry with more than enough. Forgetting bread was not the end of the world; Jesus could always make more. They should have learned that lesson by now. However, Jesus was more concerned that His disciples get His teaching and carry it beyond their community. They had eyes and ears, but they did not seem to see or understand what He was teaching them, and they failed to remember the works He had done.

Jesus quizzed the disciples like children: "How many baskets of leftovers did we have the first time, after feeding five thousand?" Jesus asked. How can one person's response affect how others receive the message of Jesus?

What is the most important item you left behind when you went on a trip?

How do you feel when you realize the disciples didn't "get it" much of the time? "Twelve," they chorused.

"And when I fed the four thousand, how many baskets were gathered up?" He questioned.

"Seven," they said.

Jesus sighed, "How is it that you do not understand?" (See Mark 8:19-21.)

It was not about the bread, and it was not about the baskets. Jesus could make bread as easily as He provided manna in the wilderness. It was more about the Bread of Heaven coming down to humanity; Jesus had come to give life. He announced: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:51).

Why be concerned about bread and fish when the one who spoke the words of Creation stood with them in the flesh? It was not really about the number of miracles or the leftovers; the Lord of Glory was there. "God with us" was sharing the principles of the kingdom of Heaven. The Promised One who came as the seed of Abraham, the son of David, the Great I AM was with them. And they were still concerned about bread and fish, lunch plans, and their daily itinerary. If the disciples would have understood who was with them, they would never have been discouraged with doubt again.

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. (John 1:1, 14)

D. I Will Allow the Miracles Jesus Has Worked to Frame My Faith for Future Miracles

We are in good company with the disciples. They were not heroes or super-Christians. They were fallible and often did not get what Jesus wanted them to know. The more we see them as humans, the more we can appreciate God's patience with us and our mistakes. Jesus did not dismiss any of the disciples. He continued teaching them and giving them more chances to get it right, and He will do the same for us.

As our experience grows, the lessons make more sense, and their application makes the truths memorable. Faith from past answers to prayer will give us confidence for future miracles. The more we acknowledge God's healing in the past, the greater our faith grows for future healing. We cannot forget God's promises or His mighty acts. Every miracle adds substance to our expectation: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1).

How does our understanding of Jesus' identity affect our faith?

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

he senior couple felt like they had lived a pretty privileged life—no big health issues, no major problems. In their forty years of marriage, neither had spent a night in the hospital except for childbirth. Then during a routine mammogram, a small shadow showed up that warranted further examination. The wife was encouraged by the technician's assurance, "It happens all the time. It could be a false positive." But that shadow was the beginning of the cancerous growth.

The word *cancer* evoked fear and concern about what was coming. So many of their friends had been affected by cancer, and more than a few of them were lost after months of difficult treatments. It had always been someone else, and the couple had offered prayers and support to them. Now they were facing a diagnosis no one wants to hear. The general practitioner recommended a cancer surgeon. That referral caused even more concern and fear. The senior couple could not help but recall all the difficult stories they had heard of treatments ranging from painful radiation to sickening chemotherapy.

In the early days of the diagnosis, they reflected on life. What if this is the end? Dark thoughts gave way to memories of blessings and causes for thanksgiving. Age gives a broader perspective on the events of the past. After reflecting on many years of God's blessings, they found calm assurance from Hebrews 13:5: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

One of the greatest faith-building exercises was recalling stories of healings, both in their lives and in the lives of others. As they recounted testimonies of healing, deliverance, and miracles, they received an overwhelming assurance that the same God who worked all those wonders was still present with them. Follow-up exams revealed the cancer was caught early and was treatable. They asked for prayer from family, church, and friends, and proceeded with the surgery. The surgery was successful, and the wife was relieved traditional chemotherapy was not prescribed. However, they recommended targeting the affected region with radiation. The next step was healing and recovery.

After several years, the cancer had not returned. They continued to give thanks to God. The faithfulness of God through this experience and His healing afterward is also part of the story of God's faithfulness. In times of adversity, trouble, disease, sickness, or even death, we have an assurance of God's abiding presence. Our best exercise is to simply look back over the years to our own experiences and others' testimonies of God's amazing works in our lives. Let us learn the lesson from these testimonies, and continue to share the blessings of God's provision.

Prayer Focus

- For God to help us remember the many times He has touched, healed, delivered, and restored us, and to share those stories with others
- For God to help us be sensitive to what He is teaching us through miracles or through trials and suffering

JULY 6, 2025



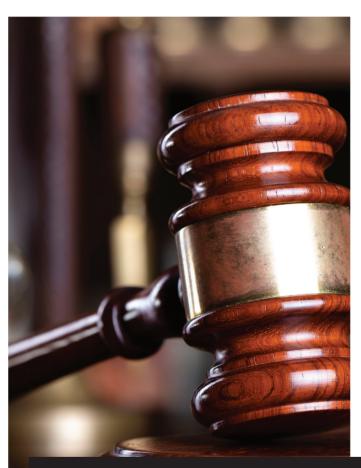
THE JUST JUDGE

FOCUS VERSE Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

LESSON TEXT Luke 18:1-8; Hebrews 11:6

TRUTH ABOUT GOD God is just.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE I will persistently pray for justice.



Series Overview:

Faith is requisite to please God. Witness faith exampled through the lives of heroes of faith who got it right and even some who got it wrong, encouraging us that we all have a place in God's kingdom.



SG TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: What is the most inspiring story of persistence you have heard?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

- I. THE JUDGE AND THE WIDOW
 - A. Although the Judge Had Power to Help Others, He Was Unwilling
 - B. The Widow Was Powerless without Help from the Judge
 - C. I Will Be Just toward Others When I Am in a Position of Power
 - » In what roles do you currently serve that place you in a position to potentially bless others this coming week?
- II. THE WIDOW'S PERSISTENCE
 - A. The Widow Was Persistent
 - » Why do we sometimes have difficulty being persistent in bringing our requests to the Lord when we do not receive an answer after the first prayer?
 - B. The Judge Granted Her Request because of Her Persistence
 - » What prayer request are you currently bringing to the Lord that has not been answered for a long time? What keeps you motivated not to give up?
 - C. I Will Persistently Pray for Justice
 - » Why do you think the Lord sometimes waits before answering our prayers? What lessons might He be wanting to teach us?
- III. THE JUST JUDGE
 - A. God Is Just
 - » How would your prayer life change if you knew every single request you made would be answered as long as it was in agreement with God's will?
 - B. Because Our Vision Is Limited, We May Not Recognize God's Justice
 - C. I Will Trust God to Right Wrongs 💟

Internalizing the Message

Prayer Focus

- For God to grant us the faith to be persistent in our prayer life
- For God to help us recognize His justice at work in our lives and the world

LESSON CONNECTION

A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. 🕕

erbal Bean was a well-known evangelist in the Apostolic church prior to his tragic death in an automobile crash in 1977. The audio of a series of teaching sessions he held for young evangelists was recorded and distributed throughout Pentecostal circles. Eventually it was transcribed and published as a book simply entitled *Prayer*.

He was explaining the concept of memorial prayers like a Roman centurion prayed in Acts 10. Bean used the analogy of buying a suit on layaway. This idea was certainly familiar to his contemporary audience but is likely foreign to current generations who have been raised with widely available credit and internet access. When making a purchase on layaway, a customer would select an item and make a small down payment. The store would then "lay the item away" so no one else would be able to purchase it, trusting the customer would make additional payments, usually weekly, until the price was paid in full. At that time the customer would be able to take their purchases home.

Parents often bought Christmas gifts on layaway throughout the year to keep from spending a fortune just before the most wonderful time of the year. To use Bean's suit example, on the day of the last payment, the customer would pay the same small amount of money he or she had paid the store every week, but that day the customer would take the suit home.

Bean made the point that our prayers often work in a similar way. God hears and answers our prayers, but sometimes He waits for us to ask in faith a few times. During those times our prayers come up as a memorial before Him like they did for centurion Cornelius. The critical point Bean was making in his session to young ministers was only God knows the untold number of unanswered prayers simply because people stopped one prayer away from receiving their answer.

What if the intercession you have made for a lost family member or friend is only one prayer away from an answer? What if the healing you need in your body is only a handful of more prayers away from coming up before the throne of God as a memorial? What if the revival our church has been praying about is one more passionate, corporate prayer meeting from being born into existence? Don't stop praying. Keep laying up one prayer after another. In God's perfect time, we will take our answer home.

BIBLE LESSON

I. THE JUDGE AND THE WIDOW

A. Although the Judge Had Power to Help Others, He Was Unwilling

The parables of Jesus bring to life principles concerning His kingdom and show us how we should live as pilgrims and strangers throughout every generation. Due to humanity's fallen nature, every society is exposed to a seemingly endless parade of injustice. On days when we feel tremendously blessed, we are often shocked to hear of yet another suffering soul. Even on our worst days, we can always find someone who has it worse. Thankfully, this common suffering has a common antidote: faith.

Enter the widow in Luke 18. Clearly she has suffered. She was married, but she had already buried her husband. Now we find out she had enemies who were trying to take away her land. For her, gray skies had just turned even grayer. Jesus began His story describing "a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man" (Luke 18:2). This judge was in a position of power. He had both the ability and responsibility to help those in need who were in the right and to punish those in the wrong. Unfortunately for a desperate widow, this judge neither feared God nor had any regard for even the most desperate people in his jurisdiction. This judge was driven by his own comfort more than by a sense of justice. His cold heart has earned him the moniker of "the unjust judge."

B. The Widow Was Powerless without Help from the Judge

For anyone listening to Jesus' story, it was not looking good for the widow. Jesus did not include any details about how long she had been struggling or how often her enemies were coming after her; Jesus simply repeated her constant refrain to the unjust judge: "Avenge me of mine adversary" (Luke 18:3). The Lord was aware of our human tendency to sometimes blame the victim (they must have done something wrong) and He knew sympathy for her situation was necessary to properly understand what she was going through.

Let us not underestimate the severity of a widow's place during the New Testament period. She lived long before the days of disability benefits, Social Security payments, and life insurance settlements. Without a male member of the family to provide, a widow often faced a grim future. It is obvious from the scant details provided that Jesus' audience understood her inability to solve her own problems.

C. I Will Be Just toward Others When I Am in a Position of Power

Before casting ourselves as the widow, it is important to consider how we would respond if we were the judge. We would be quick to declare our commitment to justice and our unselfish concern for others. We would never hesitate to help the widow and we may even seek out additional family members to bless.

So, let's pause and consider the areas in our lives where we are already in a position of power. We all have power and influence, but we often overlook areas where we have the opportunity to be a blessing to others. Parents have a wonderful ability to either bless or curse their children. The same is true for employers, coworkers, friends, and siblings. The similarities in our lives to the judge in this parable are more common than we probably realize.

In what roles do you currently serve that place you in a position to potentially bless others this coming week?

> Why do we sometimes have difficulty being persistent in bringing our requests to the Lord when we do not receive an answer after the first praver?

II. THE WIDOW'S PERSISTENCE

A. The Widow Was Persistent

The apostle Paul instructed the church in Galatia to "not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9). As often as we quote this passage and attribute this understanding to Paul, who wrote the most books in the New Testament, we often forget Jesus explained this concept first in this parable. It takes grit to ask and keep asking, and this widow was built of grit. We do not know how often she approached the unjust judge. Perhaps she rose early in the morning and interrupted the magistrate's morning coffee. (No one wants that.) Maybe she returned before lunch and then again as he was preparing for his afternoon nap. She may have lifted her voice just as he was enjoying supper and then returned to disrupt his sleep at night. We do not know all the details, but we do know Jesus used the word *continual* and later referenced the prayers of His people "day and night" (Luke 18:5, 7).

B. The Judge Granted Her Request because of Her Persistence

Jesus also did not share the transcript of her argument. Did she use flowery language to appeal to the judge's educational background? Did she flatter him? Did she weep and wail to tug on his emotions? Did she threaten to appeal to Caesar if he did not rule in her favor? Jesus did not tell us because we do not need to know. We only need to know that she never stopped asking. She refused to grow weary in "well asking."

Jesus never said the judge had an encounter with the Lord. He made no declaration like the chief tax collector Zacchaeus made to repay those he had cheated in the past. The judge did not experience a season of blindness like the apostle Paul had. This carnal, selfish judge decided to grant the request of this desperate, persistent, won't-take-no-for-an-answer widow to get her to leave him alone. In an irony only Jesus could successfully employ, the unjust judge gave up when he said: "Because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me" (Luke 18:5). Other translations suggest she was giving him a black eye, beating him up, or wearing him down like a boxer who delivers one punch after another. He could not stop thinking about her request, and he ruled in her favor because she simply would not stop asking.

C. I Will Persistently Pray for Justice

In the altar call to this parable, Jesus encouraged everyone to pay attention, not to the words of the widow, but to "what the unjust judge saith" (Luke 18:6). The implication of this statement is to understand the potential that lies within us when we, like the widow, refuse to allow ourselves to become discouraged when our request is just.

In a world that is becoming increasingly obsessed with social justice, economic justice, and environmental justice, we as children of God must commit to tirelessly seek the Lord for wrongs to be righted either here and now or when Jesus returns. There is no need to downgrade pure justice by categorizing it. God loves justice, and He calls us to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with Him (Micah 6:8). Do not allow people with selfish motives to pervert justice. Our God is the God of perfect justice.

We must be willing to continually bombard Heaven with our pleas and never grow weary in praying for the will of God to be performed. We must understand that if we take on the posture of the widow in prayer, we should be confident our heavenly Father will grant our request. We have the promise from Jesus that when we show persistence in our prayers, He will "avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them" (Luke 18:7).

III. THE JUST JUDGE

A. God Is Just

To properly understand how this parable applies to our lives, we must realize how unlike the widow we often are and how unlike the unjust judge God always is. The Word of God declares: "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he" (Deuteronomy 32:4). Additionally, the Lord, who cannot lie, described Himself as "a just God and a Saviour" (Isaiah 45:21).

This truth is essential for us to embrace, for only by the justice of God can we have the opportunity for salvation. The Bible declares: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). The mere fact that justice demands our forgiveness emphasizes how perfect Jesus' sacrifice on the cross of Calvary was. Just as the Bible declares the "effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much," the effectual death of the sinless Christ Jesus purchased our forgiveness (James 5:16).

Once we express faith to receive forgiveness through repentance, remission of sins through baptism in Jesus' name, and the infilling of the Holy Ghost, we can express that same level of What prayer request are you currently bringing to the Lord that has not been answered for a long time? What keeps you motivated not to give up?

Why do you think the Lord sometimes waits before answering our prayers? What lessons might He be wanting to teach us? How would your prayer life change if you knew every single request you made would be answered as long as it was in agreement with God's will? faith in prayer to see that justice is enforced in our world. After all, this same Jesus also taught: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matthew 7:11).

B. Because Our Vision Is Limited, We May Not Recognize God's Justice

We often fail to see when the justice of God has been performed, even after we have prayed for it. At times we may feel like the psalmist Asaph who declared in Psalm 73 that his feet were almost gone and his steps had nearly slipped because he was envious at the foolish when he saw the prosperity of the wicked. But when he walked into the sanctuary of God, he could clearly see and understand their end.

