



ECHOES

Adult Teacher's Commentary

March–May 2022



God Frees and Redeems
Studies in Ezra, Deuteronomy,
Matthew, John, Romans, Galatians

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*This lesson is designed to help you evangelize unsaved students (see also page 114).

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A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



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Once upon a time and not too far away, Ray Anna traveled to God's throne room. She smiled, anticipating a great time in God's presence, with songs and verses all picked out. Right before entering, Ray Anna took off her backpack and approached the door. "No," she clearly heard Jesus say. "Bring your backpack in. Truth is in there."

"What?" Ray Anna questioned? "There is nothing in my backpack but a few snacks."

"No, Ray Anna, look again."

Obediently she fished around in her bag until she came across a teeny, tiny little girl. Her cheeks were sunken in, her arms thin as pencils, her ribs showing through her t-shirt.

"How did she get here?" Ray Anna asked.

"I placed her in your heart when you opened your heart's door and let Me in. She's in one of your favorite verses you quote all the time. I am the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6)."

"I'm so sorry I've been so neglectful. Truth looks so malnourished."

"Truth understands. Most people do not want to bring her into the throne room when they pray. She uncovers secrets, reveals things from the past, points out present unhealthy habits, and wants to talk about fears of the future. Her conversation is not always welcome. But I love her. She is a significant part of who I am. And I want you to get to know her and love her too. She's your pathway to freedom in this life."

Here recently, I realize how much I'm like Ray Anna. But I'm also learning when I'm in the throne room to let Truth come with me. As I'm sitting there feasting at the Lord's table, I'm learning to pull Truth up beside me. I'm amazed when I feel chains falling.

This quarter's lesson is all about Christian liberation. Maybe this spring season—in the weeks leading up to our concentration on the death, burial, and resurrection of our Savior—invite Truth to the table. Strengthening her is the true key to a life of freedom.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

In Christ,

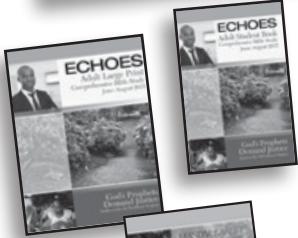
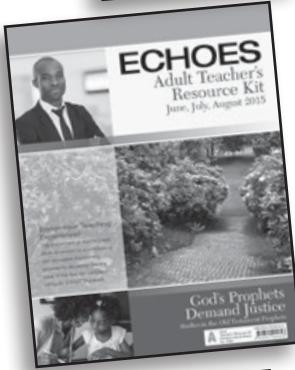
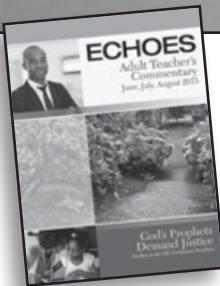
A handwritten signature in cursive ink that reads "Victoria L. McAfee".

Victoria McAfee

Contributing Editor

Your Teaching Materials

adult curriculum publications



FREE!



Online Is
Where It's @!

These quarterly resources enable you to coordinate a complete learning experience for your students.



Adult Teacher's Commentary: step-by-step instructions to help you prepare for and teach each lesson with Bible background material and activities relating Bible truths to your students' lives.



Adult Teacher's Resource Kit: a packet containing an *Adult Teacher's Commentary* and teaching aids including full-color Bible background posters, worksheets, and other discussion starters to be used with the teacher's commentary.



Comprehensive Bible Study: an adult-level student booklet providing students with information about and application of a portion of Scripture. **In Regular or Large Print.**



Lesson Leaflet: a condensed version of *Comprehensive Bible Study* to give to visitors or use as an outreach tool.



The Quiet Hour: daily devotionals coordinated with the Daily Bible Readings listed in *Comprehensive Bible Study*.



Power for Living: an adult take-home paper profiling dynamic Christians, along with other helpful articles.



Real Life Downloaded: combines current news stories with your weekly Bible lessons. See more on p. 8. Take a test drive today and download your free copy at: Reallifedownloaded.com



Basic Classroom Supplies

You may need the following supplies for this quarter's lessons:

- Bibles—several versions (or online access)
- Paper/pencils/colored markers
- Thumbtacks
- Pointer
- Whiteboard, overhead, or newsprint, and markers
- Media player
- Cellophane tape
- Masking tape
- Index cards
- Scissors
- Stapler
- Hymnals or chorus books

Step-by-Step through the Lesson

As Easy as 1, 2, 3, 4!

1

Step 1: Life Need

Most adults show up on Sunday focused more on where the mortgage money will come from and how they can recapture their relationship with their teen than on learning something new from the Bible. This step will help adults focus on today's challenge. Don't skip this step! It's not fluff or foolishness. It's the step that gets adults ready to discover why this Bible study is important to them. At the end of these few minutes, they are ready to participate—and today's lesson just might contain the answers to life questions they brought with them to class.

2

Step 2: Bible Learning

Lively Bible study! That's what happens here. As adults study the Bible and discuss what they found, they gain a growing understanding of how to move forward on their discipleship journey.

Spend lots of time preparing Step 2. In class, you can discuss the passage, read the Scriptures, and conduct both deductive and inductive Bible study. Adults should never think the Bible section is the dullest part of the lesson. Bring it alive with your expression, actions, and most of all, your own attitude! Each week, you'll challenge adults to prepare for next week's lesson. Their preparation isn't long or difficult, but it does encourage participation. When adults have invested something of themselves in the lesson, they will get more out of it.

3

Step 3: Bible Application

Practice time—a time to turn the classroom into a laboratory. You'll discover how deeply your adults are personally involved with what the Bible teaches. This guide will give you three choices every week. Use all three. Or, if you have a small class, pick one. Activities will be different each week: a role-play, creative activity, discussion, case study, interviews—lots of adult-level interaction.

4

Step 4: Life Response

Okay! You helped your adults become focused on the topic (Step 1). Then you guided them into the Bible study (Step 2). They practiced what they learned (Step 3). Now students will decide what they will actually do with what they've learned. This part of the lesson is not safe! Living the Christian life can be challenging, but it is always exciting.

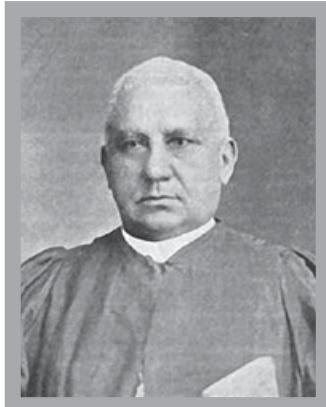
Each adult will decide for himself or herself how to live for Jesus this week. You can encourage people, but ultimately they need to personally own their decisions. They are living for Jesus because they choose to, not because of outside pressure you put on them.

Don't have a single doubt about it! The biggest part of your Sunday school lesson doesn't happen in your classroom. It happens on Monday and Tuesday—and through the week—when instead of following their own desires or the crowd, they dare to say, "No, I will follow Jesus."

Natural Learning Cycle

You've just been around the Natural Learning Cycle. It's fun! It's simple! It's how we all learn—adults, teens, and children. First, we get interested in the subject (Step 1). Then we learn the facts from the Bible (Step 2). Next, we practice what we've learned (Step 3). Then, and most importantly, we use what we have learned during the week (Step 4). Then we come back to class next week and share how we lived the Christian life ([Link to Last Week](#)).

Highlights in Black History



Henry McNeal Turner Evangelist and Activist

by Victoria McAfee

“Turner was the last of his clan, mighty men mentally and physically, men who started at the bottom and hammered their way to the top by sheer brute strength, they were the spiritual progeny of African chieftains, and they built the African church in America.” —W.E.B. Du Bois

Henry McNeal Turner was born on February 1, 1834, to Sarah and Hardy Turner, who lived in New Berry Court House, South Carolina. Turner's grandfather was born as an African prince, which prevented the Turner family from being enslaved since British law refused to enslave royalty. Yet, Sarah and Hardy still worked under cruel conditions in the cotton fields.

Turner, at the age of eight, dreamed he would one day be a teacher of millions. This vision increased his hunger for education, but the law in the 1800s kept him from attending school or learning how to read and write. Therefore Turner prayed about his academic yearnings and later claimed an angelic being appeared in his dreams and helped him learn. His “dream

teacher” opened Webster’s spelling book and helped explain it. By 15, Turner had read the Bible five times and memorized several passages. At that same time, he secured a janitor’s job at a law office. The white employees soon observed his desire to learn and began teaching Turner.

Although Turner belonged to a church in South Carolina, he admitted to foul language and drinking. But he was converted while listening to the preaching of Samuel Leard. In a letter later written to Leard, Turner made plain he was “so stunned me by [his] powerful preaching that I fell upon the ground, rolled in the dirt, foamed at the mouth, and agonized under conviction till Christ relieved me by his atoning blood.”

Turner accepted his call to preach at the Southern Methodist Church where his family attended. They licensed him at the age of 19. He spoke before both black and white audiences. People started to address him as the “Negro Spurgeon,” comparing him to the great evangelist Charles Spurgeon, because of his powerful and eloquent oratory skills. Despite his talent and power as a speaker, the domination refused to advance him as a clergyman, so he joined the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E) church.

The A.M.E ordained Turner, and he started pastoring in Washington, D.C. President Lincoln appointed Turner as the first African American to serve in the Chaplain’s office in the Union army during the Civil War. During his time in the military, Turner began his writing career with *The Christian Recorder*, publishing articles concerning the challenges of the colored soldiers. After the war, he continued his chaplaincy assignment and worked at the Freedmen’s Bureau in Georgia as a chaplain.

Turner left the military and began to involve



himself in politics during the Reconstruction period. He rallied the black vote for the Republican party, helped organize the first Republican State Convention, and wrote a new Georgia state constitution. He crafted bills offering women the right to vote and the right to an eight-hour workday.

Later, Georgia elected him as a legislator, and he founded several politically supportive organizations. Up until this point, Turner delivered hope-filled messages, pushing for the forgiveness of the white race. However, the white members of the state legislature voted against the African Americans in their midst. They disqualified them from holding elected office and put all the persons of color in the chambers. Turner addressed the assembly after their racially motivated actions saying, "You may expel us, gentlemen, by your votes, today; but, while you do it, remember that there is a just God in Heaven, whose All-Seeing Eye beholds alike the acts of the oppressor and the oppressed, and who, despite the machinations of the wicked, never fails to vindicate the cause of Justice and the sanctity of His handiwork."

After this setback, Turner became the first U.S. postmaster in Macon, Georgia. But he was ousted after two weeks based on false charges from a white individual. He took a position as a customs inspector while increasing his involvement in the A.M.E. church. During this season, Turner's views began to change. He no longer held out optimism for the Black man in America. He began to push an agenda of African Americans migrating back to Africa. He wrote, "There is no manhood future in the United States for the Negro."

In 1876, Turner became publications manager for the church and was eventually elected to a Bishop's office. He used the pulpit to declare the truth about

race, lynching, and other issues concerning oppression. He reportedly had mourners coming to the altar and falling out like dead persons in revival services—his preaching was eloquent, effective, and profound.

Bishop Turner married four times. Three of his wives preceded him in death. He produced 14 children.

Later in his life, critics came to attack him severely because of his encouragement to African Americans to give up on the U.S. He eventually encouraged migration to Africa from the 1880s until he died. His dream, however, never materialized, nor did he live out his final days in Africa. Therefore, many called him a failure, even a laughingstock, or having mental problems.

Though Turner's immigration vision never fully materialized, he did sail four times to Liberia and Sierra Leone and organized A.M.E. annual conferences and missions during the 1890s. He also started a church in South Africa. His work allowed African students to come to the U.S. to attend college.

Turner spoke truth to government officials, but he also boldly called for African American leaders to practice what they preached. His messages caused people to redefine their thinking and reshape how they see themselves. One of his most controversial statements was encouraging Blacks to declare that "God is a Negro." He stood on the fact that each race should be able to identify with their deity.

In his later years, Turner continued to speak around the country. He wrote for several newspapers, contributed introductions for books, and put out several essays. Turner headed the board of directors for Morris Brown College between 1896 to 1908. Then, in 1915 he suffered a massive stroke at the General Conference of the A.M.E. Church and died a short time later.

Resources for Deeper Bible Study

When you want to know more about the Scriptures

Beyond your **Adult Teacher's Commentary** are a wealth of resources to give you the in-depth Bible study you want and need to help you and your students understand Scripture as fully as you can.

- For even more depth, **The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New and Old Testaments**, by Dallas Theological Seminary professors John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, answers such questions as:

- What does this verse mean?
- What is the significance of this word or phrase in Hebrew?
- How can this alleged contradiction be explained?

The commentaries include for each Bible book an introduction

(discussion of the author, historical background, purpose, features), outline, commentary, and bibliography, as well as easy-to-understand interpretations of the Scripture verses.



- Each week, **Real Life Downloaded** combines current news stories with your weekly Bible lessons. Online you will find a news story for Step 1 and discussion questions. Also online are links to music videos that relate to the focus of the lesson, and to videos of Bible places you will be studying in your lesson. *Real Life Downloaded* is available before you teach, so you will be able to plan your lessons ahead and set up any audio-visual equipment you need. **Check it out today at Reallifedownloaded.com**

- For every lesson, you will also find more commentary in the two-volume **Wiersbe Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments**. You can study the Bible verse by verse with one of America's most beloved pastors, Dr. Warren Wiersbe, the former pastor of The Moody Church in Chicago and for 10 years the general director and Bible teacher for the *Back to the Bible* radio broadcast. Whether you are a pastor, teacher, or layperson, these commentaries allow you to study the Bible in easy-to-follow sections that emphasize personal application as well as biblical meaning. Developed from Dr. Wiersbe's best-selling *Be* series of Bible study books, these commentaries unpack all of God's Word in accessible, easy-to-read language. Each volume offers you Dr. Wiersbe's trustworthy insights on the Scriptures, introductions and outlines for each Bible book, and text that is free of academic jargon.

The Word of God admonishes us to "study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15, KJV). This is the resource to help you do just that.



This selection from *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: Old Testament* can be used for background on Lesson 11 for May 15.

The 60 verses that make up Galatians 3 and 4 are some of the strongest writing that Paul ever penned. But, after all, he was in a battle! He was out to prove that salvation is by grace alone, and not by the works of the law. His opponents had used every possible means to try to capture the churches of Galatia, and Paul was not going to fight them halfheartedly.

Law Is Not Greater Than the Promise (3:19–20)

Paul pointed out that the law is inferior to the covenant of promise in two ways.

The law was temporary (vs. 19a)

"It was added ... until the seed should come." Now it is obvious that a temporary law cannot be greater than a permanent covenant. When you read God's covenant with Abraham, you find no "ifs" in His words. Nothing was conditional; all was of grace. But the blessings of the law were dependent on the meeting of certain conditions. Furthermore, the law had a terminus point: "until the seed [Christ] should come." With the death and resurrection of Christ, the law was done away, and now its righteous demands are fulfilled in us through the Spirit (Rom. 7:4; 8:1–4).

The law required a mediator (vss. 19b–20)

When God gave the law to Israel, He did it by means of angels and through the mediation of Moses. Israel "received the law by the disposition of angels" (Acts 7:53). This means that the nation received the law third-hand: from God to angels to Moses. But when God made His covenant with Abraham, He did it personally, without a mediator. God was revealing to Abraham all that He would do for him and his descendants. "God is one" (Gal. 3:20), therefore there was no need for a go-between. The covenant of promise was permanent, and no mediator was required. There could be but one conclusion: The covenant was greater than the law.

The Law Is Not Contrary to the Promise (3:21–26)

Paul did not say that the law contradicts the promise, but rather that it cooperates with the promise in fulfilling the purposes of God. While law and grace seem to be contrary to one another, if you go deep enough, you will discover that they actually complement one another. Why, then, was the law given?

The law was not given to provide life (vs. 21)

Certainly the law regulated the lives of the Jewish people, but it did not and could not provide spiritual life to the people. If life and righteousness could have come through the law, then Jesus Christ would never have died on the Cross. But Jesus did die; therefore, the law could never give the sinner life and righteousness. It was "worship of the law" that led Israel into a self-righteous religion of works, the result of which was the rejection of Christ (Rom. 9:30–10:13).

The law was given to reveal sin (vss. 19a, 22)

It is here that we see the way that law and grace cooperate in bringing the lost sinner to Jesus Christ. The law shows the sinner his guilt, and grace shows him the forgiveness he can have in Christ.

There is a lawful use of the law, and there is an unlawful use (1 Tim. 1:8–11). The lawful use is to reveal sin and cause men to see their need of a Savior. The unlawful use is to try to achieve salvation by the keeping of the law. The law concludes "all [men] under sin" (Gal. 3:22), Jews and Gentiles alike. But since all are under sin, then all may be saved by grace! God does not have two ways of salvation; He has but one—faith in Jesus Christ.