Often in a church service or prayer meeting, we discover the limitation of our own understanding. As we read the familiar passage in Isaiah 55 where the Lord said His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts are so much higher than our thoughts, we sometimes look at our lives and the state of the world and wonder how we could be so off base in our prayers. In those moments remember the persistence of this widow. And remember that we pray to the just Judge of all the earth who has promised He will avenge us speedily (Luke 18:8).

C. I Will Trust God to Right Wrongs

We must trust that God will right all wrongs—some now, and some on that glorious day when He shall wipe away all tears from our eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying (Revelation 21:4). To receive all these promises, we have to live by faith because "without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

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

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

n the early days of the 1800s American gold rush, Rill Darby's uncle set out west to strike gold and strike it rich. When he reached Colorado, he heard daily reports that others were discovering gold there. He spied out a plot of land, staked his claim, and began digging with a pick and shovel. It was exhausting work with no guarantee of reward, but his excitement about the prospect of prospecting gold kept him going.

After weeks of manual digging, he finally spotted a glimmering speck in the mud. He dug more, and he saw more. And more. And more. He was in the throes of discovering gold. He was ecstatic. He needed machinery and a drill to bring the gold ore to the surface, so he covered up his discovery to keep anyone else from stealing the gold he rightfully mined, and he quickly headed home to Maryland for help and cash.

He first reached out to his nephew Rill Darby. They both reached out to their friends and family for money for machinery. Once they raised the funds, they both headed west to Colorado to unearth their gold mine and write their names into the history books. The first ore they discovered proved to be one of the richest veins in Colorado. They drilled with even more fervor, and then suddenly, the glimmering golden vein disappeared. They drilled deeper and deeper and deeper, but the gold was gone. They drilled for months. Still nothing. What was once the richest vein in the state—which would make them two of the richest men in the state—was gone. They were disappointed, disillusioned, frustrated, exhausted.

Rather than pick up their tools and machinery and drill elsewhere, they packed it all up and sold the mine and machinery to a junk man for a few hundred dollars. Their initial discovery had made news in the area, so the junk man consulted with an engineer and geologist who explained the Darby men did not realize there was a fault line where they were drilling. The golden vein had not disappeared; they just did not drill in the right place. When the new owner of the mine and the drill began drilling, he struck gold and struck it rich—three feet away from where the Darbys stopped drilling. They had no idea they were so close. After months of drilling, had they only gone thirty-six inches farther, their names would be in the history books for a much better reason.

What about you? You have been praying for someone to return to God. Do not stop praying. You may be one more prayer away from helping someone fight and win the spiritual battle they don't have the strength to fight. Pray and keep praying. Our judge is just, He listens to our prayers, and when His time is right, He will move His hand to answer because He is God, and He is good.

Prayer Focus

- For God to grant us the faith to be persistent in our prayer life
- For God to help us recognize His justice at work in our lives and the world



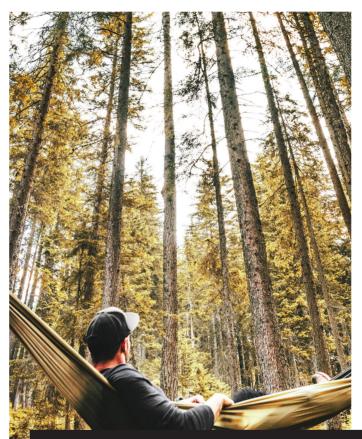
TRUST AND REST

FOCUS VERSES Matthew 11:28-30 ²⁸ Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

LESSON TEXT Matthew 11:25-30

TRUTH ABOUT GOD Jesus invites us to come to Him for rest.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE I will come to Jesus for my rest.



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: Have you ever been given a task that included a specific list of detailed instructions that were impossible to follow?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

- » Do you remember what it was like when you were a child and found it easy to believe virtually anything someone older than you said?
- I. CHILDLIKE FAITH
 - A. Childlike Faith Trusts
 - » What is a mistake one of Jesus' disciples made that has helped you avoid the same mistake in your life?
 - B. The "Wise" Are Often Cynical
 - » Are there examples in your life when following godly wisdom instead of worldly wisdom was a great blessing? Are there examples when you made the mistake of not following godly wisdom and learned a lesson the hard way?
 - C. I Will Choose Childlike Faith
 - » What are the most common "faith substitutes" that rob us of faith in God when we decide to trust in them more than Him?
- II. JESUS' INVITATION
 - A. Jesus Invites Us to Rest in Him
 - » What lessons have you learned from trials you've been through?
 - B. Jesus' Yoke Symbolizes Our Partnership with Him \blacksquare
 - C. I Will Come to Jesus for My Rest

Internalizing the Message V

Prayer Focus

- For God to help us leave our burdens at His feet
- For God to reveal problems we are trying to solve with our own effort when we need His help

LESSON CONNECTION

revor was concerned and somewhat confused. Like most young boys living in America in 1980, he enjoyed hearing stories of the wars that had been fought in American history. George Washington, Douglas MacArthur, and Sergeant York were some of his heroes. Trevor imagined himself one day fighting for his country and receiving a medal for bravery.

However, in all his seven years on the planet, he had never heard of anything so terrible as the news that came across the airwaves of the radio. He paused for a moment to try and picture the scene. Somewhere in a country that was certainly nothing like the United States, a village had been taken over by a group of "gorillas" wielding M16s. Entire families, including women and children, were gathered together and terrorized by these apes who somehow had managed to learn how to operate machine guns.

Trevor pictured in his mind the terror that most certainly stained that day on the other side of the world: families just like his family rounded up by these animals who certainly would never listen to reason. How were the humans not able to outsmart them? What could the gorillas possibly have planned next? Trevor paused for a moment and became extremely thankful that in his experience in America, the only place gorillas could ever be found was behind the bars of safety at the local zoo.

Years later Trevor discovered the meaning of the word *guerrilla*, which sounded exactly the same as the word *gorilla*. As an adult he still chuckles when telling this story, along with one about his father teasing him on their last trip to the beach about how the chef caught the hush puppies they were eating. Children often have difficulty distinguishing between the truth and jokes adults like to tell because God created us with a tremendous capacity for faith.

A child is often willing to believe virtually anything an authority figure declares as truth, even if it seems somewhat preposterous. That is why we must take seriously the admonition in Scripture to train up our children in the way they should go, taking every advantage of the opportunities we have to teach them the foundational truths of the Word of God when they will so readily receive them.

It also underscores the need for us to examine our level of faith to determine if we have the same ability to receive the truth in the Word of God. If Trevor mistakenly believed that gorillas could take up automatic weapons just because that's what he heard an authority figure on the radio say, how much more should God's children receive His timeless truth? Through God's Spirit, let's develop childlike faith to live a life pleasing to the Lord.

Do you remember what it was like when you were a child and found it easy to believe virtually anything someone older than you said?

BIBLE LESSON

I. CHILDLIKE FAITH

A. Childlike Faith Trusts

Older adults often observe children playing and remark how wonderful it would be to have that level of energy. At least a portion of a child's high energy level could be attributed to a complete lack of worry over anything other than the fun they want to have in the next moment. Children are not concerned about the power bill, interest rates, their 401K, or the upcoming busy season at work. Perhaps they instinctively understand the lesson Jesus taught about worry not having the ability to add a single inch to our stature.

If we desire the energy of a child to accomplish the practical tasks we find important, how much more should we desire the faith of a child to accomplish the spiritual activities that would be beneficial to our lives and the advancement of God's kingdom? Jesus declared quite plainly: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). Obviously Jesus was not calling on His followers to display the immature actions we may see from children when their parents say no to them in the checkout line of the grocery store; He was speaking of the faith of a child we possess during the stage of life before our innocence has been lost.

Eventually we all learn that adults (or older siblings) are not always right. The disciples provide us with excellent examples of what it means to take up our cross and follow Jesus, but they also allow us to learn lessons from their mistakes. Jesus' disciples debated among themselves about who would be the greatest in God's kingdom. They seemed oblivious that Jesus always knew about their private conversations.

Jesus explained to His followers that to be considered the greatest, one must become a servant. No one can voluntarily submit to servanthood without humility. That explains why Jesus once said: "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:4). Only through childlike faith can we fully trust the Lord.

What is a mistake one of Jesus' disciples made that has helped you avoid the same mistake in your life?

B. The "Wise" Are Often Cynical

How are we adults who have lost our childhood innocence supposed to become as children? How do we reconcile Jesus' call to Paul's command to "put away childish things?" (See I Corinthians 13:11.) Any time we are faced with what appears to be a contradiction in God's Word, we must ask God for help to understand the passages together. Jesus and Paul did not disagree. The letter to the Corinthian church did not include an admonition to ignore the teachings of Jesus. Instead we discover here the difference between childlike faith and worldly wisdom. For every spiritual truth we discover in the Bible, the enemy desires to convince us to settle for an inferior substitute, and the subject of faith is no exception.

Often those who are considered wise in the world's eves are the most difficult to convince of scriptural truth. Our world teaches us to look out for "number one," but the Bible teaches us to humble ourselves. Our world warns us if we do not promote ourselves, no one else will, yet the Bible declares promotion comes from the Lord. The wisdom of God is not often accepted by those the world deems wise because the wisdom of the world is at war with the Word of God. The Bible explains this contrast clearly in the Book of James. Worldly wisdom is referred to as "earthly, sensual, and devilish." (See James 3:15.) However, the wisdom of God is described as "pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17). If we settle for the world's version of wisdom, we are buying in to a devilish deception intended to keep us from embracing the full truth of God's wisdom.

C. I Will Choose Childlike Faith

Faith is one of the most essential elements in our walk with God, but it is also often misunderstood. Some think faith is an emotion: if we pray loud enough or use enough biblical language, God has to answer. If we are forceful with people praying in altar, God must fill them with His Spirit. But God measures the fervency of our prayer by our sincerity and passion, not our volume. Unfortunately, unwise actions in the altar can become a distraction to the person praying and a reason for the whiteknuckled pew grabber who is watching to stay put instead of venturing into that holy space. As we seek to grow up into a mature faith, we must trust in God like a child naturally trusts an earthly father, instead of placing confidence in our own ability.

Authentic faith is available to everyone because "God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Romans 12:3). We are not expected to generate faith out of thin air by some emotional demonstration or mental exercise. God asks us to place all our faith in Him rather than placing our faith in ourselves or any other option the world presents us. Just as Jesus declared there were different types of soil in the Parable of the Sower, the Word of God provides multiple descriptions of faith. We can settle for being like those He described as having "little faith" (Matthew 6:30), we can walk away from Him and display "no faith" (Mark 4:40), or we can allow ourselves to become like children and display "great faith" (Matthew 8:10).

When we place our faith in politicians, we are destined to be disappointed. When we place our faith in a get-rich-quick scheme, we discover poverty sprints faster than prosperity. The only place our faith belongs is in the Lord. He counseled: "But

Are there examples in your life when following godly wisdom instead of worldly wisdom was a great blessing? Are there examples when you made the mistake of not following godly wisdom and learned a lesson the hard way? rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Luke 12:31).

II. JESUS' INVITATION

A. Jesus Invites Us to Rest in Him

Jesus taught, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). He also said, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). We must understand the commandment to deny ourselves and the offer to experience His rest are both equally important in our walk with God. As the old expression goes, they are simply two sides of the same coin. If we attempt to carry the cross in our flesh (our human nature), we will stumble and fall. However, when we are in partnership with Him, we find strength for the journey because of the rest and refreshing power of the Holy Ghost.

Isaiah prophesied this truth in the Old Testament when he declared, "For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.... This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing" (Isaiah 28:11-12). The rest Jesus promised was not permission to sip sweet tea and wait for Jesus to return; this rest is permission to call on Jesus' name and trust in His Spirit to do what we cannot do on our own.

Sinners, not saints of God, live the most difficult lives. The Bible clearly declares: "Good understanding giveth favour: but the way of transgressors is hard" (Proverbs 13:15). If we find our walk with God to be difficult, perhaps God wants to teach us a lesson. Our proper response is not to question God by asking why, but to examine ourselves and ask Him, "What do I need to learn from what I'm going through?"

B. Jesus' Yoke Symbolizes Our Partnership with Him

We are accustomed to thinking food comes from our favorite aisle of the grocery store, but the farmer can tell the story about seeds sown, watered, grown, and harvested. In Jesus' day it was customary for an experienced farmer to partner a seasoned ox with a young ox because he understood the seasoned ox would bear most of the load. Just as the inexperienced ox has no knowledge of the help he will receive from the seasoned ox until he finds himself in the yoke, the same is true for us. Only when we are in His yoke will we discover Jesus truly does the heavy lifting, all the while He allows us to rest in His strength. When we are yoked with Him, He automatically directs our steps.

C. I Will Come to Jesus for My Rest

Even the world tells us life is hard, but the Lord declares this simple truth: when we walk with Him, we will discover His burden is light (Matthew 11:30). Even Christians experience trials, but we do not walk through them alone. When we are yoked with Jesus, we do not "walk through the valley of the shadow of What are the most common "faith substitutes" that rob us of faith in God when we decide to trust in them more than Him?

What lessons have you learned from trials you've been through?

Teacher Option: A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. death" (Psalm 23:4) or find ourselves in the "valley of decision" (Joel 3:14) all alone. Jesus is with us through it all. Everyone who walks with God for any significant amount of time could tell a multitude of testimonies of times God has proven Himself to be "a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

If life is difficult for you, do not run from God; run to Him. He is the only one who can offer you the help to walk and the strength to rest. There is no substitute for the presence of God and His strength He gives us. When we are submitted to the Lord, we will discover He is there with us working for us to develop us into the people He saved us to become.

We find comfort in passages of Scripture such as Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." As we follow His instructions to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, He made us a wonderful promise to weave and work our situations—the easy and the difficult—for our good. Do not give up when you feel weak. The alternative is carrying our own cross and our own burdens without His help. That plan is destined for unnecessary hardship in this life and an eternity of regret.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit. 💟

magine living in Israel in AD 30. From a child, you have been taught to steer clear of the Gentiles. In fact, one of your friends named Peter was "called on the carpet" because he dared enter a Gentile's house and even share a meal with him. Your leaders are so concerned with being defiled by Gentiles that you are forced to bathe by full immersion when you return from the market in case your garment brushed a Gentile without you realizing it.

Always mindful of good hygiene, you wash your hands before eating, but you are still surprised by the detailed protocol. The water used must be equivalent to at least one-and-a-half eggshells full. As water is poured on both hands, you must raise them to ensure your entire hand is wet, being careful not to allow the dirty water to run down to your fingers again. If so, you must wash all over again. If the water does not run down to your wrists, your hands will not be considered clean. You listen and follow these instructions carefully because the rabbis said if you were to neglect washing your hands according to these strict rules, you are as bad as a murderer.

On Friday night, you are introduced to additional Sabbath rules. You know Moses gave instructions to cease from work, but you discover the Jewish leaders have created thirty-nine additional rules called "father-works" that are punishable by death. These include plowing, carrying a burden, and reaping. That seems easy, but you grow concerned when hearing about the "descendant-works" you must also avoid.