The law was given to prepare the way for Christ (vss. 23–26)

Here Paul uses an illustration that was familiar to all his readers—the child guardian. In many Roman and Greek households, well-educated slaves took the children to and from school and watched over them during the day. Sometimes they would teach the children, sometimes they would protect and prohibit, and sometimes they would even discipline. This is what Paul meant by schoolmaster (Gal. 3:24).

By using this illustration, Paul was saying several things about the Jews and their law. First, he was saying that the Jews were not born through the law, but rather were brought up by the law. The slave was not the child's father; he was the child's guardian and disciplinarian.

But the second thing Paul said is even more important: the work of the guardian was preparation for the child's maturity. Once the child came of age, he no longer needed the guardian. So the law was a preparation for the nation of Israel until the coming of the promised Seed, Jesus Christ. The ultimate goal in God's program was His coming (Gal. 3:22), but "before this faith [Christ] came" (3:23 NIV), the nation was "imprisoned by the law" (literal translation).

The law separated Israel from the Gentile nations (Eph. 2:12–18); it governed every aspect of their lives. During the centuries of Jewish history, the law was preparing for the coming of Christ. The demands of the law reminded the people that they needed a Savior. The types and symbols in the law were pictures of the coming Messiah (see Luke 24:27).

This section of Galatians is valuable to us as we read the Old Testament Scriptures. It shows us that the spiritual lessons of the Old Testament are not for the Jews only but have application to Christians today (see Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11–12). In the Old Testament we have preparation for Christ; in the Gospels, the presentation of Christ; and in the Acts through Revelation, the appropriation of Christ.



Babylonian Captivity Ends

Lesson Overview

Week of March 6

Suggested Material for As Your Students Arrive:

■ Pictures of things that people trust to keep them safe while in operation (an airplane, an elevator, etc.)

1 Life Need:

1 Discuss how the Lord rescues and what He provides.

2 Bible Learning:

2 Study what Cyrus's proclamation meant to the exiled Jews.

Suggested Material:

■ Adult Teacher's Resource Kit: Poster and reproducible handout—Ezra and the Return from Exile

3 Bible Application:

3 Comprehend why God intercedes on behalf of His people.

4 Life Response:

4 Be more faithful in your trust in your Savior.

Suggested Material:

■ Index cards

Church/Home Theme:

Our God's Love Heals

Lesson Focus:

Trust in God our Deliverer and Provider.

Lesson Scripture:

Ezra 1:1-8, 11; 2:64-70

God Is Faithful—In 538 B.C., around 50,000 Jewish exiles left Babylon and headed home to Judah, a trip of 1,000 miles over four months. They committed themselves to rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem. Isaiah and Jeremiah had prophesied Judah's downfall and promised God would allow them to be delivered. After 70 years in captivity, under the leadership of Zerubbabel (Sheshbazzar), the group returned to the city's ruins with God's promise of re-establishment and His blessings. The nation had failed God, but God never forgot His people.

The Lord had raised up a Persian king named Cyrus who conquered Babylon and then allowed the captive Jews to go and rebuild their land. King Cyrus generously gave the remnant funds, wealth, and protection, and he also returned over 5,000 valuable artifacts stolen from Solomon's temple. The Jews remaining in Babylon also contributed to the remnant who returned.

The Remnant—In several places in the Book of Ezra, families are listed. Many of the old records had been lost or destroyed. Ezra and the other historical writers needed to list the names and count the numbers of those who left Babylon. The congregation included heads of households and their families. The crowd also included priests, servants, and the singers for festive occasions. When the crowd reached Jerusalem, the families contributed generously to the temple building project. Their offerings might have also been a way to express their thanksgiving to God for allowing them to make the long trip home.

God Is in the Reconstruction Business—The Lord has allowed Christians to realize their freedom and deliverance from the bondage of sin. Their salvation is now secure. But when some individuals look at their lives, like the remnant returning from Babylon, they see only ruins, a life in complete destruction and disarray. However, those returning from their captors to rebuild depended on God for His plan and provisions to reestablish their land.

The Father's children can still do the same. A shame-filled, broken human being cannot reconstruct his own life. It's beyond human capabilities. But like the remnant, that person can surely place their trust in a God who is able to do more than they could ever think or imagine.

As Your Students Arrive

Prior to class, collect at least three pictures of things that people trust to keep them safe while in operation. Examples might

include an elevator, an airplane, and even restaurant food. As students enter the classroom, ask them to identify the focus of the pictures and briefly explain why they place their trust in these objects. Introduce the lesson by letting the class know that this week's lesson reminds us that we place our trust in God to keep us safe, while He provides for our needs.

Link to Last Week

Encourage a few of your students to talk about humility in their relationship with God this past week.

1 Life Need

Discuss how the Lord rescues and what He provides.

Comprehensive Bible Study Student Book Reduction

Lesson 1 • March 6 • Page 5

Babylonian Captivity Ends

Tony double checked his watch. It was 8:55 A.M., and Jasmine was dressed with makeup and hair complete! The couple had agreed to leave the house at 9 A.M. sharp in order to get to church by 9:20-9:30 A.M. This would ensure that they would not be seated in the overflow rooms for the 10 A.M. service.

The Hills were grateful that their church was growing! Tony and Sharon prayed and fasted along with Green Pastures Community Church for souls to be saved. They were also part of several outreach ministries at the church. It was an exciting time at Green Pastures, and the Hills wanted a front-row seat.

As Tony entered the sanctuary, he paused at one of the collection boxes in the rear of the sanctuary. Jasmine had been stopped by one of her girlfriends. A few minutes later, he saw Jasmine enter the middle doors to the sanctuary. It reminded him of all the other times she had come through that door, and the good things God had done for them over the years. He had brought them through some hard times, and they were humbly grateful.

Now, Tony and Jasmine were grateful they were able to give their largest offering in recent years. They had made a special sacrifice for the new wing the church was building. Jasmine slipped her arm through her husband's as the two of them bowed their heads and prayed silently. Then Tony dropped the envelope into the open slot.

1. How has God deepened your trust in Him through your past experiences?

2. What were some of the things from which He delivered you during those experiences?

3. Why are such memories of His provisions sacred to your Christian faith?

After reading the anecdote in the student book, form small groups so that students can share how the Lord has impacted their lives as they discuss their answers to **Questions 1, 2, and 3**.

Question 1 provides students with an opportunity to relate how their initial misgivings evolved into trust during their walk with the Lord. Similarly, as a youngster first learns to ride a bike, there is fear and uncertainty, but, as that child becomes more accustomed to the bike and continues to depend on its competencies, the child's trust in the bike becomes instinctive.

Question 2 encourages students to reflect on how the Lord has delivered them from the evil grip of spiritual darkness. That grip may be in the form of crippling depression, angry hatred, addictive sin, or some other powerful wickedness. Of course, they need not be specific and personal in their responses.

Finally, Question 3 helps class members to recall key moments in their lives when God has provided them with wisdom, strength, and courage not only to overcome sin and evil but also to care for their needs during times of hardship, loneliness, and oppression. Each recollection further strengthens their faith and deepens their reliance in God's goodness.

LESSON FOCUS: Trust in God our Deliverer and Provider.

2 Bible Learning



Put up the poster "Ezra and the Return from Exile" from the Resource Kit and make copies

of the handout that goes with it. You will be using it through Lesson 4.

CYRUS MAKES A PROCLAMATION

Read Ezra 1:1-4, and highlight these key points as you discuss the Scripture with your class:

- Because of God's compassion for His chosen people, He stirred the heart of Cyrus, the king of Persia, to issue a proclamation on behalf of the Jews whom the Babylonian Empire had conquered and exiled from their homeland.

- Because the Persians had defeated the Babylonians, Cyrus the Great reigned supreme in the Middle East, and, therefore, he had the power to release the Jews from their captivity.

- Indeed, the Persian king proclaimed that the heavenly God had both awarded him all the earthly kingdoms and commissioned him to erect a temple dedicated to God in the sacred city of Jerusalem, the capital of Judah.

- Moreover, Cyrus declared that the exiled Jews were to return to their homeland and build the temple of the Lord.

- The king then blessed the Jews, saying, "May their God go with them."

- Furthermore, Cyrus decreed that people everywhere were to provide them with finances, food, and sacrifices for the temple.

Study what Cyrus's proclamation meant to the exiled Jews.

Suggested Answer to Question 4

In the first year of his reign over Babylon, Cyrus made a written proclamation concerning the return of God's people, the Israelites, to their homeland. This was no coincidence. As Ezra 1:1 makes clear, this proclamation was done specifically "to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah" (vs. 1).

Suggested Answer to Question 5

Cyrus began his proclamation by openly

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Cyrus Makes a Proclamation

Ezra 1:1-4, KJV

1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying,

2 Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

3 Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.

4 And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

Ezra 1:1-4, NIV

¹In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing:

²"This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:

'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. ³Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them. ⁴And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with free-will offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.'

As soon as Cyrus conquered Babylon, "the LORD moved [his] heart" (vs. 1) to make a proclamation concerning Israel.



Further commentary on this Scripture passage can be found on pp. 734-737 in *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: Old Testament*.

acknowledging the role of “The LORD, the God of heaven” in giving him “all the kingdoms of the earth” (vs. 2).

Suggested Answer to Question 6

Cyrus declared that God had appointed him “to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah” (vs. 2)—the temple the Babylonians had destroyed decades earlier. He granted permission for all of God’s people to return to Jerusalem to perform this work, and proclaimed that those who returned were to be given “silver and gold, with goods and

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This happened “in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah” (vs. 1). Cyrus’s proclamation explicitly acknowledged the role of “the LORD, the God of heaven” in giving him “all the kingdoms of the earth” (vs. 2). God had “appointed” him to rebuild the temple. Not only were all Israelites freed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, but Cyrus also gave them silver and gold, goods, livestock, and freewill offerings. God used Cyrus to liberate His people and to provide everything they would need—even the offerings to use to worship Him.

4. *What did Cyrus do after conquering Babylon?*
5. *How did Cyrus begin his proclamation?*
6. *What things did Cyrus commission in his proclamation?*

The People Respond

Ezra 1:5-8, 11, KJV

5 Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.

6 And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered.

7 Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought

Ezra 1:5-8, NIV

5 Then the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites—everyone whose heart God had moved—prepared to go up and build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem. 6 All their neighbors assisted them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with valuable gifts, in addition to all the freewill offerings.

7 Moreover, King Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the temple of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and had placed

livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem” (vs. 4).

THE PEOPLE RESPOND

While reading Ezra 1:5-8, 11, note these important points to share with your class:

- In response to Cyrus’s proclamation, the leaders of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, as well as the priests and Levites, felt God’s call to return to Jerusalem and construct a temple dedicated to their Lord God.
- Meanwhile, the neighbors of these exiled Jews complied with the king’s decree by giving these Jews the supplies necessary for them to journey to Jerusalem, build the temple, and dedicate the appropriate offerings.
- King Cyrus also returned the valuable items that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had stolen from the temple when the Babylonian army had destroyed Jerusalem.
- Moreover, the Persian king instructed

BIBLE EXTRA

Isaiah’s Prophecy about Cyrus

More than one hundred years before Jeremiah prophesied about the Babylonian Captivity, Isaiah prophesied about the man God would use to liberate the Jews from Babylon. Isaiah 44:28 declared, “He [Cyrus] is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, ‘Let it be rebuilt,’ and of the temple, ‘Let its foundations be laid.’” Likewise, Isaiah 45:13 declared, “I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free.”

Isaiah 45:1 took it even a step further, as God proclaimed Cyrus “his anointed.” The Hebrew word here is the same word translated elsewhere in the Bible as “messiah”—or “Christ” in the Greek. It is the only place in the Bible where this word is used to refer to a non-Jewish person.

his treasurer, Mithredath, to place in the hands of Sheshbazzar, a Judean prince who would lead this group of exiled Jews to Jerusalem, 5,400 articles of gold and silver.

Suggested Answer to Question 7

Verse 5 tells us that the returning group consisted of “the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites—everyone whose heart God had moved.” Although they were a comparatively small group, they knew God had called them to return.

Suggested Answer to Question 8

As decreed by Cyrus, those who departed for Jerusalem were given “silver and gold . . . goods and livestock, and . . . valuable gifts, in addition to all the freewill offerings” by their neighbors (vs. 6). And Cyrus gave them even more precious materials: “the articles belonging to the temple of the LORD” taken by

BIBLE EXTRA

The Rebuilding of the Temple

Although the foundation of the temple had been laid the year after Zerubbabel (Sheshbazzar) arrived in Jerusalem (Ezra 3:8-10), the completion of the second temple would take much longer. About five years into construction, the surrounding peoples—including the Samaritans, comprised in large part of the former ten tribes of Israel—successfully petitioned the new king, Xerxes, to have the work halted. “Thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia” (4:24)—10 years later.

With the arrival of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (5:1-2), the rebuilding resumed, and after an inquiry uncovered Cyrus’ decree, Darius added his own decree not only that the work should continue but that “Their expenses are to be fully paid out of the royal treasury . . . so that the work will not stop” (6:8). The temple was completed five years later, in 515 B.C.—more than 20 years after it began.

Nebuchadnezzar (vs. 7), totaling “5,400 articles of gold and of silver” (vs. 11). The temple would not only be rebuilt but also restored.

THE COUNTING OF THE RETURNED EXILES

Next read Ezra 2:64-70, and note these ideas:

- Other than the 7,337 slaves and 200 singers, 42,360 Jewish exiles made the journey to Jerusalem, also bringing horses, mules, camels, and donkeys with them.
- As soon as they arrived at the site of the future temple, family heads offered freewill sacrifices for the rebuilding of the house of the Lord.
- Meanwhile, they allotted gold, silver, and priestly clothes for the temple treasury.

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forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods; 8 Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.

... 11 All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

in the temple of his god.
⁸Cyrus king of Persia had them brought by Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. . . .

¹¹In all, there were 5,400 articles of gold and of silver. Sheshbazzar brought all these along with the exiles when they came up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

With the proclamation, mostly the families from Judah and the priests and Levites made the trip back. In addition to the gold, silver, and provisions, they were given the articles the Babylonians had stolen. God wanted the temple not only to be rebuilt but restored. Cyrus’s treasurer, Mithredath, “counted” the items to Sheshbazzar (vs. 8), who may have been an associate of Zerubbabel, the governor (Ezra 3:8-13), or it was another name for Zerubbabel himself (5:16).

7. Who chose to return to Jerusalem? Why?

8. What special items were given to those who returned?

The Counting of the Returned Exiles

Ezra 2:64-70, KJV

64 The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore,

65 Beside their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and there were among them two hundred singing men and

Ezra 2:64-70, NIV

⁶⁴The whole company numbered 42,360,

⁶⁵besides their 7,337 male and female slaves; and they also had 200 male and female singers.

⁶⁶They had 736 horses, 245 mules,^{⁶⁷} 435

• Subsequently, the Jews, which included priests, Levites, musicians, gatekeepers, and temple servants, as well as other people, settled in the towns with which they identified.

Suggested Answer to Question 9

Verses 64-65 tell us that this first group of returning exiles totaled about 42,000; verses 66-67 lists the horses, mules, camels, and donkeys the people returned with. The original exiles had left with nothing, but they did not return empty-handed; God had amply provided for them during their time of captivity.

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singing women.

66 Their horses were seven hundred thirty and six; their mules, two hundred forty and five;

67 Their camels, four hundred thirty and five; their asses, six thousand seven hundred and twenty.

68 And some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the LORD which is at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place:

69 They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pound of silver, and one hundred priests' garments.

70 So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.

About 42,000 people returned, a fraction of those who had been exiles; most exiles remained in Babylon. The heads of families who had the ability and desire gave freely, so that the work on the temple could begin. The original exiles had left with nothing, but they did not return empty-handed. The value of a gold daric would be roughly five dollars today; a mina of silver weighed about 13 ounces. The temple rebuilding had been amply provided for, and people resettled in their ancestral towns.

9. What was different about those who returned?

10. What did some of the heads of the families give? Why?

11. What did the people do after they had arrived?

Suggested Answer to Question 10

Those who had the ability and desire "gave freewill offerings toward the rebuilding of the house of God on its site" (vs. 68). They gave freely of what they had received from God—"61,000 darics of gold, 5,000 minas of silver and 100 priestly garments" in all (vs. 69)—so that the work on the temple could begin.

Suggested Answer to Question 11

After their return to Jerusalem, the people "settled in their own towns" (vs. 70). With the resettlement of their ancestral lands, the Israelites' return from exile was finally complete. There was rebuilding left to be done, both "in their own towns" and in Jerusalem, but those who were willing to make the long trip back began to settle at last into their true homes, far from Babylon.

BIBLE EXTRA

Who Was Ezra?

Although he eventually became a key figure in the book that bears his name, Ezra the priest had not even been born when Ezra 1-2 take place. In fact, he does not "show up" until chapter 7—some eighty years later, "during the reign of Artaxerxes" (Ezra 7:1), and about a dozen years before the arrival of Nehemiah as governor of Judah.

Ezra brought yet another group of exiles to Jerusalem with him (Ezra 8:1-14), but upon his arrival—and much like the prophets before the Babylonian captivity—he was greatly discouraged by Israel's backsliding, especially its returns to idolatry and intermarriage. Ezra's mourning caused the people to confess their sins and repent (Ezra 10:1-17). Sometime later, during the Feast of Trumpets, with Nehemiah present, Ezra read the entire Book of the Law (i.e., the five books of Moses) to all the people, "from daybreak till noon" (Neh. 8:3), and led them in worship (vs. 6). Ezra's reforms rescued Israel from deserting God yet again.

3 Bible Application

This step encourages students to consider the significance of God's intervention in our individual lives as well as His impact on the Body. Allow students to select the activity they would like to do. If possible, photocopy this page and give instructions to each group.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Discussion Group

Read "The Utter Richness of Being a Child of God" and answer **Questions 12, 13, and 14** in the student book. Think of what it means to be spiritually lost and in need of something that will provide true meaning for your lives. Not only does God's light illuminate our lives but with its power it also gives personal security as well as the assurance of God's love. The Bible is far more than God's manual on how to conduct one's life; Scripture spiritually empowers people to live a life that is being transformed into the image of Christ.

Cyrus's Marvelous Announcement

Write a short script in which Cyrus the Great of Persia proclaims the release of the exiled Jews and the benefits that come with it. Cast Cyrus, Sheshbazzar the prince, Mithredath the treasurer, as well as a vocal Jewish crowd. People may cheer at the king's announcement, volunteer to go to Jerusalem, and pledge to donate to the rebuilding of the temple. When you're finished, perform the script before the class.

Proclamation Pictograph

Illustrate a Christian interpretation of Cyrus's proclamation on a board or sheet of newsprint both with pictures and in words showing that God is our Deliverer and Provider. After you finish, display the pictograph on a wall in the classroom.

Comprehend why God intercedes on behalf of His people.

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The Utter Richness of Being a Child of God

When we look back at the darkness from which we came, and look at the Light leading us into the future, we can't help but feel wondrous joy. We are blessed to the utmost by our loving, amazing God.

Spiritual darkness encompasses all our fears, anxieties, and sins. Its grip is like an iron vise, strangling our souls and rotting our spirits. Some of us are quite aware of what is happening to us, but others are oblivious to our spiritual degeneracy. And yet, God's light not only illuminates the clinging claws of spiritual darkness, but it also grasps us and yanks us toward the Lord Himself, delivering each one of us from our own personal wretchedness.

Like a lamp in a dark cave, we can see both where we are and where we need to go to escape from worldliness. Meanwhile, God provides us with the spiritual tools we need to go forth, tools such as wisdom, courage, and strength. Moreover, whenever we stumble, the Lord is always present to lift us when we reach out to Him, trusting that His love for us will never fail.

And how can we be assured that what is said here is true? For those who have walked with God, their recollections bear witness to this truth. But we have an even more powerful testimony than our memories, and that is God's Word, which provides clear evidence of God's truth.

Therefore, like the psalmist, let us sing out: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119:105, KJV).

12. Briefly describe the spiritual darkness when you feel apart from God.

13. How have you felt God's divine light when you feel close to Christ?

14. How does God's holy Word shed light on your walk with the Lord?

4 Life Response

Be more faithful in your trust in your Savior.

Trusting God is easy when life is pleasant and satisfying. When hardship and disappointments engulf us, however, trusting the Lord with our lives is exceedingly difficult for most of us. Cyrus's proclamation to the Jews in exile is historical evidence that God is not only faithful to His people during times of seeming hopelessness but also a benevolent provider.

Ask students to read "Trust in the Lord" in *Comprehensive Bible Study*. We may or may not

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Trust in the Lord

Finally, their heavenly Father answered the prayers of the exiled Jews when King Cyrus granted their desire to return to their homeland. Moreover, Cyrus decreed that they could rebuild their temple and that he would aid them in this sacred task. Just as the Lord God delivered the exiled Jews and provided for their needs, God rescues us and supplies us with spiritual blessings.

► Will you place your trust in God in whatever situation you encounter in this coming week? If so, write that commitment in a sentence here or on an index card to take with you. By next week, be ready to talk about an incident or incidents in which circumstances demanded that you turn to the Lord for help, and describe what He provided for you.

KEY VERSE

And some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the LORD which is at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place.
—Ezra 2:68, KJV

When they arrived at the house of the LORD in Jerusalem, some of the heads of the families gave freewill offerings toward the rebuilding of the house of God on its site.
—Ezra 2:68, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of March 7 through March 13

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon. Ezra 3:8-13—Rebuilding the Temple and Praising God.
- Tue. Ezra 4:1-5—Jews Discouraged from Rebuilding.
- Wed. Revelation 5—Worship at the Heavenly Throne.
- Thu. Psalm 138—Bowing in Praise.
- Fri. Haggai 1—The Time to Rebuild Has Come.
- Sat. Haggai 2:1-9, 15-19—The Temple's Foundation Laid.
- Sun. Ezra 6:1-12—God Provides through King Darius.

know what situations we'll encounter on any given day or in any given week where we need to trust in the Lord. We may say we always trust Him, but when health issues, family troubles, or money problems happen, will we indeed trust Him? The commitment sentence helps remind us that yes, we do trust in Him because He is our only real Deliverer and Provider.

End the lesson with a closing prayer. Thank our heavenly Father for bestowing His light upon our lives whenever we place our lives in His guiding hands. Ask Him to help your students be more faithful in their trust in Him. Rejoice with gratitude that He has delivered us from evil and provided us with His good blessings.



As the class members are leaving, hand out copies of this week's *Power for Living*. Take or mail copies of *Lesson Leaflet* to those who couldn't be with you today, or send them to those you would like to join your class.

Before Teaching Next Week's Lesson

Before next week, read Ezra 6:1-12. Have students think about the way(s) in which they worship the Lord.



Lesson Overview

Week of March 13

1 Life Need:

Discuss how worshiping God can be fresh and new.

2 Bible Learning:

Study Darius's decree regarding the Jewish temple.

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit*: Poster and reproducible handout—Ezra and the Return from Exile

3 Bible Application:

Comprehend the dynamic effects of worshiping God.

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit*: Reproducible handout—Planning a Worship Service
■ Sheets of paper, colored markers

4 Life Response:

Commit to earnestly worship the Lord.

Church/Home Theme: Our God's Love Heals

Lesson Focus: God gives people a fresh start for worship.

Lesson Scripture: Ezra 6:1-12

Freedom to Worship

The Work Restarted—The exiles returned to Judah from Babylon with the intention of rebuilding the Jewish temple. The people neglected their assignment for about 16 years. The families concerned themselves with reestablishing their properties. And they also were constantly harassed by surrounding enemy neighbors.

God sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to preach to the congregation and get them to finish the temple. God specifically spoke to Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest, encouraging them to be brave and restart the work. The prophets assured the people of God's backing of their efforts. God's Word proved to be a fresh wind of energy and enthusiasm to get the people to return to the building—in anticipation of a place to worship.

Confidence in God—Tatnai, the Persian governor over the province of Judah, became concerned. He saw large stones used for the building and thought it might be a coming revolt. He asked who gave the Jews the authority to work on the temple, and who was doing the work? The construction workers answered without hesitation—we are God's servants continuing to build His house. They knew God supported their efforts.

Provisions for the Temple—King Darius, the Persian monarch in charge at this time, authorized a search for the documentation permitting the Jewish people to rebuild. The former king, Cyrus, had signed off on their work, permitting the people to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. Cyrus ordered a return of the temple valuables and ordered funds from the royal treasury to be used for the rebuilding project. The king even requested animals be given to the Jews for sacrifices.

King Darius realized the previous king had blessed the labor by the Jewish nation. He told Tatnai and other officials to allow the work to continue. Anyone who hindered the progress of the temple was subject to punishment under the Persian government.

God Is Able—The lesson for us today is simple: never underestimate the power of God's Spirit to renew His people and reestablish praise and glory to His name.

As Your Students Arrive

Before class, write the acrostic word "WORSHIP" on a board or a large sheet of paper. As students enter the classroom, ask them to provide a word or words that identifies key elements in our worship of God. The first letter of the word must begin

with one of the letters in the word W O R S H I P. Write or have them write their answers below the appropriate letter. Examples might include: wafers in communion for W; offering for O; reading Scripture for R; sermon for S; hymns for H; invitation for I; and prayer for P.

Start the class session by telling students that the subject of this week's lesson is why the Lord desires that our worship of Him be fresh and heartfelt.

Link to Last Week

Encourage a few students to share ways they trusted God last week as their Deliverer and Provider.

1 Life Need

Discuss how worshiping God can be fresh and new.

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Freedom to Worship

Alphonso looked out at the small, eclectic group of people sitting on rickety metal chairs. He smoothed the edges of his Bible down again with steady hands—hands that had been steady for the past three years, thank God!

Alphonso was a minister who had come back to the Lord after years of struggling with alcohol. It was the Lord who met him face down in his own mess, somewhat like the biblical prodigal son, and caused him to take an honest, brutal assessment of himself. The pain of it drove Alphonso back into the arms of the Lord.

The Lord had put caring people in his life, one of whom was a member of the church he now attended. For more than two and a half years, Alphonso has been a member at Renewal Christian Church. When Pastor Goode learned that Alphonso used to be a minister, he told him that he would one day have to get back to his calling.

"We are all misfits," Pastor Goode had said. "We love you for who you are. God has given you yet another chance. Don't waste it."

Certainly, Alphonso didn't want to waste it, which is why he desired his relationship with Christ with a new intensity.

"How glorious it is to be in the House of God," Alphonso said to the audience. "I know it's only because of God's grace that I'm saved, and for that I'm thankful!"

1. Would you describe your worship of God as fresh every week or the same old routine?

2. What do you enjoy the most about worshiping God? Explain your answer.

3. Why does worshiping the Lord free you from personal anxieties and other troubling thoughts?

Ask your students to form small groups to discuss **Questions 1, 2, and 3** in the study book.

For Question 1, class members may say that glorifying God in worship each week is always a new and fresh experience, or they may say it feels like they do pretty much the same routine every time, especially if they see "worship" as being what they do mostly on Sundays at church.

The many answers to Question 2 include being uplifted through praying, singing, listening to sermons, and having Communion. Others will say that worshiping Christ with other believers is highly important to them. And still others will note the freedom they have in being able to worship in a democratic society. As they see new things God is doing each week, they may feel new joy in their worship each week.

Question 3 reminds students that when they are genuinely thankful for God's grace and His blessings, they experience a joy that only the Lord can give them. Moreover, this joy is so marvelous and absorbing that their personal troubles lack any access to their souls. In other words, their eyes are no longer focused on themselves but rather on their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

LESSON FOCUS: God gives people a fresh start for worship.

2 Bible Learning

Study Darius's decree regarding the Jewish temple.



After King Darius of Persia uncovered Cyrus's proclamation for the rebuilding

of the house of God in Jerusalem, he ordered the completion of the temple. The presence and operation of this temple would enliven the faith of the Jews, while providing a central place of worship for the one true God.

On the poster sheet, read the second paragraph, and on the poster, point out the photo of King Darius.

CYRUS'S SCROLL

Read Ezra 6:1-5, and highlight these key points as you discuss the Scripture with your class:

- As ruler over the Persian Empire in the early sixth and late fifth centuries, Darius's sovereignty was extensive and absolute in the ancient Middle East.
- Therefore, when King Darius issued

BIBLE EXTRA

The Second Temple

The glorious first temple, built by Solomon, was destroyed in Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. After 70 years in exile, God fulfilled His promise to allow the exiles to return to Jerusalem—giving them an opportunity to rebuild the temple. Even though the building paled in comparison to Solomon's structure, it was at least a place for the people of God to begin again. The second temple was completed by 516 B.C., and then underwent several expansions and renovations through the centuries, where it eventually came to be known as Herod's temple (which the Romans destroyed in A.D. 70).

a decree, obedience to his commands was strictly followed.

- On one such occasion, he ordered a search for official Persian documents stored in a Babylonian treasury.
- One of the documents was discovered in the palace in the Median city of Ecbatana, which was a memorandum issued by the former Persian king, Cyrus, who specified how the temple in Jerusalem was to be constructed.

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Cyrus's Scroll

Ezra 6:1-5, KJV

1 Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon.

2 And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record thus written:

3 In the first year of Cyrus the king the same Cyrus the king made a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits;

4 With three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber: and let the expenses be given out of the king's house:

5 And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon, be restored, and brought again unto the temple which is at Jerusalem, every one to his place, and place them in the house of God.

Ezra 6:1-5, NIV

¹King Darius then issued an order, and they searched in the archives stored in the treasury at Babylon.

²A scroll was found in the citadel of Ecbatana in the province of Media, and this was written on it:

Memorandum:

³In the first year of King Cyrus, the king issued a decree concerning the temple of God in Jerusalem: Let the temple be rebuilt as a place to present sacrifices, and let its foundations be laid. It is to be sixty cubits high and sixty cubits wide, ⁴with three courses of large stones and one of timbers. The costs are to be paid by the royal treasury. ⁵Also, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, are to be returned to their places in the temple in Jerusalem; they are to be deposited in the house of God.



Further commentary on this Scripture passage can be found on pp. 741 in *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: Old Testament*.

- Cyrus's intent was for the temple to be rebuilt as a place of worship, according to exact dimensions, funded by the Persian government, and filled with articles of gold and silver that had been taken by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

Suggested Answer to Question 4

Cyrus was specific about how the temple was to be rebuilt, even giving some of its new dimensions in his decree.

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Though Cyrus had authorized the building of the temple, after about six years, the work stopped for almost 10 years due to opposition from the non-Jews living around Jerusalem (Ezra 4:1-5, 24). In Ezra 6, we see the hunt for Cyrus's decree to allow the temple building to continue, which would give the current Persian king, Darius, the right and motivation to allow the work to continue.

Cyrus's was specific in terms of some dimensions of the temple. Height and width was to be 60 cubits. A cubit was about the length of fingertip to elbow, about 18 inches.

A symbol of God's healing was the return of the temple treasures that Nebuchadnezzar had confiscated. With the temple artifacts returned, the people of God would be reminded of their deep spiritual roots in the law of Moses.

4. What was in the decree of Cyrus?

5. What did Cyrus tell the people about the rebuilding of the temple?

Temple Funding

Ezra 6:6-10, KJV

6 Now therefore, Tattenai, governor beyond the river, Shetharboznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence:

7 Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place.

8 Moreover I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the

Ezra 6:6-10, NIV

⁶Now then, Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and you other officials of that province, stay away from there. ⁷Do not interfere with the work on this temple of God. Let the governor of the Jews and the Jewish elders rebuild this house of God on its site.

⁸Moreover, I hereby decree what you are to do for these elders of the Jews in the construction of this house of God:

Their expenses are to be fully paid out of the royal

Suggested Answer to Question 5

The edict of the Persian king was considered irrevocable; any successor was morally obligated to keep those as promised.

TEMPLE FUNDING

While reading Ezra 6:6-10, note these points in your class discussion:

BIBLE EXTRA

The Decree and the Library

The Babylonians and Persians were quite organized when it came to creating and preserving historical records. The fortified city ("citadel") of Ecbatana was one of the four capitals of the Persian Empire. The city was home to a library where documents such as the ones Cyrus had created would be stored and protected. Media was the home of the Medes, who eventually became subject to the Persians. However, in keeping with the preservation of culture edicts, the Medes did not lose their cultural identity. In fact, they are often coupled with their conquerors, from which we get the phrase, "The Medes and the Persians." Of course, as superpowers, they felt like their existence would go on for centuries, and they wanted to keep a chronological record of what happened.

BIBLE EXTRA

The Royal Treasury

Darius decreed that the second temple was to be funded out of the "royal treasury." In ancient Persia, the royal treasury was actually an armory that held the spoils of war from nations that had been conquered. Of course, these warehouses held the equivalent of millions of dollars (in today's currency). Sometimes kings were tempted to show off their massive accumulations of wealth, which resulted in the creation of greedy enemies who wanted those treasures. (See 2 Kings 20:12-19 where King Hezekiah shows off the royal treasury to Babylonian ambassadors.)