If plowing a field on the Sabbath is punishable by death, then it is unacceptable to drag a chair across the ground because that would "plow" a rut. If carrying a burden is punishable by death, then wearing false teeth is not acceptable. You can walk with a cane but not on stilts because the rabbis say the man should carry the stilts; the stilts should not carry the man.

The rabbis also forbid tying or loosing certain types of knots, writing two or more letters of the alphabet next to each other, and purposefully starting a fire on the Sabbath. You must be careful because if a fire accidentally starts, you are not allowed to put it out, even in the case of an emergency. You fear a toothache because you will not be allowed to gargle with vinegar unless you are brave enough to swallow it afterward. Do not spit it out on the Sabbath.

Jesus' first-century Jewish audience carried heavy burdens by trying to keep the Law and all the additional laws the rabbis made, which is one reason Jesus invites us to yoke with Him. Put our faith in Him, not through obeying Jewish law but by obeying the gospel. We will find Jesus' words are true: His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

Prayer Focus

- For God to help us leave our burdens at His feet
- For God to reveal problems we are trying to solve with our own effort when we need His help



SERIES 2: FAITH PASSAGES

EVEN GIANTS FALL

FOCUS VERSES I John 1:8-10 ⁸ If we say that we

have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

 ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
 ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

LESSON TEXT II Samuel 12:1-14

TRUTH ABOUT GOD God is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE I will confess my sins to God and forsake them.



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 biggest surprise you have read in the Bible?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection. 🕕

- I. DAVID'S FAITH AND FORGIVENESS
 - A. David's Sin
 - B. Nathan's Story
 - » Much of the Book of Acts is written as a historical narrative to teach spiritual concepts through stories. Why do you feel that method is effective?
 - C. David's Repentance
 - D. I Will Recognize I Am Vulnerable to Temptation
 - » What spiritual disciplines could help us avoid the mistake David made to take a vacation from God?
- II. OUR FAITH AND FORGIVENESS
 - A. We All Are Sinners
 - B. We All Can Be Forgiven through the Gospel
 - » Can you share an experience when you faced temptation but God delivered you by revealing a way of escape?
 - C. I Will Confess My Sins to God and Forsake Them
 - » Many new disciples testify that the enemy immediately attacked them after being baptized or receiving the Holy Ghost. What advice would you give someone who has that experience?
 - » David's sins were not the end of the story. Why do you believe he was able to recover his relationship with God?

Internalizing the Message $oldsymbol{V}$

Prayer Focus

- For God to restore to us the joy of our salvation
- For God to cleanse our conscience from the guilt of past sin and empower us to accomplish His will

LESSON CONNECTION

A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. 🚺

A generation of Americans was mesmerized by the fascinating stories and comforting voice of Paul Harvey. He became famous for capturing the attention of listeners on the radio and readers of his syndicated newspaper columns. His signature approach was to first weave a biographical tale about the unknown history of a famous person to humanize that person. Then once the audience felt they could relate to the real and emotional story of tragedy, triumph, and every other human experience in between, Harvey would reveal the person's identity just prior to closing his commentary with the well-known catchphrase: "and now you know the rest of the story."

In a newspaper column that differed from the format that made him a household name, Harvey once offered some ideas about the current state of America in 1964. After the original publication date, it was then recorded and broadcast on the radio in an updated form. Recently it has surfaced again on the internet, reaching a new generation. Many know nothing about Paul Harvey other than this singular commentary. The newspaper column and radio broadcast share the title "If I Were the Devil."

Among the many ideas Paul Harvey saw as plaguing society in his time, he included such issues as the prevalence of drugs and alcohol, the substitution of psychology in the place of religion, and the tendency of Americans to believe that solutions come from Washington, D.C., instead of from the Lord. Those topics would be fitting for every generation and help to explain its popularity over time.

However, one rather obvious tactic of the enemy that Harvey overlooked was the enemy's most treasured weapon against the saints of God. The Bible declares: "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper" (Isaiah 54:17). While that promise is comforting, it does include an underlying message that the enemy actively forms weapons against us. The fiery darts he launches at me may be different from the attacks he designs against you. While these attacks may come in different forms, we must be on guard against one consistent tactic. The Bible identifies the enemy of our souls as "the accuser of our brethren" (Revelation 12:10).

This strategy can only be effective against the saint of God who does not understand the difference between conviction and condemnation. *Conviction* comes from the Lord and is intended to draw us back to Him when we sin; *condemnation* only comes from the enemy of our souls and is intended to drive us further from God by bringing up past mistakes God has already forgiven. They both feel like guilt, but they lead us in opposite directions. When we feel the enemy trying to condemn us though God has already forgiven us, we can hold up the shield of faith which is "able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked" (Ephesians 6:16). If I were the devil, I would be scared to death of a Holy Spirit-filled saint of God who understands the power of repentance and being forgiven.

BIBLE LESSON

I. DAVID'S FAITH AND FORGIVENESS

A. David's Sin

In the springtime when kings typically went out to battle, the mightiest warrior in all of Israel decided to sit this one out. Perhaps he felt he had earned the right to relax at home and catch up on some overdue royal projects. Second Samuel 10 tells the story of David personally fighting against the Syrian army, a battle in which he "slew the men of seven hundred chariots of the Syrians, and forty thousand horsemen, and smote Shobach the captain of their host, who died there" (II Samuel 10:18). The problem with David's decision is he also took a vacation away from God. We are often most vulnerable to temptation after a great victory because we let our guard down.

One evening during his sabbatical, David took a stroll on the roof of his house. Maybe he was having trouble sleeping and wanted to glimpse the grandeur of his kingdom. Whatever the reason for his evening rooftop walk, it ended in David's sinful choice. David saw a married woman bathing; she happened to be the wife of one David's mighty men, Uriah the Hittite. Rather than look away or walk back inside, David caved into temptation and sent someone to bring her to him. He discovered her name was Bathsheba and she was indeed married, but even that holy boundary did not keep him on the right side of righteousness. She was brought to him and he committed the sin of adultery with Bathsheba.

Once he discovered she was expecting David's baby, King David called for her husband, Uriah, to come home from the battle, hoping to make it appear Bathsheba's husband was the father of the soon-to-be-born child. When Uriah refused to spend the night in the comfort of his home—twice—while his companions slept on the battlefield, David ordered him to be intentionally placed and then abandoned on the front lines where he would certainly be killed by enemy troops. Although Uriah was a mighty man of valor, he was not mighty enough to face the enemy alone. There on the battlefield, righteous Uriah died at the hand of unrighteous David.

B. Nathan's Story

David had strayed far from his commitment to lead God's people in righteousness, but thankfully he had a man of God in his life. No matter what position God allows us to fill in His kingdom, we should always prioritize the spiritual authority of church leadership. David ignored conviction and kept his sin a secret. He married Bathsheba when the time for mourning her husband, Uriah, ended. However, the Word of God declares the obvious: "the thing that David had done displeased the LORD" (II Samuel 11:27).

Nathan the prophet then entered the scene. His task was not one for the faint of heart: to stand before King David, who had the ability to order the prophet's immediate execution, and declare the king to be a sinner. Nathan doubtless prayed, and then he entered the presence of the king and exercised tremendous wisdom.

God led Nathan to illustrate the severity of what David had done in a non-confrontational manner, and the best method to do so was by telling the former shepherd a story about a shepherd and his sheep. One rich man was blessed with many flocks and herds, but the poor man only had one ewe lamb, which was more like a daughter than a sheep. To feed his hungry guest, the rich man robbed the poor man of his only lamb, and David was incensed.

He angrily declared, "As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die." Nathan directly challenged the king by asserting: "Thou art the man" (II Samuel 12:7). He pronounced judgment upon David's house for his sin, including the death of his newborn child.

C. David's Repentance

David broke down and confessed, "I have sinned against the LORD," and the Bible transcribes David's prayer in Psalm 51. His words can serve as a model of repentance: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (Psalm 51:1-2). As David acknowledged his sin, his sincerity screams through the pages of Scripture when we read: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me" (Psalm 51:10-11). David pledged to teach transgressors the ways of God and declared his "tongue shall sing aloud of God's righteousness" (Psalm 51:13-14).

When we sincerely cry out to God to forgive our sin, God responds the exact same way every time: with forgiveness. David did not escape the immediate consequences of his transgressions; God judged him, and the remainder of David's reign was filled with betrayal and strife. In grace God answered David's prayer request, which we should always pray when we have fallen short: "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation" (Psalm 51:12).

D. I Will Recognize I Am Vulnerable to Temptation

We should glean inspiration when we discover the great examples of faith in the Bible were flesh and blood, just like us. Noah planted a vineyard and became intoxicated with wine from the grapes. Sarah laughed when God told her she would bear a child. Moses had a temper that denied him access to the Promised Land. Add to that list the name of David: an adulterer, liar, and murderer.

Much of the Book of Acts is written as a historical narrative to teach spiritual concepts through stories. Why do you feel that method is effective? We typically start with people's failings and conclude by emphasizing God's ability to use them to accomplish great feats for His kingdom. The inverse must also be a part of our analysis. At times we should begin with the feats of faith and then remind ourselves of the mistakes. David slew the giant Goliath. He wrote the comforting words of the twenty-third psalm. His name appears over eight hundred times in the Word of God, including fourteen times when Jesus is referred to as the Son of David. That same David was guilty of some of the most grievous sins in the Word of God. If it could happen to him, it could happen to any of us.

II. OUR FAITH AND FORGIVENESS

A. We All Are Sinners

The Book of Romans includes a conviction of all humanity from the pen of the apostle Paul and the inspiration of Almighty God. No one escapes indictment. From the vilest sinner to the most holy, the Bible declares: "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10). Furthermore, Scripture describes our efforts of righteousness as nothing more than "filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6), because we "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Our goodness will never be enough to answer the holy call of Heaven.

B. We All Can Be Forgiven through the Gospel

That is the bad news. However, the same Paul who presented an abundance of evidence to return a guilty verdict from any impartial jury also provided us with the best news of all human history in his first epistle to the church in Corinth. There he identified the gospel as having three components: "Christ died for our sins . . . was buried, and . . . rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (I Corinthians 15:3–4).

When we respond to His death, burial, and resurrection through repentance, baptism in Jesus' name, and receiving the Holy Ghost, we receive the glorious promise that "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (II Corinthians 5:17). When the enemy tries to bring up our past, we can remind him God has placed it as far from His mind "as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12). While we may struggle with memories of past sin, we have the right to claim the bold declaration of Paul: "Such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (I Corinthians 6:11).

When God forgives, He will not bring our past up against us anymore. He empowers us by His Spirit to live holy lives, separated from wickedness in our world. Even when temptation presents itself to us, the Lord will always "make a way to escape, that we will be able to bear it." (See I Corinthians 10:13.) What spiritual disciplines could help us avoid the mistake David made to take a vacation from God?

Can you share an experience when you faced temptation but God delivered you by revealing a way of escape? Many new disciples testify that the enemy immediately attacked them after being baptized or receiving the Holy Ghost. What advice would you give someone who has that experience?

David's sins were not the end of the story. Why do you believe he was able to recover his relationship with God?

C. I Will Confess My Sins to God and Forsake Them

Unfortunately, we do not always make right decisions. In those times, do not become discouraged and give up. Remember the promise God's mercy makes available: "And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (I John 2:1-2). The blood Jesus shed on Calvary is enough to remove every stain of sin in our lives.

While new disciples often deal with condemnation, seasoned saints of God are not exempt from the same fiery darts. We have a scriptural answer that empowers us to shut our enemy's mouth. When explaining Jesus' superior sacrifice, the writer of Hebrews explained: "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:13-14). When we have obeyed the gospel and are living a repentant life free from willful sin, we can have confidence the blood of Jesus will purge us from any guilt that could prevent us from accomplishing the will of God.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit. 💟

avid and Bathsheba anxiously awaited the day their baby would be born. They could not forget Nathan's searing prophecy in the back of their minds. David knew he had sinned, and his son would not live long past birth.

When their baby was born, it was obvious he was weak. David pushed away the plate and fasted, lying all night on the cold ground. The staff urged David to eat, but he refused. Perhaps his self-inflicted sacrifice would move God to relent and heal his newborn son. He fasted one day, two days, three days, four days. The little guy hung on. Five days, six days, seven days. On the seventh day, the little boy closed his eyes and died. He was a casualty of David's rebellion and sin against God. The staff had watched their king grieve and fast for a week. He was so broken. How would he respond if they told him his son had just died? Would he be angry, lash out at them, accuse them of not doing enough?

They met secretly to discuss how to tell the king the sad news. David looked over to see them whispering, and he knew. He quietly spoke up, "Is my son dead?" They slowly nodded. "Yes, sir, he is." David nodded as well. He stood up off the cold ground, washed, changed his clothes, and then went into the Tabernacle of the LORD and worshiped God. He knew he did not deserve mercy after committing adultery, cover up, and murder. God could have rightly stripped him of his crown, even his life, but God judged him by taking his son.

But that was not the end of the story. After his sincere repentance, David and his wife Bathsheba discovered she was expecting again. When their baby was born, they named him Solomon, meaning "peace." After all of David's sins and missteps, his repentance brought him back to a beautiful place of peace with God again. And this son with Bathsheba grew to be wise and to succeed his dad, King David, as the king of the nation of Israel and builder of the famed Temple where God gloriously met with His people.

Even giants like David fall, but giants also get back up again. Repentance from sin has that amazing power. Our repentance coupled with God's mercy gives God a grace-filled opportunity to write "the rest of the story."

Prayer Focus

- For God to restore to us the joy of our salvation
- For God to cleanse our conscience from the guilt of past sin and empower us to accomplish His will



SERIES 2: FAITH PASSAGES

A DYNAMIC DUO

FOCUS VERSE James 2:14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

LESSON TEXT Genesis 22:1-14; James 2:14-26

TRUTH ABOUT GOD God calls us to put our faith into action.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE I will demonstrate my faith through my works.



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 been born in any family in the Bible, which family would it have been?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

- I. THE DYNAMIC DUO OF FAITH AND WORKS
 - A. The Danger of Faith without Works
 - B. The Power of Faith with Works
 - » If Peter walked into our church this Sunday, would he feel right at home? What if he heard our typical altar call—would the instruction he heard match what he said in Acts 2?
 - C. I Will Demonstrate My Faith through My Works V
 - » Why do you think the majority of Jewish society rejected Jesus even after witnessing so many marvelous miracles?

II. THE FAITHFULNESS OF ABRAHAM

- A. God Challenged Abraham's Faith
 - » Who is your favorite Bible character included in the Hall of Faith Heroes in Hebrews? Which name are you surprised was not included?
- B. Abraham Proved to Be Faithful
 - » Can you think of any reason it would make sense for God to call Abraham to offer Isaac?
- C. I Will Seek to Be Found Faithful When Tested
 - » What types of sacrifice has God required from you in your walk with Him?

Internalizing the Message 🚺

Prayer Focus

- For God to help us become doers of the Word and not hearers only
- For God to give us the confidence to stand when life challenges our faith

LESSON CONNECTION

A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. 🕕

opeka, Kansas, is well known in American history for multiple reasons. In Topeka the events that led to the famous Brown v. Board of Education case occurred, which resulted in the desegregation of American schools. Topeka was also the location of the Bible school where Charles Fox Parham and his students believed and taught that speaking in tongues was the initial sign of Holy Ghost baptism, helping to spark the modern Pentecostal movement.