- Mindful of the evil intentions of the enemies of the Jews, King Darius ordered Governor Tatnai, Shethar-Bozenai (SHE-thar-boz-EE-nigh), and other officials to stay away from Jerusalem and not interfere in the ongoing work on the temple of God.

- Meanwhile, the king was implicitly encouraging the Jews in the region to renew their efforts in the rebuilding of the house of God.

- Moreover, King Darius instructed his officials to take care of the expenses of the Jews, while also continually

BIBLE EXTRA

Later Opposition

Opposition to the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall came later. Sanballat and several others exhibited significant resistance against Nehemiah during the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall (Neh. 4–6). Though not successful, Sanballat's efforts resulted in significant delays. Darius, in his own decree concerning the building of the temple, was going to be sure this type of hostility toward the Jews was not going to be tolerated.

When Sanballat harassed the wall rebuilders, the people of God had the strong personality of Nehemiah to stand up for them. In this case, Darius was going to be that intimidating champion, even though it would be unlikely that he'd ever physically visit the rebuilding sites.

BIBLE EXTRA

Darius's Building Projects

In his warnings against non-compliance, it's interesting to note that Darius says he'd use pieces of a building (namely a man's home) as a means of execution. Spectacular architecture was a hallmark of the reign of Darius. He became famous all over the world for his massive building projects. His best known project was a massive palace that also contained the armory-sized royal treasury in the city of Persepolis.

providing them with the necessary sacrifices that were to be offered to the heavenly God.

- Darius wanted these sacrifices to give off "sweet savours unto the God of heaven (v. 10, KJV), while the worshipers prayed for the well-being of the king and his sons.

Suggested Answer to Question 6

The second temple was to be funded out of the royal treasury, which meant the wealth and resources of the nations that Persia had conquered.

Suggested Answer to Question 7

They were to stay away from the rebuilding and follow the king's decree without question. The

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tribute beyond the river, forth-with expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered.

9 And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail:

10 That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons.

treasury, from the revenues of Trans-Euphrates, so that the work will not stop.

'Whatever is needed—young bulls, rams, male lambs for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, and wheat, salt, wine and olive oil, as requested by the priests in Jerusalem—must be given them daily without fail,¹⁰so that they may offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven and pray for the well-being of the king and his sons.

Darius began his own decree by telling Tattenai, the governor in the region, and all of his officials to stay away from Jerusalem all together. To emphasize the seriousness of his orders, Darius issued a decree. For the Persians, a king's decree was irrevocable. First, Tattenai was to fully fund the rebuilding of the temple. This may have taken Tattenai off-guard, because it meant he would be taking a cut from the profits of his trade in the Trans-Euphrates province. The key objective here was that the work was not to stop or be delayed in any way.

This resourcing would include building materials, plus the livestock necessary to keep the temple sacrifices going. Anything the priests needed was to be provided for them. Darius had an ulterior motive here. He hoped to gain the favor of the God of Israel for himself and his family.

6. How was the rebuilding of the second temple to be funded?

7. What strong instructions did Darius give about not interfering with the rebuilding efforts?

rebuilding was not to stop for any reason.

STRICT WARNINGS

Finally, read Ezra 6:11-12, and discuss the following summary statements:

- King Darius was determined that no one disobey his edict regarding the house of God, threatening both the offenders and their families with execution and complete ruin.
- Darius's decree extended to even the downfall of kings who might become obstacles to this Jewish endeavor; that is, to anyone who might lift his or her hands against the Lord God and His house of worship.
- This royal ordinance had the personal stamp

of King Darius and was to be zealously obeyed.

Suggested Answer to Question 8

He would be impaled on a beam from his own house, and that home would be destroyed.

Suggested Answer to Question 9

Darius was so sure that God was behind his decree, that he called upon the God of Israel to punish anyone who tried to thwart the building and even existence of the temple.

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Strict Warnings

Ezra 6:11-12, KJV

11 Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this.

12 And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed.

Not only was the king's decree irrevocable, there were stiff penalties associated with either disregarding the mandate or fulfilling it halfheartedly. The idea of the defiant man being impaled on a beam from his house was a precursor to the practice of crucifixion. The fact that it was a from part of the man's home was to add to his humiliation. The idea of his house becoming a pile of rubble was related to the beam that had been removed from it.

Interestingly, Darius assumes that God is going to back him up in this decree. He assumes that God will overthrow anyone who attempts to prevent or stall the rebuilding of the temple. Like Nebuchadnezzar, Darius might be conceding here that the God of Israel is all-powerful and worthy of worship and obedience.

8. What would happen to the man who did not comply with Darius's decree?

9. Why did Darius appeal to the God of Israel to back him up?

Ezra 6:11-12, NIV

¹¹Furthermore, I decree that if anyone defies this edict, a beam is to be pulled from their house and they are to be impaled on it. And for this crime their house is to be made a pile of rubble. ¹²May God, who has caused his Name to dwell there, overthrow any king or people who lifts a hand to change this decree or to destroy this temple in Jerusalem.

I Darius have decreed it. Let it be carried out with diligence.

WINDOW ON THE WORD

Darius the Great

Darius I (550-486 B.C.) ruled over the Persian Empire for more than 25 years and is regarded as one of the greatest kings of the Persian dynasty. He is noted for his construction of buildings and roads, the installation of Aramaic as the official language of his kingdom, and the division of his empire into provinces. He eventually gained the reputation of being one of the most powerful rulers who ever lived in the ancient Middle East. He came to power by somewhat devious means, using his position as the bodyguard of the son of Cyrus (the rightful heir to the Persian throne) to create a claim to succession. While Darius respected the heritage and proclamations of his predecessor (Cyrus), he clearly had an empire-expanding agenda of his own. Despite his power, however, he was unable to subjugate Greece—which eventually followed Persia as the world's next superpower.

The derivation of his name means "he who holds firm the good." As long as conquered groups of people submitted to his authority, Darius supported their faiths and religion. Interestingly, Xerxes I, who succeeded Darius and was his son, was King Xerxes in the biblical Book of Esther.

3 Bible Application

If possible, photocopy this page and give instructions to each group. Cut the sheets of paper in half horizontally and

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Discussion Group

Read “The Wonder of Worship Revived!” and answer **Questions 10, 11, and 12** in the student book. A worship service can seem “stale” to us at times, but we may be focusing too much on ourselves or others and not the Lord. Other answers will certainly include being in a state of gratitude, praise, humility, and contrition, as well as having a pure mind and a forgiving heart toward others. The central bond between believers and the Lord is love. A worship service inspires that love to greater heights through music, Scripture, a sermon, and Communion.

Worship Banners

On the half sheets with colored markers, work individually to create a colorful and inspiring banner with a phrase that expresses the joy and praise essential to a worship service. Examples might include “Glory Be to God!” “Thank You, Jesus, Our Savior!” and “The Lord Has Freed Us!” After you finish, display your drawings around the classroom.

Your Worship Service

Design a worship service together. Discuss what you consider to be essential elements in the service such as music, a sermon, announcements, etc. Then discuss why such a service would be meaningful to you and why it could invigorate your faith in Christ. For example, why might you select specific hymns or Bible verses? We all have our ideas about what “worship” should look like, and as you do the activity, you may discover some elements feel very worshipful, while others do not.

Comprehend the dynamic effects of worshiping God.

give them and the colored markers to the banner group. Make copies of the handout from the Resource Kit for the group using it.



Handout:

‘Planning a Worship Service’

Follow the instructions on the handout sheet.

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The Wonder of Worship Revived!

“I can safely say, on the authority of all that is revealed in the Word of God, that any man or woman on this earth who is bored and turned off by worship,” declared A. W. Tozer, “is not ready for heaven. We’re here to be worshippers first and workers only second.”

On the one hand, Tozer is noting that the central activity in heaven is worshiping God; on the other hand, he is stressing the powerful impact worship should have on our souls. Each is vitally connected to the other. Indeed, worshiping God is the outward expression of our humble gratitude and praise to the Almighty Creator and is the inward exultation of His awesome and transforming effect on our lives.

Christian theologian R.C. Sproul provides additional insight when he noted that “It is the pleasing of God that is at the heart of worship.” In other words, when our eyes are fixed on Christ instead of ourselves and our motivation during worship is to bring joy to our Lord God, then worship becomes truly uplifting and impactful.

Without water there is no spring to nurture the soul, but when we express our deep love for the Lord in worship, Christ’s water of life springs up within us and nourishes our spirits to renewed heights. This dynamic exchange of love between the God who is worshiped and those who worship Him is unique and priceless.

Therefore, let us heed the words of the psalmist when he urged God’s people to “worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand” (Ps. 95:6-7, KJV).

10. How do you overcome the feeling of boredom during a worship service?

11. How do you please God during a worship service?

12. How does a worship service enhance the love between Jesus and you?

4 Life Response

The worship of the Lord is a sacred gift from God for those who love and adore Him and who freely express their love for Him. Such a gift is a blessing in so many ways, not the least of which is in how genuine and enthusiastic worship purifies the soul and rededicates one's faith. Therefore, worshiping the Lord should have a high priority in our daily walk with Christ Jesus.

For this step, have students read "A Commitment Letter" in *Comprehensive Bible Study*. They may

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A Commitment Letter

Darius affirmed the decree of the former king to erect a temple in Jerusalem. The Jews were overjoyed that they could once more have the freedom to worship God in a house built for Him. Likewise, we as Christians should rejoice because we can freely worship the Lord, and such worship should renew our spirit and refresh our soul.

► Take a few minutes to write a letter to God. Begin by thanking Him for having the love He has for you and giving you the freedom to worship Him without the fear of persecution or harmful derision. Next, ask Him to help you engage in worship more faithfully and sincerely. Finally, promise to allow each worship service to be refreshing to your spirit.

KEY VERSE

And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. —Ezra 6:12a, KJV

May God, who has caused his Name to dwell there, overthrow any king or people who lifts a hand to change this decree or to destroy this temple in Jerusalem.
—Ezra 6:12a. NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of March 14 through March 20

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon. Leviticus 23:4-8—Keep Holy Convocations.
- Tue. Exodus 12:1-14—God Institutes the Passover.
- Wed. Exodus 12:21-28, 50-51—Instructions for the Passover.
- Thu. Psalm 113—Praise the Name of the Lord.
- Fri. 1 Corinthians 5:7-8; 10:1-4—Christ Our Passover.
- Sat. Psalm 114—Praise for God's Liberation.
- Sun. Ezra 6:13-22—Returned Exiles Keep the Passover.

Commit to earnestly worship the Lord.

write their letters in their book or on a separate sheet of paper you provide to them. Hopefully the letter will help them know how to better worship the Lord and give them a new appreciation for why they worship Him.

Finally, give the class the opportunity to pray silently or out aloud. In their prayers, they can thank God for His abiding love and express what worshiping Him means to them.

End the lesson with a closing prayer. Express the gratitude of the entire class for those special moments in their lives in which they can pour out their love and praise through the worship of their Jesus, their Savior. Moreover, ask God to continue to deepen their insights in how He blesses them through the worship services, which they can freely and openly enjoy.



As the class members are leaving, hand out copies of this week's *Power for Living*. Take or mail copies of *Lesson Leaflet* to those who couldn't be with you today, or send them to those you would like to join your class.

Before Teaching Next Week's Lesson

Before next week, read Ezra 6:13-22. Ask your students to think about how the Lord saved them.



Celebrate Passover of Completion

Lesson Overview

Week of March 20

Suggested Material for As Your Students Arrive:

- A sports cap with papers describing situations when you might need help

1 Life Need:

1 Recall your joy for having been rescued by the Lord.

2 Bible Learning:

2 Study the rebuilding of the temple according to Ezra.

Suggested Material:

- *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit*: Poster and reproducible hand-out—Ezra and the Return from Exile

3 Bible Application:

3 Understand why we honor God's intercessions in our lives.

Suggested Materials

- *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit*: Reproducible sheet—The Stories of Whitney and Bin

4 Life Response:

4 Celebrate the Lord with greater zeal.

Church/Home Theme: Our God's Love Heals

Lesson Focus: Remember and celebrate how God delivers people.

Lesson Scripture: **Ezra 6:13-22**

Time for Celebration—Those who experienced the Babylonian destruction and the remnant that returned to Judah greatly rejoiced once the temple was finished. The people had meager means and were small in number. Yet this did not stop them from bringing their sacrifices to the temple. The priest and Levites consulted Moses' laws and organized their temple responsibilities.

Remember the Past—Ezra labeled the remnant "children of the captivity," a reminder of their former state, a congregation violently taken to a foreign country because of their disobedience. They served other gods, ignoring the voice of God through His prophets. But the same hand of God who chastised His people also rescued them. He provided what they needed to return to their homeland.

Celebrating Passover—Part of the celebration included the Passover ceremony. They desired to keep remembering what God had done for their ancestors in Egypt. God delivered His nation in the past, and now He's done the same. These facts inspired their worship.

Each individual presented for slaughter a Passover lamb as an offering. Two different groups participated in the service: the Jews who came from Babylon and those Jews left in Judah after the captivity. The latter group were Jews who had intermarried with foreigners. To take part in the Passover, they had to renounce their allegiance to idols and became circumcised.

The people also offered the Feast of Unleavened Bread, marking their purity. The people made bread products without yeast, which was considered evil. The Matzoth, or Week of Unleavened Bread, symbolized the entire separation from evil.

Hallelujah, What a Time of Rejoicing—It had taken this remnant almost 20 years to rebuild their homes, the temple, and reestablish worship in Judah. Jesus' death ushered Christians out of darkness and captivity—into God's marvelous light. Every day, Christians need to reflect on Jesus' sacrifice. These thoughts should become the reason for praising and celebrating the grace of God.

As Your Students Arrive

Bring a sports cap filled with slips of paper to your classroom. On the slips briefly describe a situation in which you need help. As students enter the room, ask individual students to draw a slip from the cap, read what is written on the slip, and indicate the profession that is needed. Examples might include: a broken

water pipe in a home (plumber); a cavity in a tooth (dentist); and a hole in a muffler (car mechanic). Introduce the lesson by letting the class know that this week's lesson focuses on why we turn to God for help because of the emptiness in our lives.

Link to Last Week

Some of your students may want to share about how they felt fresh and renewed in some way as they worshiped God this past week.

1 Life Need

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Celebrate Passover of Completion

Sasha stood before the eight people in the church's conference room with a smile that was a mixture of delight and intrigue.

Sasha wanted to give her parents, Pastor and First Lady Scott, a celebratory event. Exactly what it would look like is why she had called the meeting—pending everyone buying into the idea.

Shining Star Fellowship Church had been less "shiny" when, about 10 years earlier, about 1/3 of its church members left. But Sasha had witnessed the love of Christ in the aftermath, people coming together and putting the good of church before their own. The result had been an influx of new members that almost equaled its membership loss.

It had not been Sasha's idea to "circle the pastor and first lady with love and support." She had heard it many times from numerous people. Ideally, the church could have done so at a "church anniversary," but Shining Star didn't have official anniversary services. Sasha also suspected that the new parishioners, who were mostly previously unchurched, would be open and keen to the idea.

After she explained the idea of a celebration of love for the Pastor and First Lady and Shining Star, Sasha received a thunderous round of applause.

"Yes!" said Deacon Oscar. "Finally. Let's get this party started!"

1. When are some times that you celebrate what God has done for you?

2. From what crises in your life has God rescued you?

3. How do you glorify the Lord when He saves you from personal troubles?

Recall your joy for having been rescued by the Lord.

Form small groups to discuss **Questions 1, 2, and 3** in the study book.

Question 1 invites students to think about occasions when they celebrate the Lord's love for them. That could be at Christmas and Easter, but we should really celebrate Him more times than that for everything He has done for us.

Question 2 asks students to address personal crises that have occurred in their lives either aloud or silently. These crises may have come upon them outside of their control, such as a severe illness or a financial setback, or the students may have brought it upon themselves such as a moral relapse or a consequential lie. In any case, they have experienced God's rescue following contrition and submission to the Lord.

For Question 3, students will discuss the various ways they express their appreciation to God for delivering them in times of great need. These ways may include praying, singing, and memorizing Scripture. For some, they may thank the Lord by helping others who are in need. Whatever their expression may be, our heavenly Father is certainly pleased with selfless humility and grateful praise on the part of His children.

LESSON FOCUS: Remember and celebrate how God delivers people.

2 Bible Learning

Study the rebuilding of the temple according to Ezra.



The Jewish temple in Jerusalem was not merely an amazing structure like any other extraordinary building; it housed the very presence of Almighty God here on earth! It is no wonder the Jews, God's chosen people, were openly and loudly ecstatic when the construction of the temple was accomplished and they could worship the Lord within and before it.

On the handout, read the fourth paragraph, and on the poster, point out the relief of the Persian king Darius I, who ordered the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem to resume.

THE COMPLETION OF THE TEMPLE

Read Ezra 6:13-15, and highlight these key points as you discuss the Scripture:

BIBLE EXTRA

We Four Kings

While Cyrus (reigned 559–530 B.C.) set the stage for God's people to return to Jerusalem, Darius I (521–486) was the king who reigned during the completion of the temple rebuilding. King Artaxerxes (465–424) is probably mentioned in Ezra 6:14 because he was reigning at the time Nehemiah was his cupbearer and approved Nehemiah's bringing more exiles back to Jerusalem to help rebuild the city walls.

Another king, Xerxes (485–465), reigned after Darius and before Artaxerxes, who was his son. Scripture says Xerxes is the king who reigned at the time of Esther (Esther 1:1). His Hebrew name was Ahasuerus.

- After the ancient Israelites finally settled in Canaan, Solomon built a spectacular temple in Jerusalem, but centuries later the Babylonians destroyed that temple.

- A second temple was erected in its place with the permission and aid of King Darius of Persia, who had commanded Governor Tattenai, Shethar-Bozenai, and other officials stay away from Jerusalem and stop interfering with the work on the temple (Ezra 5:6-7).

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The Completion of the Temple

Ezra 6:13-15, KJV

13 Then Tatnai, governor on this side the river, Shetharboznai, and their companions, according to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily.

14 And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.

15 And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.

Ezra 6:13-15, NIV

¹³Then, because of the decree King Darius had sent, Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and their associates carried it out with diligence. ¹⁴So the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo. They finished building the temple according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia.

¹⁵The temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

When the second temple was finally completed, the people had great reasons to celebrate. Even though this version of the temple was much smaller and less glamorous than the first, it represented the return of God's people from exile and the fulfillment of the promise that He would free them. However, the Book of Haggai says little progress had been made on the temple because those who had returned were focused on building their own homes (Hag. 1:3-4). After Haggai's admonishment, they focused on building God's house.

As expected, Darius's officials were also 100% behind the project, perhaps because of the severe penalties



Further commentary on this Scripture passage can be found on pp. 741-742 in *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: Old Testament*.

- Meanwhile, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah preached the word of the Lord and encouraged the people to finish this sacred task.
- Therefore, the rebuilding of the temple was accomplished because of both the command of God and the decrees of Cyrus and Darius, kings of Persia.
- The house of the Lord God was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius: March 12, 516 B.C.

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associated with non-compliance. The author of Ezra reminds us that the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah gave the people of God the spiritual perspective that they needed. Zerubbabel gave the needed organizational leadership. The author also reminded his readers that God was able to motivate pagan kings to support the project. Cyrus and Darius openly acknowledged the hand of God in the re-building of the temple. Artaxerxes was added to the names of foreign support because he later made a contribution to the temple (Ezra 7:21-23).

Ezra tells us the exact date of the temple's completion, which would have been March 12th on our calendar in 515 B.C. Adar was the last month in the Babylonian calendar. This was almost exactly 70 years after the first temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

4. Who were the spiritual leaders of the rebuilding of the temple?

5. Who is given credit for the completed building?

A Time to Celebrate

Ezra 6:16-18, KJV

16 And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy.

17 And offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.

18 And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites

Ezra 6:16-18, NIV

¹⁶Then the people of Israel—the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles—celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy. ¹⁷For the dedication of this house of God they offered a hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred male lambs and, as a sin offering for all Israel, twelve male goats, one for each of the tribes of Israel. ¹⁸And they installed the priests in their divisions and the

Suggested Answer to Question 4

The prophet Haggai and the prophet Zechariah were God's spokesmen for the rebuilding of the temple.

Suggested Answer to Question 5

God is credited with commanding the building of this second temple, and His will in this matter was implemented by the kings of Persia.

A TIME TO CELEBRATE

Now read Ezra 6:16-18, and note these important statements:

- When the construction of the house of the Lord God was finished, both the resident and returning exiles, led by the priests and Levites, joyously dedicated the temple.
- Meanwhile, they sacrificed many bulls, rams, and lambs as a sin offering for all the tribes of Israel.
- They also installed the priests and the Levites into their appropriate stations in Jerusalem in order to resume their service to the Lord God according to the statutes that Moses had established.

BIBLE EXTRA

The Priests and the Levites

Ezra tells us that it was the priests and the Levites who led the celebrations associated with the dedication of the second temple. The priests were required to be not only from the tribe of Levi, but also descendants of Moses' brother Aaron. The Levites served in non-priestly roles in the temple (like in the collection of animals for sacrifice, or maintaining the temple's treasury, serving as gatekeepers or musicians). Priest or not, Moses made sure that only those from the tribe of Levi were to have critical roles in the life and function of the temple. Most of the guidelines for the ritual cleansing of the priests (vs. 21) appear in the Book of Leviticus.

Suggested Answer to Question 6

The people of God rejoiced and celebrated with a deep sense of joy and well-being that comes from realizing God is sovereign and keeps His promise.

Suggested Answer to Question 7

All the sacrifices and roles of the priests and Levites were taken directly from the law of Moses.

A SPECIAL PASSOVER

While reading Ezra 6:19-22, note these important points in your class discussion:

- The Jews who had returned from their captivity, either recently or in the past, jubilantly performed the Passover

BIBLE EXTRA

Passover

The first Passover in the new temple gave the people of God a magnificent reason to celebrate. The Passover was a festival to celebrate the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt after nearly 400 years of slavery. While it's likely that the Jews celebrated a form of the Passover in the exile, now, with the existence of a new temple, the full and rich symbolism of the Passover feast could be enjoyed in its entirety.

BIBLE EXTRA

The ‘King of Assyria’

It's interesting to note that credit is given to “the king of Assyria” (not Persia) in Ezra 6:22. Of course, the Assyrians had long since been conquered by the Babylonians, and the Babylonians, in turn, conquered by Cyrus. Even so, Darius is given the honorary title of “King of Assyria” because Persia's heritage of military conquest, even indirectly, belongs to him. But even so, we know God is sovereign over all nations and every government. And because of God's sovereign work through political leaders of the time, the people of God were full of joy in the celebration of their new temple.

on the 14th day of the first month of the year—April 21st, 516 B.C.

• Prior to the ceremony, the priests and Levites had purified themselves so they could be clean before God as they sacrificed the Passover lambs for the exiles, their families, and themselves.

• The exiles and the resident Jews who had separated themselves from the uncleanliness of their Gentile neighbors feasted together on these Passover lambs.

• As the people participated in the Feast of Unleavened Bread, they rejoiced because the Lord God had persuaded the “king of Assyria” to help them build His temple.

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in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses.

Levites in their groups for the service of God at Jerusalem, according to what is written in the Book of Moses.

Once the temple was completed, the priests and the Levites were ready to begin the sacrifices again. Thanks to Darius, plenty of ceremonially acceptable livestock was there. Food was not as easily available to those in Jerusalem as it had been in the past, so to see over 700 animals given to God was truly a sacrifice on their part. In addition to the sacrifices, the people were diligent to go back to the law and fulfill all its obligations. The priests and Levites were divided into “teams” in order not to overburden any of them. The people's joy likely came from seeing what God had done through them—and that was reason enough to celebrate.

6. What was the emotional state of those who celebrated the dedication of the temple?

7. What guided the activities and roles associated with the second temple?

A Special Passover

Ezra 6:19-22, KJV

19 And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month.

20 For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves.

21 And the children of Israel, which were come again out

Ezra 6:19-22, NIV

¹⁹On the fourteenth day of the first month, the exiles celebrated the Passover. ²⁰The priests and Levites had purified themselves and were all ceremonially clean. The Levites slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the exiles, for their relatives the priests and for themselves. ²¹So the Israelites who had returned from the exile ate it, together with all who had separated themselves

Suggested Answer to Question 8

The existence of the temple meant that sacrificial lambs could be used in the feast for the first time in 70 years.

Suggested Answer to Question 9

God is the one who changed the attitude of the Persian king Darius (referred to here by an honored title, “king of Assyria”) so that the second temple would have the funding and protection it needed.

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of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the Lord God of Israel, did eat,
22 And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the Lord had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

The people had not been able to experience the full expression of Passover during their exile because there was no temple (and therefore no sacrificial lamb could have been presented). Though they had been enslaved by three superpowers (the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians), the people were back in their homes where they could worship God as in the old days. Also, when the people left Egypt, the Egyptians had given gold, silver, and other valuable items to the Israelites. God had led the Persians to do essentially the same thing, giving the people all the resources they needed to resume temple worship in Jerusalem—even the temple building!

In keeping with the law of Moses, the priests had made themselves ceremonially clean in order to be qualified to offer the sacrifice. The exiles did not exclude any Jews who had not been exiled—as long as those people had separated themselves from any pagan practices and idolatry. Again, the joy of the people is emphasized. Knowing that God is in control and keeps His promises deserves celebrating.

8. What was significant about celebrating the first Passover in the new temple?

9. Who is attributed with changing the minds of their oppressors?

BIBLE EXTRA

New Temple, New Beginning

This new, modest temple building was symbolic of God’s healing and the fulfillment of His promise to bring His people back to Jerusalem—after they had been effectively disciplined. No longer would there be any pagan temples in or around Jerusalem. The child sacrifices to Molech, or the temple prostitutes of Ashtoreth, would never be a part of Israel’s attempts to “blend in” with their neighbors, ever again. The acceptable sacrifices to God could begin again, and the symbol of God’s atonement and forgiveness of sin could once again be a part of the lives of the Israelites.

WINDOW ON THE WORD

The Prophets Zechariah and Haggai

Haggai is one of the 12 minor prophets in the Hebrew Bible and the author of the Book of Haggai. He served the Lord God in the sixth century B.C. about 16 years after the Jews returned to Israel, having been exiled by the Babylonians and having been released by the Persians. The name Haggai means “my holidays.” We get the details of his leadership in the Old Testament book that bears his name. He is the one who pushed the exiles to focus their attention on God’s house rather than their own homes (and lives). Like Nehemiah, Haggai had to jolt the people out of their complacency, and their hands to the task God had given to them.

Because work on the temple’s construction had lagged, Haggai, on behalf of God, exhorted the people to complete the work. In fact, in his prophecies Haggai threatened the people that their indifference to the task would lead to drought, famine, and poverty (see Hag. 1:2-11).

Like Haggai, Zechariah is one of the minor prophets and the author of the Book of Zechariah. He is mentioned twice in Ezra (5:1; 6:14) as prophesying at the time of the temple building. He was the grandson of Iddo, who returned with Nehemiah to Jerusalem (Neh. 12:4, 16), and his book says that he began prophesying two months after the temple building had begun (Zech. 1:1).

3 Bible Application

Recalling a sad and bitter chapter in our lives can be deeply painful, but like a mother who gives birth, followers of Jesus Christ remember the saving hand of God and the joy that comes with it. Allow students to select the activity they would like to do. If possible, photocopy this page and give instructions to each group. Give paper and pencils to the cartoon group. Make copies of the handout from the Resource Kit for the group using it.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Discussion Group

Read “Let Us Rejoice!” and answer **Questions 10, 11, and 12** in the student book. A person can look at only one object at a time. If he or she is gazing at Christ, that person cannot view neither one’s self nor one’s troubles. The touchstone for remembering is whether or not the Lord played the central role in those memories. The deeper our faith in Him, the more our memories are a blessing to us. Sometimes we can be more joyful in our prayers when we recall what God has done in our lives, be more celebratory in our singing of songs that reflect on how the Lord intervened on our behalf, and be more cheerful when we tell others about Christ’s impact on our lives.

Three-Panel Cartoons

With the paper and pencils, individually draw a three-panel cartoon in which each panel illustrates the building of the Jewish temple, the celebration of its completion, and the commemoration of the Passover. After you finish, display your drawings on a class wall and explain how the pictures portray the Lesson Focus.

Understand why we honor God’s intercessions in our lives.



Handout:

‘The Stories of Whitney and Bin’

Read the two stories in this handout, then discuss your answers to the questions: do you relate more to Whitney or Bin in these case studies? How do these two examples illustrate how different experiences can still spiritually enrich various followers of Jesus Christ?

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Let Us Rejoice!

Nathan was lost in a world of self-gratification, trying to make money as a substitute for the friends he never had and wanting to be an “important” person. Alcohol, pornography, and sex became the driving forces in his life until one Sunday he found himself at a church with a woman he would later marry. It was there he found Christ, and since then he praises God for totally changing him. He reminds himself what God did for him with this verse: “LORD my God, I called to you for help, and you healed me” (Ps. 30:2).

James Barrie, a Scottish novelist and the creator of Peter Pan, once wrote, “God gave us memory so that we might have roses in December.” There are those who dwell on disappointments, harbor resentments, and cling to grievances; their Decembers are full of shadows that haunt their consciousness. Others, however, reminisce on God’s intercessions in their lives; their Decembers are joyfully blessed with fragrant and lovely roses.

Recollections of the Lord caring so deeply that He uses His divine power to be active in our lives liberates us from worldly cares. Indeed, memories of His lifting us when we are sinking or shielding us when we are besieged motivate our souls to rejoice.

“I will remember the works of the LORD,” sang the psalmist, “surely I will remember thy wonders of old” (Ps. 77:11, KJV). Let us then rejoice today and be glad.

10. How does keeping your sights on Christ help you from sinking into the sea of self-pity?

11. How do you distinguish between those memories that are a curse to you and those memories that are blessing to you? Which occupies your thoughts more? Explain your answer.

12. In what ways can you rejoice more while recalling how God has delivered you in the past?

4 Life Response

In a way, remembering reflects who we are. Memories reveal what is important to us. They influence our decisions and sway our moods. And if we ponder how Jesus has saved us and how time and again God has delivered us, we can't help but celebrate the grace we have received from the Lord and rejoice that He has favored us with His love and His guardianship.

Ask students to read "Reflect and Celebrate" in *Comprehensive Bible Study* and allow volunteers

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Reflect and Celebrate

God gave us memories of His demonstrative love in our lives so that we won't lose faith in Him when life seems meaningless. And like the Jews who witnessed the rebuilding of the house of the Lord, we too can celebrate what the Lord has accomplished in our lives. We too can glorify the one true God with joy and thanksgiving.

► List here some things the Lord has delivered you from in the past. Did you celebrate when He did those things? If you did, write what you did next to each occasion. If not, plan to celebrate them this coming week.

KEY VERSE

And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of with joy.
—Ezra 6:16, KJV

Then the people of Israel—the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles—celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy.
—Ezra 6:16, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of March 21 through March 27

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon. Deuteronomy 8:12-20—Remember God's Blessing.
- Tue. James 1:19-27—Hear and Act.
- Wed. 1 Peter 5:5-9—Show Humility and Resist the Adversary.
- Thu. Psalm 103:1-10—Bless the Lord, O My Soul.
- Fri. Psalm 103:11-22—God's Love Is Everything.
- Sat. 2 Timothy 2:8-13—Remember Christ and Endure.
- Sun. Deuteronomy 8:1-11—Keep the Lord's Commandments.

Celebrate the Lord with greater zeal.

to read what they related in their book. Recalling such celebratory moments deepens our trust in Christ. Planning to celebrate this week will also help them remember just how many times God has come to their rescue in tough situations.

End the lesson with a closing prayer. Ask God to help students always be mindful of what He has done in their lives, whether it be for a long lifetime or even for a few months since their conversion. Glorify the One who has saved them from spiritual destruction and celebrate the many miracles He has performed for the people in your class.



As the class members are leaving, hand out copies of this week's *Power for Living*. Take or mail copies of *Lesson Leaflet* to those who couldn't be with you today, or send them to those you would like to join your class.

Before Teaching Next Week's Lesson

Before next week, read Deuteronomy 8:1-11. Ask your students to think about what things they trust and don't trust.



Lest We Forget

Lesson Overview

Week of March 27

1 Life Need:

Discuss the key aspects of remembering and trusting.

2 Bible Learning:

Study God's exhortation to the Israelites to obey His statutes.

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit*: Poster and reproducible hand-out—Ezra and the Return from Exile

3 Bible Application:

Comprehend how God assures us of His guardianship.

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit*: Reproducible sheet—Distrust and Trust
■ Large and long sheet of paper, felt pens

4 Life Response:

Always trust God's ways.

Church/Home Theme: Our God's Love Heals

Lesson Focus:

Remember God's acts so you trust in His ways.

Lesson Scripture: **Deuteronomy 8:1-11**

Remember!—The Scriptures use this word “remember” repeatedly. Specifically, God wanted the Hebrew children to recall His grace and mercy over their 40 years in the wilderness. It's essential to have an excellent memory of what the Lord has done to trust Him with your future.