In this same city, Charles Sheldon served as the pastor of Central Congregational Church during the closing years of the nineteenth century. In 1896, he decided to try something different during the Sunday night services. Instead of a traditional sermon, he began reading a novel he was writing by presenting one chapter each week to the congregation. The story became so popular that soon the church was full of people wanting to find out about what would happen next. Eventually the book would be published with the title *In His Steps*, and it remains a popular reading assignment in many Christian schools today.

The story is set in fictional Raymond, a railroad town in the Eastern United States. It opens with the main character, Reverend Henry Maxwell, pastor of First Church of Raymond, sitting in his home on Friday afternoon preparing his Sunday sermon. When his efforts to concentrate are interrupted by a panhandler, the pastor brushes him aside and gets back to what he considers a more important activity.

On Sunday morning the same man shows up to service and addresses the congregation. He then immediately collapses and dies a few days later. Reverend Maxwell is affected deeply by these events and begins to question his selfish behavior. He challenges his congregation with a question that causes a revival in the lives of virtually everyone in the town: what would Jesus do? Inspired by this simple, yet profound question, the members of Central Congregational Church begin to look for ways to use their position in the community to bring about changes that will form Raymond into a place God desires it to be.

What would Jesus do? We would still do well to consider that provoking question because one of the essential components of true biblical theology should focus on what we believe and what we do. Living for God is much more than simply listening to the preached Word of God on Sunday mornings; we must respond and follow what the Word of God calls us to do. When God's Word calls us to repent, we must repent. When God's Word calls us to love our neighbor and forgive those who hurt us, we must hear and heed. We would do well to enter every service asking ourselves two questions: what does God want me to know? What does God want me to do?

BIBLE LESSON

I. THE DYNAMIC DUO OF FAITH AND WORKS

A. The Danger of Faith without Works

Peanut butter and jelly. Coffee and donuts. Rest and relaxation. Some things seem destined to always go together. The same should be true of faith and works. Almost nine hundred years ago a man commonly referred to as Saint Bernard of Clairvaux wrote, "Hell is full of good wishes or desires." While you may not have heard of this man, you likely have heard the contemporary equivalent of his saying: "the road to Hell is paved with good intentions." Neither of these quotes are from the Word of God because they are not exactly accurate. A person being cast into outer darkness, being eternally separated from God, is not simply the end result of good intentions but rather the direct result of sin.

Likewise, we understand that good works alone cannot earn us entrance into that beautiful gate cut from a single pearl. We can never be good enough to purchase our own salvation because, even on our best day, the Bible declares all our righteousness as nothing more than "filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). It is impossible to do enough good deeds to erase the stain of one single sin. We must apply the gospel to our lives through the new-birth experience because neither good works nor good intentions are enough to save us.

This fact is demonstrated throughout the Word of God. If Noah had the faith to believe it was going to rain but refused to build the ark, he would have drowned. If Peter had answered the question, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" by explaining that simply changing their mind about Jesus was enough for salvation, the people may have gone home with a repentance experience, but they would not have been born again. (See Acts 2:36–39.)

B. The Power of Faith with Works

However, faith combined with works releases the power of God. Faith and works are both involved in all elements of obeying the gospel of God. (See II Thessalonians 1:8; I Peter 4:17.) We must do more than have a change of mind about our sinful state; we must repent of our sins by turning from our old life. It is not enough to feel sorry for past mistakes; we must quit sinning.

For those who gathered to be baptized by John the Baptist, he demanded they "bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:8). Jesus taught the same doctrine when He instructed the woman caught in adultery to "go, and sin no more" (John 8:11). Repentance is how we obey the death of Jesus. We must have faith to believe that His death on the cross of Calvary was sufficient to pay our debt to sin, and we must do the work of turning from sin. After we have repented of our sin, we respond to Jesus' burial by being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. (See Romans 6:4.) When the first Gentiles were brought into the New Testament church in Acts 10, Peter did not just suggest they be baptized; rather, he "commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord" (Acts 10:48).

Our new birth is not complete without Spirit baptism. In His supreme wisdom, God provided us an undeniable sign that we have been filled with His Spirit. Multiple experiences in life can make the hair stand up on our neck or give us moments of joy or a sense of peace. However, only the baptism of the Holy Ghost allows us to worship God in a language we have never learned as we declare "the wonderful works of God" (Acts 2:11). That experience involves a level of faith in the Word of God combined with surrendering our whole self to Him. Faith without works is dead, but the combination of faith and works produces the new birth.

C. I Will Demonstrate My Faith through My Works

Just as faith apart from obedience will not result in salvation, our walk with God after the new birth is equally dependent upon the marriage of faith and works. If Jesus had only declared His identity with words, the statements He made would have been true, but the opportunity to prove their accuracy may have been lost. The Bible declares: "Jesus . . . went about doing good" (Acts 10:38).

When John the Baptist sent messengers asking whether Jesus really was the Messiah, Jesus offered the works He had done as evidence: "Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached" (Luke 7:22).

The Book of James contains the most notable commentary on this subject. James asked these rhetorical questions: "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?" (James 2:14). James then gave a very practical example to illustrate his point. If we encounter a brother or sister needing clothing and food and say, "Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled" without offering practical help, it is of no use (James 2:16). In summary, the Word of God declares in clear terms: "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" (James 2:17).

II. THE FAITHFULNESS OF ABRAHAM

A. God Challenged Abraham's Faith

To see faith in real life, let us look at the "father of the faithful" based on Paul's description of Abraham as "the father of all them that believe" (Romans 4:11). The first eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis chronicle approximately two thousand years. In those chapters we read about Adam and Eve, the story of Noah and

If Peter walked into our church this Sunday, would he feel right at home? What if he heard our typical altar call—would the instruction he heard match what he preached in Acts 2?

Why do you think the majority of Jewish society rejected Jesus even after witnessing so many marvelous miracles?

Teacher Option: A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit. **V** the Flood, and how God confused the languages because of humanity's disobedience in building the Tower of Babel.

We see some detail, but the Bible paints in rather broad brushstrokes until we reach chapter twelve where we are introduced to a man named Abram and his wife Sarai. The next fourteen chapters are devoted exclusively to that one man and his family. If we add in the portion of the Bible dedicated to Abraham's son, grandson, and great-grandson, we see a total of thirty-nine chapters devoted to this one extended family.

No surprise Abraham is celebrated in God's Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11: "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Hebrews 11:8). Abraham was called, and then he obeyed. Abraham combined faith with works. If he had sat around his entire life bragging about God speaking to him and explaining how much he believed God's promise without ever leaving his hometown, his spoken faith would have been dead words.

But to be proven faithful required more than one action. Abraham left his hometown, separated from his entire family (including his nephew Lot), and received the promised son named Isaac. Then the Lord challenged Abraham's faith yet again with a call that must have been incredibly difficult to hear: "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" (Genesis 22:2).

B. Abraham Proved to Be Faithful

No one can truly understand the anguish he felt to offer up his own son to God as a sacrifice. Abraham must have thought, *God*, *this did not make sense. Is this really Your plan? Your nature?* Yet Abraham's response may be one of the most impressive examples of faith in God we read in the entire Bible. Consider the test of Abraham's faith. He had waited approximately twenty-five years for his promised son to be miraculously born. He had received the promise from God that through Isaac all nations of the earth shall be blessed. Then God said to sacrifice his promised son, Isaac. Do not underestimate what this means: Abraham would have to lay his son on an altar and kill him as a sacrifice to God.

How could Abraham do something so barbaric? Offering Isaac directly conflicted with the promises God had given him. But there are two reasons for those concerns. First, Abraham loved Isaac, but he loved God more. One of the main issues for Abraham was whether he loved the promise (Isaac) more than the promise keeper (God). Abraham passed the test by his willingness to sacrifice his son unto the one who gave him his son.

Secondly, Abraham had enough faith and trust that if he followed what God told him to do, the Lord was able to prove Himself Who is your favorite Bible character inducted in the Hall of Faith Heroes in Hebrews? Whose name are you surprised was not included?

Can you think of any reason it would make sense for God to call Abraham to offer Isaac? faithful. Again we discover insight in the Book of Hebrews that helps explain Abraham's thought process. The Bible explains Abraham reasoned that if God had promised all the nations of the earth would be blessed through Isaac, then when he followed God's instructions and sacrificed his son, "God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (Hebrews 11:19). That is certainly faith with works. But that resurrection miracle was unnecessary because as Abraham lifted the knife to sacrifice Isaac, the Lord stopped him and provided a ram as a sacrifice in place of Isaac, a beautiful Old Testament foreshadowing of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

C. I Will Seek to Be Found Faithful When Tested

Today we are faced with the same choice as every saint of God who has come before us. Unlike Noah, we will probably not be asked to build a large boat out of gopher wood, and we certainly should not expect God to call us to sacrifice our children. However, we must be mindful that living for God always has and always will require some level of sacrifice.

Only by a combination of faith with works is it possible to please God. The Book of James is often called the New Testament companion to the Old Testament Book of Proverbs. We are encouraged to be "doers of the word, and not hearers only." If we only hear the word without taking proper action, we are guilty of deceiving our own selves (James 1:22). This same principle can be applied to believing without taking action—faith without works.

In each of our lives, we must make the decision to allow the Word of God—not our opinion of ourselves or the trends of society—to be the mirror whereby we evaluate our actions and motives to ensure we are not guilty of the description Jesus gave in Luke 9:62: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." A proper combination of faith and works will ensure we endure to the end and obtain salvation.

What types of sacrifice has God required from you in your walk with Him?

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. 🕕

The year 1955 was significant. America had endured the Great Depression, experienced the thrill of victory in World War II, and found itself one decade into the Cold War with what was then known as the Soviet Union. President Eisenhower sent the first military advisors to Vietnam, and in that same year, a woman named Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, an event that sparked the Civil Rights Movement and inspired Martin Luther King, Jr.

Also in 1955 a recently retired man sat on his front porch and watched as his Social Security check was delivered to his mailbox. His life had been difficult. When Harland was only six years old, his father had died, causing young Harland to take the lead in caring for his younger brothers and sisters when their mother entered the workforce. He had dropped out of school in the sixth grade and held a wide variety of jobs since then: a railroad worker, a tire salesman, an unsuccessful politician, and others.

At the age of sixty-five, all he seemed to have to show for his efforts was the promise of another Social Security check being delivered. He went to the mailbox, retrieved his check, and thought to himself, *Is this all my life is going to be, just sitting on the front porch waiting for my next check to arrive?*

The thought was discouraging. Harland decided to pause and write down all the blessings in his life, listing everything, even the small things. You could say he was counting his blessings, naming them one by one. He wrote that he was the only person in the world who knew his mother's recipe for fried chicken, which included eleven different herbs and spices. That day he decided to become a doer. He visited a local restaurant and asked if he could get a job cooking chicken. Soon his chicken became the most popular item on the menu.

Later Harland opened his own restaurant, which soon became a string of restaurants we now know as Kentucky Fried Chicken. He sold to a national organization for millions of dollars and served as their public representative until his death in 1980 at the age of ninety. All this became possible when "Colonel Sanders" refused to simply sit on the porch waiting to receive; he decided to do something with what he already had.

If Colonel Sanders realized his recipe and his fried chicken were gifts, and if his decision to do something with that knowledge allowed him to achieve fame in our society, what can the church of the living God do if we will become doers of the Word instead of hearers only?

Prayer Focus

- For God to help us become doers of the Word and not hearers only
- For God to give us the confidence to stand when life challenges our faith

3.1

FOCUS VERSES Luke 21:25–28 ²⁵ And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring;

²⁶ Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.

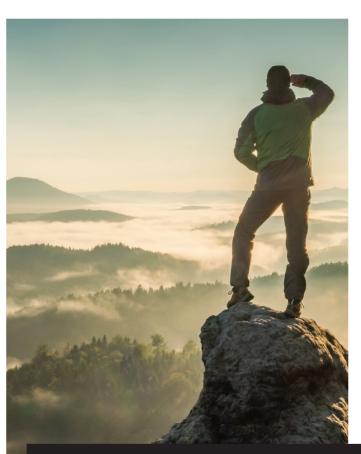
²⁷ And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.
²⁸ And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.

LESSON TEXT Luke 21:1-28

TRUTH ABOUT GOD God has big plans for eternity that we do not yet understand.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE I will live ready for Jesus' return.

PROPHECY IN PERSPECTIVE



Series Overview:

The disciples walked with Jesus for three-and-a-half years, and most of them still did not understand Jesus' teaching about the end time. If you have trouble understanding the end time, you're in good, God-called company. Learn together what Jesus said about last things and how we should live in these last days.



SG TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: If people from the 1970s could suddenly be transported to 2025, what might impress them most? What do you think the world will look like in 2075?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

- I. THE WIDOW'S MITES
 - A. The Disciples Were Impressed by the Temple \blacksquare
 - B. Jesus Was Impressed by Sacrifice
 - » What do you think about Jesus when you realize He was more attracted to a widow's offering than an ornate Temple that took forty-six years to refurbish?
 - C. Jesus Prophesied the Temple Would Be Destroyed
 - D. I Will Seek to Understand
 - » What helpful methods do you use when you read passages in the Bible you don't understand?

II. PROPHECY IN PERSPECTIVE

- A. Prophecy Often Has Multiple Horizons
- B. Prophecy Is Really God Telling His Story
 » What sometimes scares people about someone teaching on prophecy?
- C. I Will Keep My Focus on Jesus' Promises to Be Faithful 💟
- III. SIGNS OF THE END TIME
 - A. The Great Tribulation Is Coming
 - B. Prophecy Teaches God's Kingdom Wins in the End
 - » How does knowing that God and His church win affect your ability to keep going?

Internalizing the Message

» What events happening in the world today remind you Jesus could return soon?

Prayer Focus

- For God to help us see things as He does
- For God to help us live with Heaven in view

LESSON CONNECTION

found something!" shouted Ahmad, as his shovel hit a long, solid object. "Kaleem, come and help me." Shortly the two unearthed part of a wall with decorations and figures on it. The whole archaeological team gathered to dig deeper and wider. The wall extended as far as they could dig, but the deeper they dug, they found out this was not just a wall; it was an ancient, beautiful, adorned gate.

German archaeologist Robert Koldewey congratulated his crew. After further digging he announced, "You have done it. You have discovered that all the legends of ancient Babylon are true." Kaleem asked, "How did we do that?" Koldewey answered, "Do you see these glazed, blue bricks that depicted alternating rows of bulls and dragons?" Ahmad answered "yes" with great curiosity. Koldewey pronounced, "You have unearthed the famous Ishtar Gate."

- "What's the Ishtar Gate?" asked Ahmad. The archaeologist continued, "This is a gate into the city of ancient Babylon. The historian Herodotus called it the most splendid city in the world." One worker asked, "How old is this gate?" Koldewey replied, "Have you ever heard of the prophet Daniel?" Another worked puzzled, "Should I know him from the Koran?"
- "No," replied the archaeologist. "He is not in the Koran. Yet Jews, Christians, and Muslims have all spoken of him. As a youth, Daniel was taken prisoner by Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers into this very city at the same time this gate was being built."
- "Amazing!" said Kaleem, "and we have unearthed this." Koldewey continued, "There were seven gates. The inner city was said to be impregnable. Nebuchadnezzar boasted that his empire would last a thousand years."
- "Did it? Did Nebuchadnezzar's people and beliefs live on for a long time?" asked Kaleem. "Nope," said the archaeologist, "less than a century. But remember Daniel, the Jewish exile; well, his people are still prosperous today. And millions worship the God he served."