A Heart Exam—When confronted with a test or trial, what is in the heart of a person becomes evident. God already knows the heart of every person, inside and out. But how well does each individual know their own heart? Or even want to know what is there? A prideful heart is a dangerous thing, but a meek spirit, humility in the eyes of God, is beautiful.

Learning Dependence—Each morning, the Hebrew children, while traveling to the promised land, had to rely on God's provision in order to survive. Unless He rained down manna each day, they had no way to get food. It took them 40 years to understand, but God eventually taught them how to depend on Him and Him alone for their substance.

God's Discipline—His correction for His children is never a punishment but always for training and maturing purposes. Being in God's classroom requires humility and being ready to submit to His will. As the Hebrew children looked to the Father for His words, at the same time, He took care of their material needs. The lesson here is, learn to obey and walk in His ways.

God's Provision—God led them to a well-watered land, fertile for growing crops and with plenty of drinking water for man and beast. The earth below contained copper, iron, and brass. They would never have to worry about food or supplies. It was a land of milk and honey—everything the Israelites needed and much more, God provided.

Moses ended his admonishment to the crowd by saying, once again, not to forget the Lord and to keep His instructions. This is wisdom for Christians today as well. Before going to sleep at night, recall God's goodness. All too often, the nighttime thoughts are unrestful, thinking about challenges that have occurred, worries, or the “to do” list waiting in the morning. If the believer reflects on the past activities of the Lord and His goodness, it's easier to look forward to God's mercies the next day.

As Your Students Arrive

As students enter the classroom, ask them to grade how much they trust things on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being “No trust” and 10 being “Complete trust.” Examples might include TV

commercials, politicians, other drivers on the road, medical pills, and weather forecasts. Start the class session by telling students that the subject of this week's lesson is learning to completely trust God with our lives.

Link to Last Week

Some of your students may want to describe how they celebrated God rescuing them as they remembered all the things He has done for them in the past.

1 Life Need

Discuss the key aspects of remembering and trusting.

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Lest We Forget

I know you've been doing your therapy, but are you sure you feel up to it this morning, Mrs. Jackson?" Jaime asked politely.

Dorothy looked at her young nursing assistant and smiled, "Yes, Jaime, I can make it."

Truth be told, Dorothy Jackson's arthritic joint pain was hurting her some, but she whispered a prayer for strength. She had been a resident of Crossroads Rehabilitation and Nursing Care Facility for almost a year. She had not only adapted at the nursing home, but she was flourishing. Various religious organizations came to the facility to provide services for the residents and patients. This Sunday, her home church was celebrating its 70th anniversary, and Dorothy didn't want to miss it.

"I'll be just fine, honey," Dorothy told her young nurse as she was being cleaned and prepared for the day. "The Lord has been extra good to me for all these years. He hasn't forgotten me, and I certainly don't want to forget Him."

Then the 86-year-old lady began to tell Jaime about the many exploits God had performed for her, the valleys He had seen her through, and the constant companion He had been.

"You certainly have a testimony," Jaime said, as she wheeled Dorothy into the dining hall.

"Yes," Dorothy said. "I want to be sure and be in the front row celebrating my church, but most of all celebrating Him."

1. What things are easy for you to remember?

2. What things do you often forget?

3. How do remembering and trusting go together in relationships?

After reading the anecdote in the student book, ask them to form small groups to discuss their answers to **Questions 1, 2, and 3**.

A wide range of answers to Question 1 will occur because students' experiences are quite diverse from one another. However, people usually remember the names of people closest to them, where they live, how old they are, and what church they attend.

For Question 2, some people have trouble remembering people's names. Others may forget their keys all the time, forget to take pills when they should, or forget what they were going to buy at the store when they arrive.

Finally, Question 3 reminds class members that trust in a relationship often depends on remembering what each has done for the other. If a person has been selfless, thoughtful, and helpful in past personal interactions, hopefully that means the person will continue that way in the future. It is hard to trust someone when we have no history with them.

LESSON FOCUS: Remember God's acts so you trust in His ways.

2 Bible Learning

Study God's exhortation to the Israelites to obey His statutes.



It is understandable why the Lord God had to continually tell His people to remember

what He had taught them, for time and again they would forget and then suffer bitter consequences. Certainly, right before they entered the promised land, God once more told them what He had accomplished on their behalf and what He expected from them so they could place their complete trust in Him as they stepped into Canaan.

On the handout, read the final paragraphs.

BIBLE EXTRA

Manna

Mere weeks after God had delivered Israel from Egypt and brought them across the Red Sea, "the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. . . . 'You have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death'" (Exod. 16:2-3). In response, God provided "bread from heaven"—enough for them to gather for each day and no more, to "test them and see whether they will follow my instructions" (Exod. 16:4; compare to Deut. 8:2).

God provided manna to the Israelites for their entire 40 years in the wilderness—and stopped only on the day that the Israelites celebrated Passover in the promised land, as they encamped at Gilgal and prepared for their march upon Jericho. From that day on, "there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate the produce of Canaan" (Josh 5:12).

REMEMBER GOD'S DISCIPLINE AND PROVISION

Read Deuteronomy 8:1-5, and highlight these key points as you discuss the Scripture:

- Through His servant Moses, the Lord God told His chosen people to be mindful of the commands He had given them.
- As long as they remained obedient to His statutes, they would prosper in the land He was about to lavish on them, which was a promise He had conveyed to their ancestors.

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Remember God's Discipline and Provision

Deuteronomy 8:1-5, KJV

1 All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers.
2 And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.

3 And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.

4 Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years.

5 Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee.

Deuteronomy 8:1-5, NIV

¹Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the LORD promised on oath to your ancestors.

²Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. ³He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. ⁴Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. ⁵Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.

In the earlier chapters of Deuteronomy, Moses had detailed the Israelites' wanderings in the wilderness, and



Further commentary on this Scripture passage can be found on pp. 323-325 in *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: Old Testament*.

• Moreover, God reminded them how He had guided them in the wilderness for 40 years, during which He had humbled and tested their hearts to determine whether they would be obedient to His laws.

• The Lord had furnished them with manna when they were starving, while teaching them that they must learn to live on His words and not on physical food.

• During their 40 years of trials in the wilderness, they discovered that their garments did not wear out nor did their feet swell.

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in Deuteronomy 7 had reiterated God's original call to drive out the nations before them—especially as it was their rebellion against this call that had caused the last 40 years of wandering. Thus, in chapter 8, Moses reminded the people to obey God's commands. Only by "follow[ing] every command" would the Israelites finally inherit all that God had promised them.

Moses also again reminded Israel why their wandering had occurred: "to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart" (vs. 2). It wasn't that God needed to know what was in the people's hearts—they needed to know and thus be humbled into following God's ways.

Moses also reminded Israel of how God had provided food for them with manna in order to teach them that not only did they not need to worry about God's provision, but that this was not even to be their focus. The Israelites'—and our—true sustenance, instead, was to come from "every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (vs. 3). In addition, amazingly, "Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years" (vs. 4). God had provided for the Israelites in every way, despite their many complaints.

With that, Moses encouraged Israel to "know . . . in your heart" not only the purpose but the manner of God's discipline: "as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you" (vs. 5). This generation of Israelites could trust the discipline of a loving God who was parenting and instructing them, preparing their minds and hearts so that they could properly take care of the land God was about to bring them into.

4. Why had Israel's wanderings occurred, according to Moses?

5. What had God provided Israel during their wanderings, and why?

6. What did Moses say was the manner of God's discipline? How did this help fulfill God's purpose?

• Their heavenly Father then stated that He was just like a parent who disciplines His children to train them to be His obedient and faithful children.

Suggested Answer to Question 4

In Deuteronomy 8:1, Moses reminded the people to obey God's commands, "so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the LORD promised on oath to your ancestors." Thus, Israel's wandering occurred "to humble and test [them] in order to know what was in [their] heart" (vs. 2). The people needed to understand their own hearts, in order to submit to God and follow His ways.

Suggested Answer to Question 5

God had provided food for them by the giving of manna, "which neither you nor your ancestors had known," in

BIBLE EXTRA

'Man Does Not Live on Bread Alone'

Many people are familiar with this phrase from Deuteronomy 8:3, although its more famous appearance in the Scriptures occurs about 1,500 years later.

After His baptism by John, "Jesus was led by the Spirit" (Matt. 4:1) into a different but nearby wilderness—the Judean Desert lay only a couple dozen miles west of the plains of Moab. After 40 days of fasting, Jesus was understandably hungry. It was then that Satan appeared and presented the first of three temptations: "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread" (Matt. 4:3; cf. Luke 4:3). In response to Satan, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3: "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matt. 4:4; cf. Luke 4:4). After overcoming this and two further temptations from Satan, Jesus was ready to begin His own ministry of liberation in the promised land.

order to teach them that their true sustenance, was to come from “every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” (Deut. 8:3). In addition, their clothes “did not wear out and [their] feet did not swell during these forty years” (vs. 4). God had provided in every way over the past 40 years, despite the Israelites’ many complaints.

Suggested Answer to Question 6

Moses encouraged Israel to “know in your heart” that “as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you” (vs. 5). The manner of God’s discipline was compared to the discipline of a parent instructing Israel, preparing their minds and hearts so that they could properly take care of the land He was about to bring them into.

BIBLE EXTRA

Worship in the Midst of Prosperity

Verses 10-11 hint at a theme developed later in Deuteronomy 8—the tendency for humans to stop worshiping God as they become more prosperous, eventually even taking credit for God’s provision. Moses continued to warn the people, “You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.’ . . . If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them . . . you will surely be destroyed” (vss. 17, 19).

Despite this and numerous other warnings from Moses and the prophets who followed him (Deut. 32:15-25; Ezek. 16; Hos. 12-13, et al.), Israel did become complacent and abandon God. And as promised (and as discussed in earlier lessons), God let Israel be conquered by the Assyrians and the Babylonians as well as by many lesser nations during the time of the judges just a few generations after Moses. God disciplined His people again and again, in order to turn their hearts back to Him.

REMEMBER GOD’S COMMANDMENTS

Finally, read Deuteronomy 8:6-11, and discuss these summary statements:

- God charged the Israelites to walk in compliance with His commands while revering His holy lordship.
- Meanwhile, Almighty God was providing them with a fertile and productive land, comprised of valleys and hills that were full of brooks, streams, and springs.
- Such fruitful land would provide wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil, and honey in abundance.
- Indeed, they would neither lack for bread nor be without iron and copper.

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Remember God’s Commandments

Deuteronomy 8:6-11, KJV

6 Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him.

7 For the LORD thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills;

8 A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey;

9 A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass.

10 When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee.

11 Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day.

Deuteronomy 8:6-11, NIV

6 Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in obedience to him and revering him.

7 For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; ^{8a} land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; ^{9a} land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.

10 When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.

11 Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day.

After reminding the Israelites of how God had provided for them in the wilderness, Moses called them not only to obey Him but to revere Him; they were not just to honor Him with their actions but with their hearts. They were to respond as children would to their loving father. The King James version uses the word “fear” (vs. 6) here, and

- Therefore, they should glorify their Lord God for their prosperity, never forgetting Him nor failing to observe His laws and statutes, which He was commanding them that day.

Suggested Answer to Question 7

"Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in obedience to him and revering him" (vs. 6). The Israelites were not just to honor God with their actions but with their hearts. As God disciplined them as a parent (vs. 5), they were to respond as children to their loving father. The Israelites were to have a healthy fear of God, being careful not to do anything that would disappoint or dishonor Him.

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this too is a part of reverence; the Israelites were to have a healthy fear of God, being careful not to do anything that would disappoint or dishonor Him.

God was bringing the people "into a good land" (vs. 7), a land plentiful with water, grain, crops, fruit, oil, honey, even minerals like iron and copper. In short, it was "a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing" (vs. 9). Surely the God who was giving them all this was worthy to be revered.

And yet, Moses again reminded Israel that they did not live by bread alone: "When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you" (vs. 10). The correct response to God's goodness and provision is to praise Him for it. God understood the people's tendency to depend on and believe in themselves. Thus, He used Moses to remind them of the inclination of their own hearts: "Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day" (vs. 11). Israel had been disciplined for 40 years; now their hearts would be tested by the abundance of God's provision.



These fertile fields in the Jezreel Valley in central Israel illustrate the richness of the promised land.

Photo: StateofIsrael

Suggested Answer to Question 8

God was bringing them "into a good land" (vs. 7)—one plentiful with water, grain, crops, fruit, oil, honey, even minerals like iron and copper. In short, it was "a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing" (vs. 9). Surely the God who was giving all this to Israel was worthy of their honor and obedience.

Suggested Answer to Question 9

"When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you" (vs. 10). The correct response to God's goodness and provision is to praise Him for it. Moses also reminded Israel of the inclination of their own hearts: "Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands" (vs. 11). Prosperity would be as much a test for Israel as 40 years of wandering had been.

WINDOW ON THE WORD

40 in Scripture

According to God's Word, the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years (see Deuteronomy 8:2). The number 40 often appears in the Bible. During the Flood, it rained for 40 days and 40 nights (see Genesis 7:4). Moses sent spies into Canaan for 40 days (see Numbers 13:2). Both David and Solomon reigned for 40 years (see 2 Samuel 5:4 and 1 Kings 11:42).

There are many more examples in the Hebrew Bible, but the most memorable examples in the New Testament accounts are Jesus' fast in the Judean desert (see Matthew 4:2) and the period between His resurrection and ascension (see Acts 1:3). The number 40 in Scripture can signify many ideas including testing, transformation, and wholeness, perhaps even a very long time.

3 Bible Application

This step helps class members understand the trustworthiness of the Lord regarding how He takes parental care of us. Allow students to select the activity they would like to do. If possible, photocopy this page and give instructions to each group. Give a large sheet of paper and felt pens to the group making the mural. Make copies of the handout from the Resource Kit to give to the group using it.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Discussion Group

Read "Trust in the Lord" and answer **Questions 10, 11, and 12** in the student book. It is helpful to think of incidents when we have felt the hand of God touching our lives in impactful, if not miraculous, ways such as healing from a severe illness or of a broken relationship. Of course, we also must acknowledge who God is—that is, He is our Creator and Lord of the universe—and acknowledge who we are: His creation and subject to His Lordship. Such acknowledgment engenders not only humility in us before Him but also a trust that He can control any situation.

A Mural of the Lord's Exhortation to the Hebrews

Using the paper and felt pens, work as a team to draw a picture of Moses conveying God's commandments to His people before they enter the promised land. After you finish, display your drawing on the class wall and explain to the class how your drawing may help us understand and trust the Lord.

Comprehend how God assures us of His guardianship.



Handout: 'Distrust and Trust'

Read your answers to one another if you feel comfortable doing so. Even if the incidents are the same, your individual perspectives probably differ and are of equal merit. For example, Elijah's flight from Jezebel was not only because of his fear for his life but also because of his resentment toward God. Furthermore, Elijah heard the Lord's voice in a gentle whisper but also comprehended God's faithfulness on the mountain (1 Kings 19:1-13).

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Trust in the Lord

Is it true that the more God acts in our lives, the more we are able to trust Him? Some people will emphatically say, "No!" That's because they perceive the wrongs they've suffered as coming from God. It may be because they actually don't believe in the grace of God, or it may be that they are in a low period in their relationship with God. For the Christians who joyfully say, "Yes!" to that question, however, they have become familiar with God's ways in their lives.

How do we become familiar with God's ways in our lives? It certainly isn't believing that He will grant our every request exactly as we want, nor is it believing that He is more concerned with world events than our own individual lives. In fact, there is an intimacy in our relationship with our Lord that confirms in our hearts that He truly loves us and in our minds that He always seeks our best interest in whatever He does.

Of course, humility is essential in our walk with God. In considering His ways in our lives, we must have a humble perspective and a submissive temperament, for the Lord knows far more than we do what is best for us.

Humbly keeping in mind how God has been involved in our lives affirms His trustworthiness. Confident that all the blessings that have flowed into our lives have come from Him inspires us to trust Him today even more than we have before. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight" (Prov. 3:5-6).

10. Specifically, how have you perceived the ways of God in your life?

11. Why does regarding God with humility help you to trust Him?

12. How have you learned to trust God through what He has done in your life?

4 Life Response

The Lord God is trustworthy in all that He does for us. His love and faithfulness are a bulwark against all the world's efforts to undermine our devotion to Christ. With earnest humility, we acknowledge that all the blessings in our lives come from Him, and we are ever mindful that what He has accomplished for us in the past, He continues to do for us in the present.

Ask students to read "The Impact of God's Ways" in *Comprehensive Bible Study*. Hopefully this

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The Impact of God's Ways

Before the ancient Hebrews entered the land the Lord God had promised them after wandering in the Sinai wilderness for 40 years, God reminded them never to forget or disregard the commands He had taught them. Likewise, we must always keep in mind the ways of God and humbly trust in Him.

► It can be difficult at times to trust the Lord. Briefly describe here a time you failed to trust Him and what happened. Next, describe a current situation in which you are having trust issues and then write the words "I will trust in You" next to that situation.

KEY VERSE

Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day.
—Deuteronomy 8:11, KJV

Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day.
—Deuteronomy 8:11, NIV

activity will help show how they can be more faithful and sincere in trusting the Lord with their lives in every situation and under any circumstances. The descriptions could be as short as "Listened to friends—paid the price" and "Finding new job—I will trust You."

End the lesson with a closing prayer. Thank the Lord God for the powerful ways He has touched the lives of your students, thus demonstrating His merciful love for them. Ask the Lord to teach them humility whenever they consider His ways in their lives and to deepen their trust in how His ways affect their lives. Finally, glorify Almighty God with praise and thanksgiving for His awesome trustworthiness.



As the class members are leaving, hand out copies of this week's *Power for Living*. Take or mail copies of *Lesson Leaflet* to those who couldn't be with you today, or send them to those you would like to join your class.

Before Teaching Next Week's Lesson

Before next week, read Matthew 21:1-11. Have students think about what qualities make good leadership.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of March 28 through April 3

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Psalm 121—Help Comes from the Lord.
- Tue.** Matthew 20:1-16—The First Will Be Last.
- Wed.** Matthew 20:17-28—The Greatest Must Be a Servant.
- Thu.** Exodus 34:23-27—Faithful Appear before God.
- Fri.** Luke 19:41-44—Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem.
- Sat.** Psalm 125—Trust in the Lord.
- Sun.** Matthew 21:1-11—Hosanna to the Son of David!

Lesson Overview**Week of April 3****1 Life Need:**

1 Discuss what makes a humble leader.

2 Bible Learning:

2 See the humble King Jesus as He entered Jerusalem.

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit*: Poster and reproducible handout—Easter: Sacrifice and Salvation

3 Bible Application:

3 Understand that humility is what Jesus wants us to have.

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit*: Reproducible sheet—Humility: A Symbol of Honor

4 Life Response:

4 Rejoice that we serve a humble King.

Church/Home Theme:
Our God's Love Heals**Lesson Focus:**

Rejoice! Our humble King has come.

Lesson Scripture:
Matthew 21:1-11

Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

Before traveling to Jerusalem, Jesus spent some time in Jericho, where He healed two blind men and encountered Zacchaeus. He then visited His friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany before making His amazing ride into Jerusalem. Unlike other occasions, He didn't avoid the crowds or enter the city privately. He received the joyous honor and praise from the people.

The Triumphal Entry—Right before Jesus entered the city, He commissioned two of His disciples to retrieve a donkey. Jesus knew the exact location of a colt and its mother. If anyone asked questions, Jesus told them to say, “The Lord needs them.” Jesus fulfilled one of Zechariah’s prophesies concerning the Messiah by riding into Jerusalem like royalty. Yet, He made no use of a warrior horse; instead, He rode on a colt, symbolizing peace and meekness.

Out of respect, the disciples put their garments across the donkey, and Jesus climbed on the animal to ride into the city. Because of the Passover feast, thousands of Jews from all over the known world were there, perhaps lining the street in a parade-like fashion. They made a carpet of their outer garments and tree branches along the road. The people shouted “Hosanna!” and hailed Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah and King. They expected Him to take down the Roman government and bring in a free, Jewish kingdom.

The Messiah’s Message—The Scripture said Jesus’ entrance “stirred” the city. The same thing happened in the city when the Magi inquired about the Christ child (Matt. 2:3). On both occasions, the Magi and Jesus turned the city upside down, and rumors started circulating. Those who had not heard about Jesus asked, “Who is this?” Those in the crowd who knew of Him shouted back, “This is Jesus of Nazareth.”

When King Jesus Rides Again—What the crowd didn’t know was that Jesus would begin to weep as He rode into Jerusalem. They shouted and rejoiced over Him, thinking He would free them from their Roman oppressors. They didn’t understand that this time when Jesus came, He came as a gentle, lowly Savior. When Jesus returns, at His second coming, He will then ride a warrior’s white horse, and everyone will know who He is.

As Your Students Arrive

Ask students to finish this sentence as they come into class: “I would follow someone who is a _____ person.” Some

answers might include *kind*, *caring*, *considerate*, or *respectful*. See how many (if any) suggest the word *humility* as a quality. This week we will talk about how Jesus could be humble and yet also a King.

Link to Last Week

Let some students tell how they trusted the Lord more this past week.

1 Life Need

Discuss what makes a humble leader.

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Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

Pastor Nolan Wright slipped in the back of the sanctuary just before the service started. Shekinah Glory Tabernacle, Pastor Campbell's 3,000 member church, was having a special youth service.

Nolan had felt honored and humbled when Pastor Campbell had asked him to be on the program, but because of a prior commitment, Nolan declined. It was with surprise and a little gratitude that Nolan met the last-minute news of the cancellation of his prior commitment. As the pastor of a small church in a neighboring city, Nolan had been of the mind to stay home and get some needed rest. But Pastor Campbell and his youth kept coming to his mind.

Dressed in jeans and a plain sports coat, Nolan now sat in a back pew. After about 30 minutes, he was feeling rejuvenated and happy he had come.

Then Pastor Campbell stepped to the podium.

"Is Pastor Wright in the house tonight?"

Nolan dropped his head, smiled, and waved his hand.

"Pastor Wright is from Triumph Church. He is a mighty man of God and has just become recognized as a dynamic singer and songwriter! He was recently nominated in the Stella Award's New Artist of the Year category. It looks like his prior commitment has fallen through. Brother, would you bless us with a selection?"

As the congregation continued to applaud, Nolan humbly got up and made his way down the aisle.

1. Why is humility a hard quality to find in many people?

2. Why would a humble leader be preferable to a haughty leader?

3. Why might you rejoice when a haughty leader is humbled?

Most of the time when you think of a king you picture a haughty, arrogant, perhaps overbearing leader, who cares little about his subjects and servants and more about appearance. Kings seem to honor above all their prestige, reputation, and brash ways. Jesus defied all the odds and came as a gentle, humble King despite being the creator of all things.

Ask your students to read the opening story, then form small groups to discuss their answers to **Questions 1, 2, and 3**.

Question 1 challenges students to think about how humility is not something we find in a lot in people. We are told to stand up for ourselves, be forceful, almost run over people if need be to get ahead in the world. We also sometimes value leaders who are like that.

For Question 2, students may say that they are more willing to follow someone who is humble as opposed to someone who is not. Haughty leaders are the opposite of humble: self-centered, bossy, and aloof.

Question 3 answers would probably be that we like to see people who think they are above us brought down to "our level." They are likely people we don't respect either. They are the opposite of the humble King Jesus who rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

LESSON FOCUS: Rejoice! Our humble King has come.

2 Bible Learning

See the humble King Jesus as He entered Jerusalem.



Before teaching this step, put up the poster "Easter: Sacrifice and Salvation" from your Resource Kit. Also make

copies of the handout that goes with the poster. You will use these this week and for the next three weeks. Read the first two paragraphs and point out the painting of Jesus' triumphal entry to Jerusalem.

BIBLE EXTRA

The Triumphal Entry

All four Gospels record Jesus' triumphal entry in Jerusalem and complement each other in the details they provide. John alone relates Jesus' dinner with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus on the day before His ride into Jerusalem (John 12:1-9). Jesus' presence in Bethany attracted a crowd of Jews who remembered His earlier resurrection of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:38-44; 12:9).

As many from this crowd returned to Jerusalem for the night, they alerted others to the Lord's soon arrival in the city. As the news spread, a large crowd among those who had already arrived for the feast came out to greet Jesus and accompany Him into the city (John 12:12-13).

Luke alone records Jesus' weeping over the city of Jerusalem as He rode into the city. He knew that the adulation of the day would be short-lived; in less than a week they would turn into cries of "crucify Him."

Matthew and Luke record the cleansing of the temple that occurred right after the triumphal entry. "Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves" (Matt. 21:12).

PREPARATION FOR THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

Read Matthew 21:1-3 with students and discuss the following important ideas:

- All four Gospels record Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, but they do not reveal the names of the disciples that Jesus sent into Bethphage to obtain the donkey and her colt.
- The ride into the city began near Bethphage on the eastern side of the Mount of Olives, which was about a mile from the city.

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Preparation for the Triumphal Entry

Matthew 21:1-3, KJV

1 And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples,

2 Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me.

3 And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.

Matthew 21:1-3, NIV

¹As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples,²saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me.
³If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

Matthew's account of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem begins with the Lord sending two of His disciples into Bethphage to obtain both a donkey and her colt. Bethphage no longer exists. It appears to have been on the eastern side of the Mount of Olives (v. 1) about a mile from Jerusalem. Jesus started His day in Bethany (John 12:1, 9-12) and journeyed to the mount, which received its name because of its abundance of olive trees. Once the disciples returned with the donkey and her colt, Jesus began His triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

The Lord had avoided such open displays of His identity in the past, but now He would enter Jerusalem claiming to be the long-awaited Son of David, the prophesied King of a future kingdom for Israel. He had also previously avoided arrest, but within a week's time Jesus would allow the Jewish authorities to both apprehend Him and condemn Him to death.

Jesus displayed His humility through the response He told His disciples to give to those questioning the disciples taking the animals. It was a humble request rather than a



Further commentary on this Scripture passage can be found on pp. 62 in *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament*.

- In the past, Jesus had avoided such public displays of His identity, but He chose this time to present Himself to Israel as the long-awaited Messiah fully aware that the “Hosannas” would not last forever.

Suggested Answer to Question 4

Jesus told His disciples to go into the city and there they would find a donkey with her colt. He instructed them to untie the two animals and bring them to Him. If anyone asked about their action, they were to respond saying “that the Lord needs

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demand; He told them to simply say “that the Lord needs them.”

- *What instructions did Jesus give to the two disciples He sent into Bethphage?*

The Fulfillment of Prophecy

Matthew 21:4-7, KJV

4 All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying,

5 Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

6 And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them,

7 And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon.

With His ride into Jerusalem, Jesus fulfilled the words of Zechariah 9:9 that predicted Israel’s future “King,” the Messiah, would ride into Jerusalem on “the foal of a donkey” (vs. 5). “Zion” refers to a hill within Jerusalem that later became synonymous with the city itself. Jesus acted purposefully to fulfill this particular prophecy; the Jews of His day fully understood this referred to their promised Messiah.

Zechariah also wrote about the Messiah’s humility—that He would ride into Jerusalem on a colt, which indicated meekness as well as a sense of royalty. Jesus did not enter the city on a horse as a conquering general would do in the first century A.D., but rather in an unassuming manner

Matthew 21:4-7, NIV

⁴This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

⁵Say to Daughter Zion,
‘See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’ ”

⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them.
⁷They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on.

them” (vs. 3). The disciples trusted that the words of the Lord would suffice for what would appear to be a theft of the animals.

THE FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY

Now read Matthew 21:4-7 and discuss these key points:

- Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem fulfilled the words of Zechariah 9:9, a well-known prophecy among the Jews of the first century A.D.

- Jesus acted purposefully in fulfilling the words of the prophet, thus revealing Himself to Israel as their long-awaited King and Messiah.

- Jesus displayed humility by riding on the colt of a donkey; He did not enter the city on a horse as a conquering general or hero.

- The disciples promptly obeyed Jesus’ instructions without worrying about the appearance of theft in taking the animals.

Suggested Answer to Question 5

Jesus fulfilled the words of Zechariah 9:9 by riding into Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey. The ancient prophet predicted

BIBLE EXTRA

A Donkey and Her Colt

Matthew alone records the presence of two animals on this day, a donkey and her colt. Mark reveals the necessity for bringing along the donkey as no one had “ever ridden” on the colt before that day (Mark 11:2). The inclusion of the colt’s mother was most likely to keep it calm while Jesus sat upon it, which was a first for this colt.

Matthew’s Gospel account highlights for the Jewish people how Jesus fulfilled prophecy. By mentioning the presence of the donkey along with its colt, he emphasizes the fact that Jesus rode upon a colt on His triumphal ride into the city, just as the prophet Zechariah said He would do.

that Israel's Messiah would arrive in Zion in just such a way. Zechariah also foretold the gentleness of the Christ on this occasion. The Messiah would not roughly assert Himself, but meekly present Himself as the long-awaited King of

BIBLE EXTRA

Psalm 118

The words of the crowd during Jesus' triumphal entry in Jerusalem reflected their messianic hopes as they quoted Psalm 118:25-26. "Hosanna," which means "Lord, save us," comes from verse 25. The word in the Hebrew originally signified a cry for help but over time, it became an expression of praise.

Psalm 118:25 says, "LORD, save us! LORD, grant us success!" It's clear from the crowd's reference to this psalm that they were proclaiming Jesus as the promised King who would deliver them from Roman domination.

The next phrase the crowd said, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Matt. 21:9) comes directly from Psalm 118:26. In Jesus' lament over Jerusalem as recorded in Luke 13:34-35, Jesus also quotes from this verse in a way that many believe is a reference to Israel's future repentance at a still future time when they will again welcome the risen Savior with the words of Psalm 118:26 and He will, indeed, be their King.

BIBLE EXTRA

Garments

The custom of laying garments on the road to welcome a king dates back at least to the time of Jehu, an ancient king of Israel. Once the crowd recognized that Elisha had anointed him as the king of Israel, 2 Kings 9:13 says, "They quickly took their cloaks and spread them under him on the bare steps. Then they blew the trumpet and shouted, 'Jehu is king!'"

The people's response of laying down their garments on the road before Jesus and the colt displayed their belief that Jesus was their anointed King. This was an act reserved exclusively for royalty.

Israel humbly entering Zion on a donkey.

Suggested Answer to Question 6

The disciples displayed great confidence in Jesus by carrying out His request. They did not question Him, but promptly obeyed by going into Bethphage and taking the donkey and her colt. Although their actions might appear to onlookers as a theft of the animals, they trusted that Jesus' answer would satisfy anyone who questioned their otherwise suspicious behavior.

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

Now read Matthew 21:8-11 and note these important summaries of the Scripture:

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fitting for the Prince of Peace.

The prompt obedience of the two disciples showed their utmost confidence in the Lord. From Mark 11:5-6, we learn that onlookers who saw the disciples take the animals questioned them about their action, but did not raise further objections after the disciples repeated the Lord's response to them. Once back with Jesus, the disciples took off their loose outer garments and placed them on the colt as a saddle. Such action displayed the disciples' honor for their Master whom they already regarded as the Messiah, the long-awaited King of the Jews.

5. How did Jesus fulfill the words of Zechariah 9:9?

6. What does the fulfillment of Jesus' request by the disciples tell us about their faith in Jesus?

The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

Matthew 21:8-11, KJV

8 And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way.

9 And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

10 And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?

11 And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.

Matthew 21:8-11, NIV

⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

"Hosanna to the Son of David!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

¹⁰When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"

¹¹The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

- Jesus attracted many people the day before His triumphal entry with His presence in Bethany at the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha.
- With messianic hopes high among those who had seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead, many people came out from Jerusalem the next day to celebrate His arrival in the city.
- The crowd displayed their anticipation that Jesus was the Messiah with their words that came mostly from Psalm 118:25-26.
- Those already in Jerusalem wondered who was deserving of such a regal welcome into the city.

Suggested Answer to Question 7

The crowd that accompanied Jesus into

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The crowd coming out to see Jesus from Jerusalem added to those already with Jesus traveling from Galilee. Prompted by His earlier raising of Lazarus from the dead, many thronged to see the One they believed was their Messiah as such hopes had reached a fever pitch.

The people honored the Lord by laying their garments on the road for the donkeys to walk upon and by cutting off branches of nearby trees and placing them before the Savior as well. John alone mentions that the branches came from palm trees (John 12:13). This also signified their belief that Jesus was their long-awaited King and worthy of a royal entry into Jerusalem.

The large throng accompanying Jesus shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David," another indication of their messianic hopes. The phrase "Son of David" was synonymous with saying that Jesus was indeed the Christ, whom they expected would be a descendant of David. The words of the crowd came from Psalm 118:25-26, a psalm often sung during Passover celebrations.

Those in the city wondered about the One who arrived with such fanfare and adulation. They asked, "Who is this?" wondering who would be worthy of such a great honor (vs. 10). Though many had seen Jesus' miracles and heard Him teach, they still questioned His identity.

In spite of all the signs that verified Jesus' claim to be the Messiah, most of the Jews in Jerusalem at the time regarded Him as no more than a prophet. His being from Nazareth in Galilee disqualified Him from being anything more than that. Was this disparagement of Jesus by the masses in Jerusalem a sign of things to come by the end of the week?