The Ishtar Gate was excavated between 1902 and 1914 by German archaeologist Robert Koldewey. Ironically, the most powerful kingdom at one time had disappeared in the sands of time, its ancient beauty long gone. This ought to give us pause as to what is important and what will last. Six hundred years after Babylon fell, the one great world power was Rome. At the time Jesus was born, Judaea was ruled by a king named Herod the Great, whose place was established by Rome.

To curry favor with the Jewish people and make a name for himself, he began a project to restore the Temple in Jerusalem to its glory when Solomon built it. Herod died before it was finished, but his son continued the building project. By the time Jesus began His ministry, thousands of men spent forty-six years building and adorning the Temple (John 2:20).

BIBLE LESSON

I. THE WIDOW'S MITES

A. The Disciples Were Impressed by the Temple

The beauty of the Temple grounds at the time of Herod rivaled some of the ancient wonders of the world. Though Jesus' disciples were certainly impressed (Matthew 24:1), Jesus had a different perspective. Further, He had little to say about the sometimes lavish display that went along with giving gifts. Luke 21:1 states Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. According to Mark 12:41, these gifts were large. Obviously, the rich enjoyed being seen and commended for their generosity. Indeed, they publicly made a show of giving a large sum into the treasure box that served as the "building fund."

B. Jesus Was Impressed by Sacrifice

On some level it is hard to blame Jesus' disciples for being impressed with such a display. They had left home and family to follow Jesus, all the while relying on small gifts given by random people to provide for their daily needs. Then unnoticed by all but Jesus, a widow woman unpretentiously dropped a couple coins into the box. The King James Version calls the coins "mites." They were the smallest, least valuable of all Roman coins, worth just a few cents. Yet Jesus said evenly: "Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all" (Luke 21:3).

The disciples were confused by Jesus' statement. They scanned the crowd for a wealthy woman but found none. They returned their questioning gaze to Jesus, who simply nodded at a poor widow woman. Then He continued: "For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had" (Luke 21:4). She did not give out of her abundance; she gave out of her poverty. In Western culture, we do not know much about giving an offering that would affect whether we will eat on a given day. This widow exhibited an unflinching trust that God would take care of her.

Jesus' simple statement offered His perspective, but the disciples did not quite get it. Most people still do not get it. What the woman put in the offering was her hope. The woman freely gave to the Lord her ability to pay for her necessities. The disciples only saw the pitiful amount, but this unnamed widow woman was putting her trust in God. Most others did not even see her, but God Almighty in flesh saw her and inspired His Gospels writers to write her story so we would also see her.

C. Jesus Prophesied the Temple Would Be Destroyed

Jesus was not done. He then soberly announced: "As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be What do you think about Jesus when you realize He was more attracted to a widow's offering than an ornate Temple that took forty-six years to refurbish?

Teacher Option: A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. thrown down" (Luke 21:6). Jesus said this after the disciples were apparently pointing out the impressive Temple sites (Matthew 24:1). His prophecy arrested their attention and caused them to wonder, *When would this massive, beautiful Temple be destroyed?*

D. I Will Seek to Understand

When we read passages like Matthew 24 or Luke 21, we often shrug because we do not know exactly what they mean. But Jesus prophesied to the disciples and for us so we would know how to live while we wait for His coming. Rather than flip past these passages, let us seek to understand what Jesus was saying for His first-century audience and for us. Pray for God to help you to understand. Read the chapters before and after the one you are trying to understand. Read other passages relating to the current one. Read books and commentaries for varied views from scholars who have done extensive research. Even reading in different translations can provide answers for the questions we have.

What helpful methods do you use when you read passages in the Bible you don't understand?

II. PROPHECY IN PERSPECTIVE

Then Jesus taught His greatest lesson on prophecy. It was no different than the lesson He taught about the widow's mites, only they did not understand. The lesson of the widow is that we can trust God, regardless of how bleak things may appear. We can trust Him with our lives and our resources. The lesson of Jesus teaching about the last days is the same: we can trust God with our lives and our resources, regardless of how bleak things may appear.

Because Jesus taught on the Mount of Olives, we often call this teaching about the last days the Olivet Discourse. It was first recorded in Mark 13, but it is recorded primarily in Luke 21 (as well as other chapters in Luke). Yet the fullest account is in Matthew 24-25. Jesus' prophecy was much like Old Testament prophecies. Several of them had multiple horizons: they would be fulfilled in the audiences' day, and they would be fulfilled again in the end of days.

A. Prophecy Often Has Multiple Horizons

We all have been in services where someone said, "That preacher was preaching right to me." The truth is God can speak a single time and it becomes a word to more than one individual in the congregation. Just as a message in tongues and interpretation could speak specifically to more than one individual, so Luke 21 and its parallel passages (Matthew 24–25 and Mark 13) can speak to God's people both near and far.

Jesus' words on the Mount of Olives had much to say to the first generation of believers, those who heard His words. Yet it also had a second and even more profound message to the generation who would see the end of things. Jesus' prophecy that the Temple would be destroyed was fulfilled in AD 70 when the Roman general Titus leveled Jerusalem. Perhaps this judgment was in answer to the Jews cry, "His [Jesus'] blood be on us, and on our children" (Matthew 27:25). This is the "near" situation. Yet, other prophecies were not fulfilled in the first century, making those fulfillments "far" from the original audience.

For example, the Olivet Discourse culminates with "and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30). The return of Jesus did not occur in AD 70 or in our day yet, but we anticipate it in the future. Jesus' Olivet Discourse spoke not only to that generation, but to every generation afterward: God has a plan. He knows the end of the story. Yes, bad things will happen, but you can trust in God. It is the same lesson as the widow's mites.

B. Prophecy Is Really God Telling His Story

A couple important principles about prophecy help us truly appreciate it and take out some of the mystery about it. The first is that prophecy is simply God telling His story. The same God who inspired Moses to write, "In the beginning God . . ." not only knows the beginning of the story, but He knows the end as well. "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain" (Revelation 21:4).

C. I Will Keep My Focus on Jesus' Promises to Be Faithful

Scholars tell us that up to a fourth of the Bible is made up of the prophetic. Further, not only are many prophecies in the Bible, but there are many fulfillments to prophecy as well, especially related to Jesus. The Messiah was prophesied to be born in Bethlehem, born of a virgin, from the seed of Abraham, and a descendant of David. All these prophecies have been fulfilled.

Jesus came, lived, ministered, and even died in fulfillment of words spoken by prophets. God's promises did prove to be true. And if God could miraculously fulfill dozens of prophecies in minute detail when Jesus first came, we can likewise believe God will fulfill future promises as we anticipate Jesus' return.

III. SIGNS OF THE END TIME

One of the most important prophetic passages of Scripture is found in today's text: Luke 21. So we would be prepared for Jesus' return, He offered word pictures, signs, and promises about events that would signal the last days. These signs do not seem to be pleasant at all, and that was purposeful.

When Jesus spoke of wars and rumors of war, it was a warning not to be fearful (Matthew 24:6; Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9). For this same reason, He warned of earthquakes, famines, and pestilence (Luke 21:11); "distress of nations" (Luke 21:25); and "men's hearts failing What sometimes scares people about someone teaching on prophecy?

Teacher Option: A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit. **V** them for fear" (Luke 21:26). Of course, none of these things are good—at all. Yet Jesus offered an important hope. "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28). In other words, the worse things get, the more reason we have for hope. Even in difficult times, the people of God can have faith that God's promises are true and He has a plan for His people.

A. The Great Tribulation Is Coming

Jesus warned His hearers about what is really important, not just to that generation but to every generation. Yet He reserved His greatest caution for those living in the generation at the final turn of the age. Daniel spoke of a time of tribulation that would come when an evil man would try to destroy the Jewish religion. But Jesus quoted from that same prophecy to talk about a future time of tribulation that would yet occur. Jesus spoke about the "abomination of desolation," and the way Mark framed it (in Greek), this could only be a man who would defile the Temple (Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14).

While this prophecy was in part fulfilled in the first century, certainly not all of it was. Matthew recorded Jesus' words after this: "Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21). This is no minor judgment. Jesus continued: "And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (Matthew 24:22).

B. Prophecy Teaches God's Kingdom Wins in the End

While prophecy is meant as a warning, it is also meant to build hope for the future. In the end, the earth will be cleansed from evil, the kingdom of God will triumph, and God's purposes will be accomplished. In this fact Daniel did not tell a different story from Jesus. Peter's epistles are not telling a different story from the Book of Jude. Paul did not have a different understanding from the Book of Revelation. In the end, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

How does knowing that God and His church win affect your ability to keep going?

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

There is a ditch on either side of the road when it comes to teaching on biblical prophecy. On one hand, some people are so afraid of being wrong, they will not venture to interpret prophetic Scripture or even to say anything about it. They see prophetic passages like a creepy closet they dare not open, lest a horned beast jump out and scare them. On the other hand, some people are so sure a certain prophecy means this or that in the headlines, they do not consider a varying view. They are judgmental of other people's interpretations.

We in the church are appointed, like Ezekiel, as watchmen on the wall. We are to look to see if the enemy is attacking and warn those in the city when there is danger. If enemies are marshaling to fight against us, we may not have it exactly right—it could be three thousand or five thousand—but even if we are not sure on every point, we ought to sound out a warning.

All the innovations and wealth around us, and the comfort and luxury in which many people live, contribute to our generation losing touch with the value of eternity. The widow woman was not wealthy financially, but she had a better sense of the value of what was really important than others around her. And she was able to surrender what she had for God's glory and eternal purpose.

It is hard to imagine everything around us could readily pass away, but Babylon thought the same about their city and their day. Like a broom passing through an old cobweb and sweeping it up, so the events of the last days could be upon us. But the Bible has a prescription for these things: Love His appearing (II Timothy 4:8); consciously live a life with Heaven in view, knowing the Lord will appear to those who look for Him (Hebrews 9:28); live a life full of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–25); and "covet earnestly the best gifts [of the Spirit]" (I Corinthians 12:31) so we "come behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 1:7).

Finally, when Paul wrote to the Thessalonian church about the return of Jesus, he not only encouraged them to live in a godly way, but he also let them know they did not have to be fearful of Christ's return. They would see their loved ones again. The brokenness and pain they felt would vanish. The same grace that saved them would be present upon Christ's return. Rather than striving to be perfect, he taught them to rest on the grace of God in all aspects of their past, present, and future. That is why he could say with respect to Jesus' return, "Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (I Thessalonians 4:18).

What events happening in the world today remind you Jesus could return soon?

Prayer Focus

- For God to help us see things as He does
- For God to help us live with Heaven in view



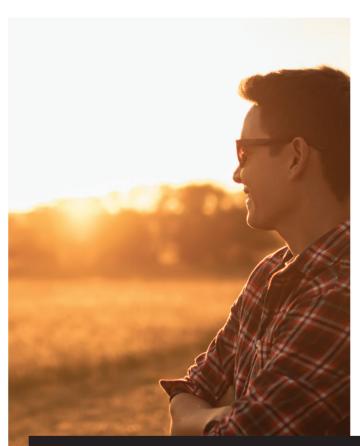
FOCUS VERSE Acts 1:7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

LESSON TEXT Acts 1:4–11

TRUTH ABOUT GOD God has a plan for us in the end time.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE I will follow God's plan for my life.

UNTIL HE COMES



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: Share a time when you were surprised by an exciting opportunity.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

- I. THE KINGDOM NOW AND IN THE FUTURE
 - A. The Disciples Misunderstood the Kingdom
 - » As you talk to unchurched people, what ideas do they have about what will happen in the future?
 - B. The Disciples Asked about the Restoration of Israel
 - » What is the most confusing part of prophecy for you? What are you doing to better understand?
 - C. Jesus Promised the Holy Spirit Outpouring » How has God's Spirit empowered you to witness to others?
 - D. I Will Remember God's Plan for Israel
 - » Those on the Mount of Olives were a bit confused in their priorities. In what ways do Christians get sidetracked from God's plan for us?
- II. JESUS' PROMISE TO RETURN
 - A. The Rapture and Second Coming \mathbf{V}
 - B. When Jesus Ascended, Angels Promised His Return
 - C. I Will Witness as I Watch
 - » What can you do today to help others be ready for that day when Jesus returns for His church?

Internalizing the Message 🚺

Prayer Focus

- For God to help us to understand His grander plan for us
- For God to help us witness as we watch for His return for us

LESSON CONNECTION

ameel said, "I will have the large fries with that order, Mr. Franklin." Mr. Franklin asked the lady at the counter, "And may I have a number seven with large fries, please." Four minutes later, he picked up their tray, and they headed to an open booth in the fast-food restaurant.

"So, why me?" asked Jameel. "Of all your students, why am I the only one who gets asked to lunch?" "That's a good question," Mr. Franklin replied. "I want to talk to you about a special opportunity next fall." Jameel hoped he made marching band again. He loved playing trumpet and honing his skills for jazz band.

"You are one of the best trumpeters I have ever had in jazz band. Really none better, but I do not want you to do that anymore." Jameel was crestfallen. He loved music. He loved marching band. He loved jazz band. Mr. Franklin was his hero. "Mr. Franklin, did I do something wrong? Don't you want to teach me anymore?" Jameel asked.

"You didn't do anything wrong, but I don't think I am going to be your teacher this fall." What was happening? Jameel asked as a tear was forming, "Are you moving away?" Mr. Franklin shook his head. "No. I will still be here. What do you think of going to a charter school starting in the fall semester." Jameel seemed even more disappointed. "Well, uh . . . you see, Mr. Franklin, my family doesn't have extra money to spend."

"But it wouldn't cost you anything. It's close to home and they specialize in music. Not only will they help you be the best trumpeter in the city, but you can pick up the keyboard as well and learn a lot about music theory." Jameel was flattered but he wondered why they would want him. Mr. Franklin continued, "I called them about you. The director of the music program is a good friend of mine. If you are interested, you are guaranteed a place. Just about everyone who goes there gets a scholarship to a university after high school. You could probably get a free ride."

"But what about my other friends in the music program? Can they come too?" Mr. Franklin anticipated his question. "You practice more than any of my other students. You are dedicated to developing the gifts you have. This plan is for you, and it is a good one. Talk to your mom and let me know by Monday."

"I don't know anyone there, and you wouldn't be my teacher. So I don't think I would like it." Mr. Franklin answered, "I will personally take you over there and introduce you to everyone. You have my cell number and can call me anytime. I will support you in every way possible. Think about it and let me know by Monday."

BIBLE LESSON

I. THE KINGDOM NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

A. The Disciples Misunderstood the Kingdom

After Jesus rose from the grave, the disciples were excited about their future. Like Jameel, they were looking forward to life as they understood it, yet God was planning something else that was not part of their lived experience. They remembered bits and pieces about Jesus' promise for the future, but as they thought about how things should come to pass, their concept of God's timing was really tangled.

In some ways we can hardly blame the disciples because life was moving quite fast. Acts 1:3 explains Jesus showed Himself alive after His suffering on the cross and His resurrection "by many infallible proofs." He miraculously appeared to them; no less than ten of these appearances are recorded in Scripture. Paul recorded one list and mentioned Jesus appeared sometimes to individuals and sometimes to groups (I Corinthians 15:4–6). His sudden appearance behind closed doors was nothing short of miraculous. On more than one occasion when Jesus appeared, His followers did not recognize Him right away. Somehow He was at one moment unknown and then suddenly understood in a way they never expected.

We do not know all the specifics about miracles Jesus might have worked, but we do know some of them. He not only provided a fish fry, but He reprised the miracle of a multitude of fish appearing in Peter's net. Jesus could appear in the evening, morning, or at twilight. Nothing prevented His appearance. And He spoke often about the kingdom of God, but what He said was hard to grasp since He often spoke in parables.

It did not help that His audience was bound by some of the same preconceptions of the future that Jews generally had. At the time of Jesus, the Jewish people had a general timeline of the future in their minds. There was the present age and the age to come. For the Jews, the coming age was the same as the kingdom of God, and they had a lot of preconceptions about it. No doubt that is why they asked Jesus when He was going to establish His kingdom. The issue was not that Jesus wasn't teaching them, it was just that it was ... well, all so new.

B. The Disciples Asked about the Restoration of Israel

At this point one of the disciples asked Jesus a question, proving the disciples were still clueless. "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). On one level, their confusion is understandable. There are indeed incredible prophecies about the Messiah and the kingdom of God. Isaiah spoke of a future time when Israel will live in peace and prosperity. "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie As you talk to unchurched people, what ideas do they have about what will happen in the future? down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them" (Isaiah 11:6).

Moreover, Jesus Himself indicated the apostles would be involved in leading such a kingdom. So real was this promise to them that the mother of James and John asked Jesus whether it would be possible for one son to sit on Jesus' right side and the other to sit on His left side in the kingdom of God (Matthew 20:20–22). Indeed, a similar promise is given to us in the church (Revelation 1:6; 2:26).

confusing part of prophecy for you? What are you doing to better Whi

understand?

What is the most

C. Jesus' Promised the Holy Spirit Outpouring

While many of those promises are for later, this promise was for now. Right before Jesus' ascension on the Mount of Olives, He gave His followers an immediate command to wait in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4). He then gave a more specific time frame: "For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (Acts 1:5). In just a few days, Jesus would fill them all with His Holy Spirit.

On the Mount of Olives, Jesus wanted His closest to be concerned about one thing. Concerning Israel and the kingdom, He taught: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Acts 1:7). This should not have been their immediate concern. Jesus then explained what should be their focus. "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

In our opening story, Jameel was not sure he wanted special treatment from Mr. Franklin. He was concerned about his classmates. Mr. Franklin told him, in so many words, this was not really his concern. That did not mean Jameel should not remain friends with them or care about them. Likewise, Jesus wanted His disciples to be concerned about a singular focus: wait for the Holy Ghost.

We learn more about the future of the Jewish people in the epistles, especially Romans 9-11. We learn more about the Kingdom age in the Book of Revelation. John told of a thousandyear period when Satan will be bound, when there will be peace on earth, and so on. There is good reason to believe that in the Great Tribulation prior to this subsequent Kingdom age, the Jewish people will discover Jesus really is their Messiah and will become part of the kingdom of God.

How has God's Spirit empowered you to witness to others?

D. I Will Remember God's Plan for Israel

The disciples were all about the nation of Israel, but we as Christians can have the opposite problem when it comes to the Jewish people. We might wrongly think God has no future plans for them or has forgotten Israel. Perhaps He has simply judged them for rejecting Him, or maybe He has replaced Israel with the church. But none of these scenarios are true. In the Book of Acts, God did not abandon the Jewish people and turn from them. On the Day of Pentecost, Jewish people were the first to receive the Holy Ghost. The apostles did not abandon the Temple or despise Jewish customs.

Yet the promise of the Holy Ghost extended beyond the Jews and was opened to the Gentiles. Right before Jesus ascended, He promised the gospel would travel through their witness throughout all Judea, to the Samaritans, and ultimately, "unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Peter likewise promised the Holy Spirit would not only be poured out on the recipients on the Day of Pentecost and on their children, but to "all who are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). Now entrance in the kingdom of God does not come from keeping Jewish law; it comes through the gospel.

II. JESUS' PROMISE TO RETURN

A. The Rapture and Second Coming

Throughout the Bible, we read of the Messiah's coming. Certainly God came in flesh in Bethlehem to redeem us from our sins. Scholars consider that His first coming, but what of the Rapture and the Second Coming? Although neither of those terms are explicitly found in Scripture, both of those world-changing events are referenced all throughout. Varied views abound, but the Rapture and the Second Coming refer to different events and for different reasons. The disciples appeared to have no knowledge of the Rapture, or the catching away of the church, so Jesus likely referred to His Second Coming to earth during His Olivet Discourse.

However, the church is looking forward to His appearing in the clouds. Paul beautifully wrote of it in I Thessalonians 4:16-18:

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

In the Rapture, Jesus will come in the air to catch away His church, and we will meet Him in the clouds. In the Second Coming which we read in detail in Revelation 19—Jesus will come to the earth to fight for Israel and defeat the Antichrist and his armies before Jesus sets up His physical reign on earth. John wrote of Jesus' Second Coming to earth in Revelation 1:7: "every eye shall see him" on that day, and what a day that will be. Those on the Mount of Olives were a bit confused in their priorities. In what ways do Christians get sidetracked from God's plan for us?

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

B. When Jesus Ascended, Angels Promised His Return

Immediately after Jesus told those on the Mount of Olives they would be witnesses once they were filled with the Holy Ghost, something amazing happened. The Bible declares: "And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9). We do not know how much warning the group had before they saw Jesus ascend that day, but the language is sudden; it seems the group was bewildered as they looked skyward. Still, God had an additional promise for them. The narrative continues, "And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:10–11).

C. I Will Witness as I Watch

The words of Jesus on the Mount of Olives were not simply an instruction to those present then. We are part of the group that has been filled with the Holy Spirit. By personal experience, we can testify that Jesus is indeed risen from the dead, He is alive, and He is alive in us.

Jesus' resurrection brims with another application for us as well. Just as Jesus ascended into Heaven, He will likewise return in the same way. He is coming for His people. He is coming in the clouds for His church; He is coming to the earth to fight for His people, Israel. His return is our blessed hope, and until He returns, we live as witnesses to others about Him. Let us share the gospel with them. Share our testimonies with them. Share our lives with them, and by God's grace, go to Heaven with them.

What can you do today to help others be ready for that day when Jesus returns for His church?

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. 🕕

n their book, *Mission Drift: The Unspoken Crisis Facing Leaders, Charities, and Churches,* Peter Greer and Chris Horst warn against "mission drift." They insist it is something leaders, charities, and even churches face. Most often in the beginning of a new venture, the mission was clear. It was stated, internalized, and overtly part of the culture. Yet over the course of time, things change. It is similar to someone sailing a great distance but not checking the compass; or someone driving along the highway, not quite paying attention, and drifting into another lane. It usually happens little by little.

Mission drift is even more marked when it has to do with values. It is possible for individuals or churches to forget why they do what they do, what they define as success, and what they define as failure. It is quite possible even to forget why we exist. It happened in Atlanta. A man there was thumbing through the yellow pages and found on the outskirts of the city a restaurant called the "Church of God Grill." Curiosity got the better of him and he made his way there. It was in a poorer section of town, and the restaurant was a bit run down in appearance. But the parking lot was full, which was a good sign.

The man asked someone in line if the food was good. "Best barbeque chicken in Georgia," came the response. Sure enough, the food was delicious, and the ambiance was wonderful. While the outside looked like an old country church, the inside had booths where he sat on what appeared to be shortened pews.

"What's the story on this restaurant?" he asked a gentleman who seemed to be in charge. "I've been here since the beginning," the man responded. "This wasn't always a restaurant. It was a mission. To pay the bills, we started selling chicken dinners after the Sunday service. It was a big hit and helped a lot financially. But in order to have enough time to fill orders, we cut back on the church services. Attendance dwindled while the demand for barbequed chicken increased. After a bit we closed the church, but we kept the chicken dinners coming. That is why we call the restaurant 'Church of God Grill."

Jesus told the disciples their mission. After they were filled with the Spirit in Jerusalem, they were to do two things. First, they were to witness. Second, they were to watch for His return. And witness they did. First in Jerusalem, and then when persecution came, they witnessed throughout Judaea and Samaria and then to the rest of the Mediterranean world.

They never stopped watching for Jesus' return nor measuring the mission of their lives by the directives of Jesus. Those directives have not changed from their day to ours. We are called to witness and to watch. Let us live this day with that glorious day in our view.

Prayer Focus

- For God to help us to understand His grander plan for us
- For God to help us witness as we watch for His return for us

AUGUST 17, 2025



FOCUS VERSE Matthew 25:13 Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

LESSON TEXT Matthew 25:1-13; I Thessalonians 4:13-18; II Peter 3:3-4

TRUTH ABOUT GOD Jesus is coming soon.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE I will live with expectation for Jesus' soon coming.

HERE COMES THE BRIDEGROOM



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 have ever missed a bus, flight, or appointment, what did it feel like?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

- I. THE QUESTION AND ANSWER
 - A. Skeptics Will Question the Truth of Jesus' Return
 - » When did you first hear about the Rapture? What are your thoughts about it now?
 - B. Jesus Is Returning for His Church, No Matter How Many People Question His Coming
 - » How are you encouraged when you realize you do not have to be in the majority to be obedient to God?
 - C. I Will Listen to Jesus Rather Than the Skeptics

II. THE PARABLE OF THE BRIDESMAIDS

- A. The Bridesmaids Did Not Know When the Bridegroom Was Returning $\fbox{\sc v}$
 - » How does living in a different culture affect the way we view these Bible stories?
- B. Five Bridesmaids Were Ready; Five Were Not
 » How do we live expectantly for Jesus' return?
- C. I Will Live with Expectation for Jesus' Soon Coming
 - » How many sermons and lessons do you think you've heard in your life? If you are not ready, what more do you think you will need to be ready?

Internalizing the Message

Prayer Focus

- For God to help us not be discouraged by skeptics
- For God to help us live every day looking for His return in joyous expectation

LESSON CONNECTION

The sun was bright in the sky that day. It was late June, and all the children were out of school for another month. Rachel and Peter decided they would take their kids to the park later in the day once they successfully completed their errands. When the four children heard the news, they were ecstatic. However, their parents added a caveat: before they could go to the park for all the fun they had been promised, they must complete a few small tasks. Weekly housework chores needed to be completed today while their parents were away finishing their errands.

Soon after the parents left, the four children set off to work on their chores, rushing to make sure they completed them all to receive their reward. However, after about twenty minutes of diligent work, two of the children decided they would begin playing; after all, their parents would still be gone for another hour. How could they not be done by then? The two other children finished their housework and then began to play with the others.

As they played, they forgot to check the clock and be ready when their parents returned. When Rachel and Peter arrived home later, the children saw them pulling in. The two children who had not completed their chores pleaded with the others, "Hurry, help us finish our work so we all can go to the park together." But it was too late.

When their parents walked into the house ready to take their children to the park, they were disappointed to find only half of the housework had been done. Why had only half been done? After discussing this situation with their children, they discovered two of them had simply decided to put off what needed to be done today. The parents agreed that Rachel would take the two children who had completed their work to the park now, and Peter would bring the other two later when they finished their housework.

In this story, despite their actions and lack of planning ahead, all the children went to the park. In the lesson today, however, the end of the story for half of the bridesmaids was not as bright. When the groom arrived, he announced: "Verily I say unto you, I know you not" (Matthew 25:12). They were left outside of the wedding feast because they were not ready for the bridegroom's return.

When dealing with the approaching Bridegroom, there are no take backs. We must live our lives expectantly, or unfortunately we will be lost. We must look toward the day of Jesus' return with longing and preparedness, for no one knows the time of the Bridegroom's coming. Let us live our lives looking for the return of Christ so we may be among the wise and enter the Marriage Supper with our Bridegroom.

BIBLE LESSON

I. THE QUESTION AND ANSWER

The church is constantly asking, "When is Jesus coming back?" But the world is asking, "Is Jesus coming back?" Skeptics have asked this second question for nearly two thousand years, even right after Jesus' resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. At the end of the Gospels, Jesus promised He would return again once He was taken up into Heaven. We can trust His promise, even after two thousand years of watching for Him and sadly watching people abandon their faith. Rather than be discouraged, we should be excited that we are closer to the Rapture than we have ever been.

A. Skeptics Will Question the Truth of Jesus' Return

Perhaps you have heard it said, "All my life I have heard Jesus is coming back soon. My grandfather heard the same thing. I don't believe Jesus is coming back at all." This doubtful belief is not new. It lived in the apostles' day, for we read in II Peter 3:3-4: "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (II Peter 3:3-4).

This misunderstanding of God's timing leads to a lack of faith and can lead to some Christians abandoning their faith altogether. Those who dismiss the hope of Jesus' return often lose hope. Yet other skeptics question when Jesus will return. Many are confident in their beliefs and tenaciously cling to them, even when Scripture points in another way. We may liken their views to the Pharisees and Sadducees in the Gospels. They asked Jesus for a sign that His prophecies would come to pass. Jesus offered faith that all would work out the way they were promised and hope for the future, but they did not believe.

Note the language Peter used in this passage of Scripture. He stated: "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts" (II Peter 3:3). His use of the word *shall* serves as proof scoffers will come. Peter knew that no matter how much proof or how many signs they saw, some would not accept that Jesus is coming back. Their minds are made up.

But there is hope within this passage. Even when those around us may not believe in the return of Christ, it is still a promise of God, and we can rely on the promises of God to come true. For Peter wrote in the same chapter: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9). God will keep His word. When did you first hear about the Rapture? What are your thoughts about it now?

B. Jesus Is Returning for His Church, No Matter How Many People Question His Coming

The promise of Jesus' return is peppered throughout Scripture. But even if Jesus only once promised He was coming back for His church, He will come back. Our hope as children of God hinges on this blessed hope. Consider the pattern we see in the Word of God. Some estimate a million people were alive in Noah's day, but only he and his family of eight were saved. He preached that a flood was coming, and it came just as God promised.

The Old Testament prophets were in the minority compared to their audience and the other prophets who promised peace and prosperity, even amid Israel's rampant sin. But God brought the nations of Assyria and Babylon against Israel and Judah respectively because He promised to judge sin, no matter how many people disbelieved or disagreed.

Past promises fulfilled are simply fuel for faith that God will fulfill future promises. Paul wrote it right concerning Abraham: "he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform" (Romans 4:20–21).

C. I Will Listen to Jesus Rather Than the Skeptics

The siren song of our world is everywhere. Whether the world is telling us to "eat, drink, and be merry," or they are arguing with us that Jesus was not real or is not really coming, we hear the melancholy chords of their song. However, as children of God, we do not have to sing their song. We sing the song of the redeemed. And one day, after Jesus returns for His church, we will gather around the throne with people from every kindred, tongue, and nation; and we will together sing, never again to listen to the discouraging lyrics of the skeptics' song.

II. THE PARABLE OF THE BRIDESMAIDS

Since only Jesus knows the day and hour He is returning, He gave us several stories to help us live while we wait and watch. This parable in Matthew 25 is such a story. In the passage, ten bridesmaids were awaiting the bridegroom's return for his bride so they could all go into the wedding celebration together.

A. The Bridesmaids Did Not Know When the Bridegroom Was Returning

Hearing this story is foreign to our culture. We know the day and even time for our weddings in Western culture. The wedding party sends invitations, we RSVP (sometimes), we save the date, and we set reminders on our phone so we do not miss the date. However, in the ancient Near East, neither the bride nor her party knew when the groom was returning for her.

How are you encouraged when you realize you do not have to be in the majority to be obedient to God? After he negotiated the price he would be willing to pay for the right to marry her, he returned to his father's house to prepare a place for his new bride and him to live to start their own family. Only after he finished building their home, he laid down the hammer and came back for his bride. The parallels to Jesus' return for us are seen all over the ancient Jewish wedding custom. Jesus paid the price to purchase us as His bride with His precious blood. (See I Peter 1:19.)

Jesus promised His disciples: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2-3). Although the bridesmaids were in the wedding party, neither they nor the bride knew when the bridegroom was coming back.

That is why Jesus called us to "watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 25:13). The church has held its breath for nearly two thousand years, waiting for Jesus to come, and some have gotten tired of waiting. Some have fallen asleep or become complacent. We must live every day as if this day is that day when our Bridegroom returns. For one day, this day will indeed be that day.

B. Five Bridesmaids Were Ready; Five Were Not

Five of the bridesmaids were considered wise and five were considered foolish. They were separated, not by education or economy but by preparation. The five wise brought extra fuel for their oil lamps in case the needle danced dangerously close to E (for empty). However, the foolish only brought the oil in their lamps. If the bridegroom delayed even a little, they would not have enough fuel to keep their lamps lit for the evening wedding.

In Jesus' story, all ten of the bridesmaids fell asleep while they waited. They were quite similar: they were likely dressed alike, they were all invited by the bridal family, and they all fell asleep. The tragedy of Jesus' story is five bridesmaids ran out of time after they had so much time to get ready. They were frantic. They jolted awake and scrambled to light their lamps. They had watched and waited for this day for months, maybe years, and this day was finally that day, but they were not ready.

These five ran to the market in search of a merchant open at midnight. But while they were there, they missed the bridegroom's arrival. He came into their city, called those who were ready, left those who were not, and went into the wedding. When the five foolish returned, it was too late. They ran out of time after they had so much time.

They banged on the door and begged the bridegroom to let them in, but he would not open the door. It was not because He was unkind or because they were wicked, but just because

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

How does living in a different culture affect the way we view these Bible stories?

How do we know we are living expectantly for Jesus' return? they were not ready. Jesus' parable sent chills into His audience because there will come a day when people have waited too long or wasted too much time, and they are not ready for the coming of the Lord.

Teacher Option: A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. The poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson wrote after the tenor of this parable:

Late, late, so late! And dark the night and chill. Late, late, so late! But we can enter still. Too late, too late! Ye cannot enter now.

No light had we: for this we do repent. And learning this, the bridegroom will relent. Too late, too late! Ye cannot enter now.

No light: so late! And dark and chill the night. let us in that we may find the light! Too late, too late! Ye cannot enter now.

Have we not heard the bridegroom is so sweet? let us in, tho' late, to kiss his feet! No, no, too late! Ye cannot enter now.

How many sermons and lessons do you think you've heard in your life? If you are not ready, what more do you think you will need to be ready?

C. I Will Live with Expectation for Jesus' Soon Coming

Typically, we are referred to as the bride in this metaphor, but in order to show the difference between those who would be ready and those who would not, Jesus compared us to bridesmaids. There will always be two kinds of bridesmaids in life, even in church. We cannot let those who live unprepared keep us from being ready for Jesus' return. We want everyone to be saved, but we cannot make anyone ready except ourselves. Live expecting Jesus' return. He is coming back.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

eremy woke up once again to his average life. He and his twin brother, James, lived similar lives. They both loved their families and both worked in roughly the same field. They were both raised in church by good parents. Yet even with living similar lives and having grown up with similar backgrounds, they had veered in different directions. On this day, which seemed as normal as any other day, something would happen to make it the most special day of Jeremy's life.

During lunch break Jeremy headed to a restaurant to eat with his brother, James. They had not seen each other in a while due to the busyness of life. Jeremy walked in to find James seated close to the back corner. After sitting down and exchanging pleasantries, they ordered. "I think it's time we talk about it, James." But his answer was curt, "What's there to talk about?" Jeremy studied his brother's face, looking to catch his mood before answering. "You should really come back to church, James. We miss you there, and we're worried about you."

James took a sip of water. "Ah, that." James displayed a level of nonchalance that displeased Jeremy. "James, this is serious." James replied, "I know man, I know. I'm just not quite ready yet." Jeremy knew James had a lot of baggage, but this conversation still needed to happen. "I'm sorry about everything that happened, but you cannot hold it against everyone. It was some individuals at the church, but not the church itself. And it certainly wasn't Jesus."

"Hey, I said I know. I'm just not quite ready to go back yet. I haven't forgiven those who did that to me, and I know you already have forgiven them and they're back in the church now."

"That is the nature of forgiveness," Jeremy stated. James was beginning to get upset. "Yep, and that's exactly why I haven't forgiven them. I don't want to see them again. But—"

Before Jeremy could finish his sentence, there was a loud noise. It sounded like a trumpet, or perhaps a shout. Maybe both. Jeremy was gone. He had been watching and praying for this moment his whole life, spending his time in prayer and reading the Scriptures. He had witnessed to those around him. But James had a different experience in that moment. It seemed as if the world had gotten darker and colder. He looked across the table to see his brother's reaction to the sound, only to find his brother was gone.

One day this day will be that day. It will be that sudden and it will be that final. That is why we must live ready. We do not know the time when Jesus will come back for His people. Do not let your heart be hardened by anyone or anything. Jesus is coming. Let us be ready.

Prayer Focus

- For God to help us not be discouraged by skeptics
- For God to help us live every day looking for His return in joyous expectation



FOCUS VERSES Revelation 21:4-5 ⁴ And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. ⁵ And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

LESSON TEXT Revelation 21

TRUTH ABOUT GOD Jesus has prepared a heavenly home for His church.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE I will live with Heaven in mind.

A HEAVEN TO GAIN



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 something you eagerly looked forward to?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

- I. JOHN'S VISION
 - » What do you think John struggled with most on the island of Patmos? How did he get through it?
 - A. John's Vision Came as Hope While He Was Exiled on a Prison Island \square
 - B. Heaven Will Be Heaven for What Will Not Be There
 - » What would you add to the list of struggles you won't deal with in Heaven?
 - C. I Will Remember My Heavenly Home When I Feel Discouraged
 - » Whose faithfulness inspires you to keep your eyes on Heaven? How can you inspire others to do the same?
- II. THAT GREAT CITY
 - A. Heaven Will Be Adorned with Jasper Walls, Golden Streets, Bejeweled Foundations 1
 - » After seeing Jesus, whom are you most excited to meet or see again in Heaven? What are you most excited to see in Heaven?
 - B. Heaven Will Be Heaven Because Jesus Reigns There
 - C. I Will Praise God on Earth in Preparation to Praise God in Heaven » What are some ways we praise God now that prepare us for Heaven?

Internalizing the Message \mathbf{V}

Prayer Focus

- For God to help us live each day with Heaven in view
- For God to help us help others get right with Him and ready for Heaven

LESSON CONNECTION

t was a beautiful morning as everyone gathered at the church to travel to the North American Bible Quizzing Tournament (NABQT) the Olympics of Bible quizzing. Each quizzer excitedly climbed into the church van, anticipating a wonderful time competing, socializing, and worshiping with fellow believers. To participate in this event, quizzers were dedicated to studying Bible verses each day. The team had competed at monthly district tournaments, and finishing in the top few teams at their district finals had qualified them to compete in the national tournament. NABQT, here they come.

Shortly after they settled into the seats of their fifteen-passenger van, they began to grumble. With every mile, they were growing impatient with the long drive. They had faithfully practiced their verses to keep them fresh in their minds, dissecting every verse to have a clear understanding of its meaning. Every quizzer, coach, parent, and chaperone had made the necessary preparations for this final and greatest tournament. They raised funds, packed suitcases, reserved hotel rooms, and the church family prayed over them before they left.

The driver followed the GPS directions and road signs to keep them on the right path. His eyes were fixed on the road, never wavering. As they neared the city, the quizzers' impatience gave way to excitement. They were eager to see their friends and to get to the quiz table to show the quizzing community the fruit of their hard work.

They thought, *We're almost there, to the city and to the tournament. Just keep running the race until we finish.* That was a familiar phrase. They were studying the letters of Paul to his son in the faith, Timothy. They saw the sign for the conference center and the parking lot full of fifteen-passenger church vans. They finally made it. They walked into the hotel, surrounded by friends and fellow quizzers who helped them stay strong through the year. Their friends had also sacrificed Saturdays and socials to memorize new verses and review the ones they had already learned. They too had fought this good fight.

It was time for the tournament to begin. Win or lose, they had reaped untold benefits of hiding God's Word in their hearts. They were with friends, enjoying fun places, having great food, and worshiping in lifechanging services. They heard testimonies that encouraged them to know God more. They saw God move in miraculous ways. It was a long season, with roller-coaster-like ups and downs, but it was a good season. And it was worth whatever they needed to do to be here in this moment. As the first service began, they could already feel the sweet presence of God. And they knew this was where they wanted to be.

BIBLE LESSON

I. JOHN'S VISION

John was one of Jesus' twelve apostles and the brother of the apostle James. John referred to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:20). Although the other original disciples (except Judas) died as martyrs, John died of natural causes at a good, old age. However, the maniacal Roman emperor Domitian ordered John to be boiled in oil and exiled to a prison island to die. Certainly he faced intense persecution. But there on the unforgiving, rocky island of Patmos, separated by a seemingly endless sea from all his friends and family, Jesus gifted John with the greatest vision of his life.

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

What do you think John struggled with most on the island of Patmos? How did he get through it?

A. John's Vision Came as Hope While He Was Exiled on a Prison Island

John glimpsed Jesus, and John glimpsed Heaven. He saw who and what awaited him on the other side of this life. Thankfully God called John to share this vision with us in the book known as Revelation. When we think of the island of Patmos, don't think vacation; think Alcatraz. When he was sentenced, he probably expected to wither away on a family-forsaken island surrounded by dangerous criminals. He had no idea that on that same island, God would pull back the curtain to let John see eternity. But God did.

B. Heaven Will Be Heaven for What Will Not Be There

As John wrote of Heaven, he wrote what he did not see. In our world, we struggle with pain, death, sorrow, hatred, racism, violence—all poisonous fruit of sin. Here people are disappointed, discouraged, rejected, abandoned, betrayed, lied to, lied on, deceived, and feel invisible. They battle cancer and other diseases, financial struggles, relationship problems, and addictions of all kinds. Families are torn apart by divorce, mental illness, promiscuity, domestic violence, and poverty. But not in Heaven.

John smiled as he dipped the pen in ink and wrote: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4). John was even impressed that there was no more sea. We love the sea for Saturdays or summers to the ocean, but the sea was undefeated in keeping prisoners on Patmos from escaping to their families and friends.

John's point that there was no more sea was his poetic way of saying there will be no separation in Heaven. Nothing to keep us from one another. Heaven is free of all the struggles this world has to offer. In John's vision he heard a loud voice saying: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Eternity will open for us as Jesus Himself wipes every tear from our eyes. It may seem overwhelmingly difficult at times to fight the good fight, finish the race, and keep the faith (II Timothy 4:7), but the reward of Heaven is far better than anything this earth has to offer. Paul wrote: "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (II Timothy 4:8). Faith is a fight, but faith is worth the fight.

What would you add to the list of struggles you won't deal with in Heaven?

C. I Will Remember My Heavenly Home When I Feel Discouraged

Few set out to forget Heaven, but it can easily happen without fighting to keep our daily devotion and spiritual disciplines priority. God offers us grace to follow Him, but we must consecrate ourselves to Jesus Christ and make the firm choice to follow Him wholeheartedly. Keep your eyes on Heaven. Hear and heed Paul's admonition: "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2). Life is filled with struggles and hardships, largely that are out of our control. Bad things happen to good people, and good things happen to the wicked.

Within the span of two years, a saint of God lost her mother to cancer, her brother to COVID-19, and her twelve-year-old granddaughter to cancer. Her husband was diagnosed with cancer and was undergoing treatment, and her daughter had a brain tumor removed. But every service, she was in church praising God. She remembered we are living this day for that day when Jesus comes back for His church.

II. THAT GREAT CITY

Heaven is a topic of conversation and debate for many Christians and non-Christians alike. What will it be like? Who will be there? How can we make it there? These are some of the questions frequently discussed. What we do know about Heaven we find throughout Scripture with the most abundance of information coming from the Book of Revelation. It declares we will dwell with God forever in a wonderous place without sin or evil. We will spend our days worshiping our God with an untold number of other Christians from every nation, tribe, and tongue. Heaven will be perfect beyond what we can comprehend.

A. Heaven Will Be Adorned with Jasper Walls, Golden Streets, Bejeweled Foundations

Nothing is quite as breathtaking as a scenic view in nature, like a snow-covered mountain by a lake with a rainbow sneaking down from the clouds. In fact, all of God's creations on this earth are a privilege to witness and experience. They are awe inspiring and exceptional. However, they are nothing compared to what we will see and encounter in Heaven. Think of your most beautiful, breathtaking vacation spot. Multiply its beauty, peace, and perfection by thousands, and Heaven begins to come into view.

Whose faithfulness inspires you to keep your eyes on Heaven? How can you inspire others to do the same? Heaven will be beautifully adorned with precious stones, metals, and gems overflowing with brilliant colors.

The city was pure gold like clear glass. John got a closer look at the construction materials, and he wrote what he saw. Here we use concrete for foundations and sheetrock for walls, but there, the foundations are built of precious gems and the walls of jasper. Even the foundation sparkles in Heaven. Heaven is glorious because it is filled with the glory of God. And the gates are made of pearls, each of the twelve gates cut of one beautiful pearl. The best way John could describe Heaven, or New Jerusalem as he called it, was "as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2). It will be beautiful, pure, holy, perfect for God is Heaven's architect and builder.

B. Heaven Will Be Heaven Because Jesus Reigns There

If the walls were drywall, the streets were gravel, the gates were wrought iron, and the foundations were concrete, Heaven is still Heaven because of who is there. There Jesus Christ, God incarnate, reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords. His perfect will is done in Heaven, which is why we pray for His will to also be done in earth.

Jesus Christ died for our sins on the cross and defeated death, Hell, and the grave. He rose from the dead on the third day and graciously provided a way through the gospel for us to live in Heaven with Him as our Lord and Savior. John recorded Jesus' promise: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2-3). Every neighbor on our million-mile mansion-lined golden street will worship Jesus. In Heaven there is no debating over who God is or if God is. In Heaven everyone worships Jesus Christ as Almighty God.

We too will be able to worship Jesus in a place of purity and innocence. The purpose for our creation will be fulfilled to the fullest. We will spend our eternal days singing around the throne of the Most High. John saw "a throne set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald" (Revelation 4:2-3). Jesus will sit on the throne, reigning over all creation. Being with Jesus should be our main reason to keep fighting the good fight and finishing this race.

C. I Will Praise God on Earth in Preparation to Praise God in Heaven

When John finally saw Jesus as He truly is, he fell at His feet as though John were dead. (See Revelation 1:17.) Although John walked with Jesus for three years, he finally saw Him as He is. And John promised us one day we would, too. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: **Teacher Option:** A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit.

After seeing Jesus, whom are you most excited to meet or see again in Heaven? What are you most excited to see in Heaven? but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (I John 3:2).

John also saw "ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands" of angels, and he heard them cry out, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (Revelation 5:11-12). Then he saw elders, people Jesus had redeemed, fall down and worship Him. John did not have to wait until He made it to Heaven to worship Jesus like the angels and elders are worshiping in Heaven right now. We praise God here because God is worthy, and we are practicing for when we get there. If you love to worship Jesus here, you are going to love Heaven.

What are some ways we praise God now that prepare us for Heaven?

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit. 💟

n 1983 Tom Trimble wrote a beautiful song called "I'm Just Warming Up" to help us keep our sights set on Heaven. Some of the lyrics read:

When I see those pearly gates and they swing open wide I'm gonna shout for joy when I've reached the other side All of my pain and sorrow there I will forget And if you think I shout down here, you ain't seen nothing yet

I'm just warming up, I'm just warming up I'm just warming up, for that meeting in the sky If you think I'm strange, don't wait for me to change ('Cause) I'm just warming up for when I reach the other side

When you get to Heaven, ask Noah if he would like to have used a circular saw. Ask Solomon if he would like to have had a flatbed truck to haul all the cedar to build the Temple. Ask Paul if he would like to have had an Uber driver to take him all over Macedonia. After you explain what a circular saw, flatbed truck, and Uber driver are, they would all say yes. You would not have to sell them. The same is true with us and Heaven. No one needs to be sold on going to Heaven; we all want to go.

But we need to be reminded that this world is not our home. Even our darkest days here are not worthy to be compared to the glory over there. If you are ready for Heaven, continue to faithfully live ready and help others get ready. If you are not right with God right now, respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ the same way the first-century church responded: repent of your sins, be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins, and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. It is the way we are born again, made right with God, and ready for Heaven.

Prayer Focus

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

- · For God to help us live each day with Heaven in view
- For God to help us help others get right with Him and ready for Heaven

AUGUST 31, 2025

HERITAGE SUNDAY

HS

FOCUS VERSES Joshua 4:6-7 ⁶ That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones? ⁷ Then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever.

LESSON TEXT Joshua 4:1-9; Judges 2:10

TRUTH ABOUT GOD God calls us to remember what He has done and share it with the next generation.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE I will tell the next generation what God has done.

DADDY, WHAT'S THE BIG PILE OF ROCKS FOR?



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: Who discipled you to know Jesus?

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection. 🕕

- I. CROSSING THE JORDAN RIVER
 - A. Carry the Stones out of the Jordan
 - » When you had questions about your faith, whom did you ask? Do others ask you?
 - B. Set Up the Stones in the Camp
 - C. I Will Remember What God Has Done and Share It with the Next Generation $\underline{\mathbf{V}}$
 - » What miracles has God worked in your life? Have you shared your stories with others?
- II. LIVING ON THE PROMISED LAND SIDE OF THE RIVER
 - A. On the Edge of Jericho
 - B. What Happened to the Stones?» Why do you think Israel left the memorial stones?
- III. LIFE WITHOUT THE STONES
 - A. Joshua's Death
 - B. The Next Generation
 - C. I Will Teach My Family
 - » How strong would we be if we only ate three meals each week? How strong spiritually would we be if we were only fed at church?

Internalizing the Message

» What will you do today to help teach the next generation who God is and what He has done?

Prayer Focus

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

- For God to help us remember all the wonderful things He has done
- For God to help us teach the next generation who He is and what He has done

LESSON CONNECTION

A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. 🚺

n northern Portugal sits a house unlike any other in the city, in the country, possibly in the world. Huge glacial rocks litter the landscape, and rather than attempt to pulverize them or move them out of the way, one engineer decided to build a house out of them. It is called the Casa do Penedo (House of the Rock). The builder built it in 1972 to be a rural retreat for a local family, but it has become a major tourist attraction in Portugal. The owners moved away to escape all the attention their unique stone house was attracting.

According to mybestplace.com, the Casa do Penedo is now a small museum, full of photographs of its construction and the beautiful scenery that surrounds it. Interestingly it is situated in the middle of a wind farm, but the house is without electricity, but not without its comforts and charm. The ground floor features a kitchen and small living space, aptly furnished with a stone sofa that weighs nearly eight hundred pounds. The bedroom sits at the top of the wooden staircase.

Unfortunately not all the attention has been positive. Due to its isolated location in the middle of the Portuguese countryside, vandals have assailed the house, necessitating expensive and often difficult repairs. The current owners have taken security measures, adding railings and bulletproof glass to secure their stone home. While some may have lamented the gigantic boulders on the hillsides, a brilliant Brazilian engineer saw an opportunity to build a house that would last for generations and cause children to ask their parents all about La Casa do Penedo.

BIBLE LESSON

I. CROSSING THE JORDAN RIVER

When people crossed over the mighty, muddy Jordan River, some of them begrudged the uneven stones they stumbled over, but God had engineered a plan for those stones. He had called Joshua to succeed Moses to lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land. But in order to get from here to there, they had to cross the Jordan River during the flooding season. As Joshua stepped his toes up to the water, he remembered how God had parted the Red Sea for Israel to cross, so perhaps He would do the same here. Joshua waited for instructions, and God spoke to Joshua: "This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee. And thou shalt command the priests that bear the ark of the covenant, saying, When ye are come to the brink of the water of Jordan, ye shall stand still in Jordan" (Joshua 3:7-8).

Joshua called the priests to the front of the line, commanded them to carry the Ark of the Covenant on their shoulders, and called them to step first into the rushing river. As soon as their feet touched the Jordan River, God stopped the flow of water and Israel marched across the riverbed as the priests stood still in the middle of the river. It was a miracle for Joshua's generation to tell the next generation.

A. Carry the Stones out of the Jordan

God knows our forgetful frame, so before they all left the river in their rearview mirror, God called for twelve men from the twelve tribes of Israel (one man per tribe) to go back into the river and pull out a stone from the place where the priests stood. Each man hefted a large rock and carried it on his shoulder out of the Jordan River. Those stones would stand as a memorial from generation to generation, especially for the Israelites who were not at the Jordan River crossing.

When children saw the stones in the center of their city, they would tug on their parents' robes and ask, "What's the big pile of rocks for?" That was a prime opportunity for the parents to tell their children how God supernaturally brought them across the flooded Jordan River and into the Promised Land where they were living.

"Sweetheart, let me tell you about the day God brought us across the Jordan River during the spring. The Jordan floods every spring, you know. Our God stopped the water so we could cross. It was amazing. I wish you had seen it." It has always been God's plan for one generation to declare His works to the next generation. That is why the psalmist David wrote: "One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts" (Psalm 145:4).

When you had questions about your faith, whom did you ask? Do others ask you?

B. Set Up the Stones in the Camp

Once all the Israelites had safely passed to the Promised Land side of the river, the priests marched out of the riverbed and onto the shore as they carried the Ark of the Covenant. Once the final priest's foot touched dry land, God removed His hand that held the water back, allowing the water to flood the riverbed and riverbanks once again. Before night fell that day, the children of Israel carefully set up a monument made of twelve stones in the middle of the camp. Although everyone in the camp was there that day, the day would soon dawn when the Israelites were not at the miraculous Jordan River crossing. The stones would stand as a constant reminder to tell the next generation what wondrous works God had worked.

C. I Will Remember What God Has Done and Share It with the Next Generation

"Stones" look different in our day than they did in Joshua's. Perhaps you do not have any rocks or boulders you care to heft from one house to the next, but each of us has stories of God's work in our lives. Perhaps God miraculously protected you from a crash. When you drive by that same area, share that story afresh with those in the car with you. If God healed you of a sickness or disease, when you hear of others battling the same condition, share your testimony with them to give them faith that God can do for them what He has done for you. Remembering past miracles should not imprison us in the past; it should free us to approach God with faith for the future.

What miracles has God worked in your life? Have you shared your stories with others?

Teacher Option:

video is available in

the Resource Kit. V

A supplemental

II. LIVING ON THE PROMISED LAND SIDE OF THE RIVER

The next time Israel took down their camp and moved down the road, they were careful to bring those twelve stones with them. They stopped in a village called Gilgal, about ten miles north of the Jordan River, and right at the border of fortified, walled Jericho. As they unpacked their gear, Joshua rounded up the twelve stones that had come from the riverbed and set them up in the camp. He gathered the children of Israel and reminded them why they had carried a pile of rocks from the river to their new campsite.

When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For the LORD your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over: that all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the LORD your God for ever (Joshua 4:21–24).

A. On the Edge of Jericho

The Israelites kept the Passover celebration while they camped in Gilgal, and on the day following Passover, they enjoyed produce from the Promised Land. The next day the manna stopped and Israel started enjoying the fruit of their new homeland. God had provided one miracle after another. Surely Israel would never forget all He had done for them, but in case they did, the stones would remind them, remind them to tell their children, and remind their children to tell their children for generations to come.

But as we prepare to flip the page to Joshua 6, Israel was preparing to go to war with Jericho. The writer of the Book of Joshua did not mention the memorial stones, but perhaps they were with them in the camp where they returned each night after marching around Jericho's formidable walls. On the seventh day, once Israel had finished its sixth silent lap around the walls, the priests blew the trumpets, Israel shouted, and God toppled the seeming unfellable walls. The children of Israel climbed over the fallen walls and conquered Jericho.

B. What Happened to the Stones?

Like children rushing to claim their own room in their new home, Israel rushed into the Promised Land, excited to finally be able to farm their own fields and build their own homes. But there is no more mention of the twelve memorial stones. Israel won some battles and lost a handful of others; they divided up the Promised Land for the tribes to inherit and inhabit; they set up cities of refuge for anyone who unintentionally killed anyone to flee to for safety until their case could be heard; but they appeared to leave the stones in Gilgal or maybe in Jericho. They were only one or two cities or campsites past the Jordan River when they forgot to keep carrying the stones.

III. LIFE WITHOUT THE STONES

A. Joshua's Death

As the sun set on Joshua's day, no one rose up to succeed him as Israel's new leader. After the Book of Joshua, the Book of Judges tells of Joshua's final words and his final breath. He died at 110 years old. Israel gathered to bury their leader who had followed God to lead them across the Jordan River, through Jericho, and into their new land. But only one verse after Joshua's funeral, the writer of Judges records one of the most sobering passages in the Historical Books: "And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel" (Judges 2:10). Why do you think Israel left the memorial stones?

B. The Next Generation

Once the generation who had crossed the Jordan River with Joshua died, another generation took their place, but they did not know their stories. The Book of Judges chronicles some of Israel's darkest days in her storied history, and it all points back to the chilling indictment in Judges 2:10. This verse is the tragic result of one generation failing to teach the next generation who God is and what He has done. T. F. Tenney often insightfully preached, "We are just one generation from extinction."

C. I Will Teach My Family

God has called all parents (biologically and spiritually) to teach our children about the wonderful works He has done. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 lays the responsibility to disciple the next generation at the feet of parents, not just pastors, youth pastors, and children's pastors. Since our children are only in a church service or class a few hours each week, parents should be teaching the children who God is, what He has done, and what His Word says He will do. Our lessons at church should help affirm the biblical lessons our children are learning at home.

Moms and dads, teach your children how to cook, how to hit a curveball, how to shoot a three, how to bait a hook, how to parallel park, how to mow the lawn, how to play the piano; but be sure to teach them: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD," and Jesus is His name. Teach them the gospel: that Jesus Christ died for us, was buried, and rose from the grave. Teach them how to be right with God as found in Acts 2:38: "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

Teach them how to pray, how to fast, how to give. Teach them why we believe the Bible to be the Word of God. Teach them Bible stories to help build their faith to believe God will do in our day what He did in the Bible days. When they ask why people are baptized or why some people cry during church, let us not leave discipling our family only to the church leadership team. Declaring the Lord's words and works to the next generation is our privilege, our responsibility, our holy calling.

How strong would we be if we only ate three meals each week? How strong spiritually would we be if we were only fed at church?

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Rufus asked his dad, "Why are we going out of town again? We do this every year." His dad smiled and answered, "Well, we're going because it's time to celebrate Passover." Rufus tilted his head. He didn't say a word, but his expression said it all. His brother piped up, "What's Passover?" Simon picked his boys up, one on each knee, smiled, and told them the story. "A long time ago, our great, great, great, great, great, well, you get the point. Our great, great grandfather was enslaved in Egypt. He and all his brothers worked every day trying to make Pharaoh happy, but they couldn't. So they cried out to God, and God sent them a deliverer named Moses.

"After a while, God sent plagues. He turned water to blood, and He sent frogs." Alex got excited, "Cool, I love frogs!" Simon shook his head, "Not this many. There were so many that they climbed into the ovens and the beds. Then came flies and lice and boils. It was bad. Each plague wore Pharaoh down a little more until they got to the last one—the plague of the firstborn. God was going to come through that night and kill the firstborn in every house if they didn't follow God."

Rufus looked at his brother. "Alex, that'd be you." Their dad nodded slowly. "That's right. The dad in each household had to apply the blood of an innocent lamb and spread it on the doorpost and lintel of their house. That night when God came through, He would see the blood and He would pass over their house, and the firstborn would be safe. That's why we call it Passover."

Simon wasn't the king of Libya, but there were two little guys under his roof who counted on him and called him Dad. They needed him to teach them what he knew about God. This week join with your family or someone you are wanting to disciple, and share God's Word with them. Start a family devotion where you dive deeper into the message you all heard on Sunday. Or buy a devotional and read through the devotions, praying and studying the Bible passages as you read. If you are living by yourself, call or visit someone and share God's Word and your story with that person. Talk with your pastor about spiritually adopting a child or student in the church, especially one whose parents are not yet serving God, and help them grow in their faith.

If you feel unqualified to disciple someone else, start by sharing what God has done for you. And possibly ask someone in the church to teach you a Bible study so you will be more ready to teach someone else. Keep coming to every service and Bible study, ready to learn and allow God to transform your life through His Word. Let us learn from the story in Joshua and Judges: God has called us to tell the next generation who He is and what He has done for us.

What will you do today to help teach the next generation who God is and what He has done?

Prayer Focus

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

- For God to help us remember all the wonderful things He has done
- For God to help us teach the next generation who He is and what He has done