7. Where did the large crowd come from that accompanied Jesus on His triumphant entry into Jerusalem?

8. How do we know that the crowd regarded Jesus as the Messiah?

9. How did the city of Jerusalem respond to Jesus' arrival?

Jerusalem during His triumphal entry came from those traveling with Jesus as well as those who came out from Jerusalem upon hearing that He was on His way to the city. Those coming out from Jerusalem had likely heard of Jesus' imminent arrival in the city from those who had been to Bethany earlier.

Suggested Answer to Question 8

Both the actions and the words of the crowd revealed that they regarded Jesus as their long-awaited Messiah. Their shouts of praise came from Psalm 118, one of many messianic psalms. The act of laying down branches and garments was an act done for royalty such as for their future King.

Suggested Answer to Question 9

The "whole city was stirred" by Jesus' arrival and wondered why such a commotion was occurring. They likely did not believe He was anything but a prophet rather than the long-awaited Messiah.

BIBLE EXTRA

Absalom's Ride on a Donkey

While Jesus' ride into Jerusalem on a donkey displayed humility, it was also a way of claiming His right to the throne of David as it was a sign of royalty in Israel.

Absalom, the rebellious son of King David, chose to ride on a mule, the typical mount for royalty (2 Sam. 13:29), as a way to show the people of Israel his importance and display his right to the crown. However, for him it was an act of great pride, and the day did not end well for him.

As Absalom's army attacked those loyal to his father David, he chose to ride into the battle on a mule signifying his claim to the throne of Israel. When the battle turned against Absalom and his forces, however, he was not able to flee as fast as he would have had he chosen to ride a horse. Instead, his hair became entangled in a tree and he became an easy target for Joab to kill him (2 Sam. 18:1-15).

3 Bible Application

Photocopy this page and give the instructions to each group. Make copies of the handout from the Resource Kit to give to the group using it.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Discussion Group

Read “Humility Is the Fear of the Lord” and answer **Questions 10, 11, and 12**. Humble leaders are focused on the progress of the people. Wisdom and an abundant life are God’s reward for humility. They are far greater rewards than what the world gives, especially in the long run. God understands that those who humbly serve Him are modeling their lives after His Son, who showed us what a humble servant should be like.

A Great Leader

Discuss great leaders you have seen in the past or follow in the present. On a board or sheet of newsprint, make a list of the characteristics of those leaders. What characteristics are the similar for everyone?

Quote Discussion

Discuss what Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), a famous American preacher, had to say about humility. Does it describe you or people you know? “Spiritual pride is very apt to suspect others, but a humble saint is most jealous of himself. He is as suspicious of nothing in the world as he is of his own heart. The spiritually proud person is apt to find fault with other saints. . . and to be quick to notice their deficiencies. But the eminently humble Christian has so much to do at home, and sees so much evil in his own heart, and is so concerned about it, that he is not apt to be very busy with other hearts. . . . Nothing sets a Christian so much out of the devil’s reach than humility.”

Understand that humility is what Jesus wants us to have.



Handout:

‘Humility: A Symbol of Honor’

Follow the instructions on the sheet and share your answers with the class.

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Humility Is the Fear of the Lord

Humble leadership paves the way for thriving companies, churches, businesses, families, countries, and governments. Joyce Banda, the former president of the south African country of Malawi (2012–2014), boosted her country’s falling economy by selling the presidential jet and the fleet of 60 Mercedes limousines. As a result, one million people were fed. This humble leader believes in sacrifice. She requested that her salary be cut by 30% because of the near-collapsing national economy. She said she wanted “to show we are making sacrifices.”

On leadership she has said, “I learned that leadership is about falling in love with the people and the people falling in love with you.” She goes on to say, “It’s about serving the people with selflessness, with sacrifice, and with the need to put the common good ahead of personal interests.”

Solomon began his reign as an outstanding symbol of a humble leader. He loved God, and when he became king, God asked him a question in a dream. It was a profound question: “Ask for whatever you want me to give you” (1 Kings 3:5). What an amazing request from God, and what a response from Solomon! He could have asked for thousands of acres of land, many cattle, multiple servants, and enormous wealth. However, in humility, Solomon basically said he was not qualified for the job of governing God’s great people. So, he asked the Lord for wisdom to do the job. God granted his request—and, in addition to wisdom, gave him tremendous wealth and honor as well.

As Scripture says, “Humility is the fear of the LORD; its wages are riches and honor and life” (Prov. 22:4).

10. Why is humility especially important in leadership?

11. Why would God reward humility?

12. How does Proverbs 22:4 help us understand humility?

4 Life Response

"When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn" (Prov. 29:2, KJV).

Thank God that He sent His Son Jesus as our Lord and King. We understand that we are under the lordship of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus has paid the price for us, and we should be rejoicing because we serve a humble King, not one who berates His servants. Every day we should rejoice because He has won the victory!

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Serve Your Humble King

God has given us victory; we rejoice because we have won through King Jesus! That does not mean, however, that in our rejoicing we look down on others or think we are in some way more special. Jesus showed us what it means to be humble, and we follow Him by sharing with others the joy we have in serving Him.

► *Rejoice today and celebrate the humble King who came to save us. One way to rejoice is share the Good News about Him with others who need to hear it for the first time or be reminded about it. You may also celebrate by writing here a praise song to Jesus like the Jewish people sang or later share a praise song you know with someone who needs encouragement.*

KEY VERSE

Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King comes unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

—Matthew 21:5, KJV

"Say to Daughter Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.' "

—Matthew 21:5, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of April 4 through April 10

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon. Psalm 116:1-15—God Is Gracious and Righteous.
- Tue. Deuteronomy 16:1-8, 15-17—Celebrate Where God Chooses.
- Wed. Matthew 26:1-2, 6-16—Jesus Anointed.
- Thu. 1 Corinthians 11:23-26—Do This In Remembrance.
- Fri. John 13:31-35—Disciples Love One Another.
- Sat. Psalm 118:1-9—God's Care Endures Forever.
- Sun. Matthew 26:17-30—Jesus Shares Passover.

Rejoice that we serve a humble King.

Ask students to read "Serve Your Humble King" in their student books, and do the activity there. They may want to make a list of those who need to hear the Good News—for example, someone who has lost hope because of a tragedy or someone who just needs a reminder that the gentle King cares for them.

End the lesson with a prayer, praising God for sending us our humble and gentle King Jesus!



As the class members are leaving, hand out copies of this week's *Power for Living*. Take or mail copies of *Lesson Leaflet* to those who couldn't be with you today, or send them to those you would like to join your class.

Before Teaching Next Week's Lesson

Before next week, read Matthew 26:17-30. Ask your students to think about what it means to be loyal to someone.



Lesson Overview

Week of April 10

1 Life Need:

Discuss how sacrifice is often part of loyalty.

2 Bible Learning:

Walk through the Last Supper and betrayal of Jesus.

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit*: Poster and reproducible handout—Easter: Sacrifice and Salvation

3 Bible Application:

Understand how hard it can be to remain loyal to Jesus.

Suggested Material:

■ Sheet of newsprint, colored markers

4 Life Response:

Examine your heart and choose to remain loyal to Him.

Suggested Material:

■ A hymn about Jesus' sacrifice such as 'Beneath the Cross of Jesus'

Church/Home Theme: Our God's Love Heals

Lesson Focus:

Examine your heart and choose loyalty to our sacrificial Lamb.

Lesson Scripture:

Matthew 26:17-30

The Passover with the Disciples

Passover Commemorated—This occasion marks the time when the Hebrew children prepared to leave Egypt. Each family placed lamb's blood over their doorpost to signal the death angel to "pass over" their home. God instructed His children to remember this great deliverance each year with a feast, a time of praise to the Lord and a meal of bread, wine, bitter herbs, and lamb to symbolize what they had gone through in their bondage.

The Betrayer—As Jesus and His disciples ate their Passover meal together, He revealed some shocking news: one of them was a traitor. Only Jesus knew about Judas and his evil intentions. Several began to ask, "Is it me?" Judas sat on the left side of the Lord in the place of honor at the feast. It was also an honor to be given a piece of bread by your host, a special act of hospitality. Judas received the bread as Jesus handed it over—this seemingly insignificant act fulfilled prophecy (Ps. 41:9). With Satan guiding his steps, Judas left to tell the religious leaders where to find Jesus.

The Lord's Supper—After Judas departed, Jesus took some of the unleavened bread and a cup of wine and explained that the broken bread now represented His soon to be broken body, given for the world's sins. The wine represented His blood, about to be spilled for those same sins. Through Jesus, God was making a new covenant with people. Jesus' death and resurrection opened the door to humanity's forgiveness and cleansing from sin. No more barriers between God and man.

Time to Remember—Each time Christians receive Communion, it's a time to ask the Lord to look deeply into our hearts. It's a time to remember Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross, to remind us of our commitment to Him and His kingdom as we serve Him here on earth.

As Your Students Arrive

Ask students as they enter class what it means to be loyal to someone. They may say a loyal person does not betray a friend, say bad things about him or her, or leave that person in time of trouble. The question today is, "How loyal are you to Jesus? Are you beside Him no matter what happens?"

Link to Last Week

Some of your students may want to share about how they celebrated the humble King Jesus this past week.

1 Life Need

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The Passover with the Disciples

Lachelle's gaze fixated on the front of the church. That's right, it was the first Sunday. She felt a little twinge go down her back.

Lachelle had tried to ignore it. But it had been there—an elephant in her spiritual house, so to speak. She had worked, played, and prayed around it. She had tried to rationalize, camouflage, and disengage.

Amir was a wonderful black man. He was well-off, civically responsible, philanthropic, and religious. He was also a Muslim who said he was not tied to the dogma of the religion and did not mind if she was a Christian. Amir believed Jesus was a good man, but not the Son of God—or in his words, "God has no offspring."

Amir was talking about engagement. Many of Lachelle's family members and non-Christian friends told her to grab hold with both hands! Would it be denying Christ to marry Amir? Perhaps she could win him to Christ? At 33, was she in love with Amir, or with the prospect of a wonderful life he could provide?

The children's choir was singing, and the chorus of their song, "You can have this whole world, but give me Jesus," broke in on her thoughts. She looked again at the front of the church, where the Communion table was draped in white sheets.

"I've been so wrong, Lord," she prayed. "Forgive me, and help me stay close to You."

1. How is sacrifice often a part of being loyal to someone?

2. When has the sacrifice Jesus made been most real to you?

3. In what situations might you not remain loyal to Jesus?

LESSON FOCUS: Examine your heart and choose loyalty to our sacrificial Lamb.

Discuss how sacrifice is often part of loyalty.

Jesus, the Son of God, left the comforts of glory to become the sacrificial Lamb, the only one worthy and able to complete the most important task in the world—the task of bringing the creation back to the Creator. Sadly, He was denied and betrayed by those closest to Him when He needed them most.

Read the story, then ask your students to form small groups to discuss **Questions 1, 2, and 3.**

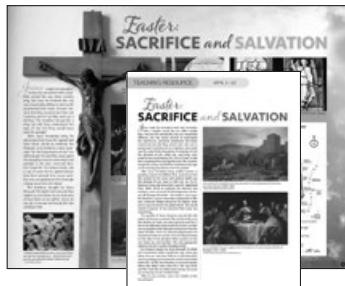
Question 1 reminds students that remaining loyal to someone often means sacrificing something important to ourselves. For example, if remaining loyal to a close friend would mean losing other friends, or being laughed at yourself, would you remain loyal?

Question 2 encourages students to think about times when they have thought seriously about Jesus' sacrifice for us. Perhaps that was during a salvation experience, or maybe it's each time they celebrate Communion, or whenever they read about or see a film depiction of His crucifixion.

Question 3 pushes students to examine their hearts to think of times they might abandon Jesus—if it would cost them close friends, make them change behaviors they want to keep, or if they were threatened with jail for being loyal to Him, which happens in many countries.

2 Bible Learning

Walk through the Last Supper and betrayal of Jesus.



On the hand-out sheet, read the third paragraph, and on the poster note the painting of Jesus and His disciples at the

Last Supper and the photo of the unleavened bread similar to what they would have eaten that evening.

BIBLE EXTRA

The Two Feasts

The combined feasts of the Passover and Unleavened Bread were the highlight of the year for the Jewish people in Jesus' day. Commentators estimate that as many as 2,000,000 people celebrated the combined feasts in the city of Jerusalem each year. The Passover began the eight-day festival, which was immediately followed by the seven days of Unleavened Bread.

The Passover looked back to the night before the Jewish people left their homes in Egypt on their way to the promised land. During the first observance of the Passover, the people put the blood of sacrificial lambs on the doorposts and above the door and when the angel of death saw the blood, he passed over that home (Exod. 12:1-32).

Jesus fulfilled the Passover as the perfect Lamb of God who paid the debt for our sins with the blood He shed as He died upon the cross. Because the Jewish days began at sunset, Jesus' death on the cross occurred the same day as He ate the Passover meal with His disciples.

Because of the close connection between the feasts, the Jews of that day often used the names interchangeably. We see this in Matthew 26:17 where "the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread" is the Passover celebration.

JESUS SENDS TWO DISCIPLES TO PREPARE THE PASSOVER

Read Matthew 26:17-19 with students and review the following key ideas:

- We know from Luke 22:8 that Jesus sent Peter and John into Jerusalem to prepare the Passover meal for Him and the other disciples.
- The preparations included taking their lamb to the temple for a priest to offer it as a burnt sacrifice and cook it.

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Jesus Sends Two Disciples to Prepare the Passover

Matthew 26:17-19, KJV

17 Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?

18 And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.

19 And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover.

Matthew 26:17-19, NIV

¹⁷On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"

¹⁸He replied, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.'" ¹⁹So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.

While Matthew speaks of the disciples in general terms, Luke specifies that Jesus sent Peter and John into Jerusalem to make preparations for the Passover meal (22:8). The two would take the Passover lamb to the temple, where the priests sacrificed it as a burnt offering, and then cooked it ahead of the gathering.

Jesus did not reveal the location in His directives, but rather gave them instructions as to how to find the place. Why the secrecy regarding the location of the Passover meal? Matthew 26:14-16 likely provides the answer: Judas had already agreed with the chief priests to betray Jesus.

Although Jesus knew His "appointed time" to die upon the Cross was "near" (vs. 18), He did not want His evening interrupted by His arrest. Only John and Peter would know the location until much later in the day.

The man the Lord led them to in the city may have been someone familiar with Jesus and the disciples as he



Further commentary on this Scripture passage can be found on pp. 77-78 in *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament*.

- The secrecy regarding the location of the Passover meal ensured that Judas would not reveal the location to the chief priests before the start of the celebration, which would have resulted in Jesus' arrest before He could spend the evening with His disciples eating the Passover meal.

Suggested Answer to Question 4

Jesus did not tell the two disciples the location of the Passover meal, but revealed that once in the city they should contact a certain man and tell him that the "Teacher" and His disciples would

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readily agreed with the request. Some suggest that the upper room was at the home of the father of John Mark, but we cannot know this for certain.

4. What instructions did Jesus give Peter and John regarding the location of the Passover feast later that night?

5. What was the benefit of keeping the place of preparation a secret until later in the day?

Jesus Identifies Judas as His Betrayer

Matthew 26:20-25, KJV

20 Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve.

21 And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.

22 And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?

23 And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me.

24 The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.

25 Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.

Matthew 26:20-25, NIV

²⁰When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. ²¹And while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me."

²²They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?"

²³Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. ²⁴The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."

²⁵Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?"

Jesus answered, "You have said so."

"celebrate the Passover" at his house (v. 18). We learn from Luke 22:10 that the man would be carrying a pitcher of water. Peter and John went into the city trusting the Lord to bring this "certain man" to them, whom they possibly already knew and would recognize once in Jerusalem.

Suggested Answer to Question 5

In giving instructions to Peter and John, presumably in the presence of the other disciples, Jesus kept the location

BIBLE EXTRA

Reclining at the Table

The famous painting by Leonardo da Vinci of Jesus and His disciples sitting on chairs all facing one direction does not fit with the customs of the first century A.D. in Israel. The entire group would have reclined on cushions in a U-shaped pattern around the table. They would have laid on their sides with one arm and hand supporting their head.

John was one of those closest to Jesus as he was able to lean back against Him and ask the identity of the betrayer (John 13:22-25). Judas was likely close to the Savior as well as the others did not make the connection between his leaving the meal and Jesus' identification of him (Matt. 26:25; John 13:28-30).

BIBLE EXTRA

No Excuse

The essence of Jesus' words in Matthew 26:24 was that although His betrayal and sacrifice were matters of prophecy, that offered no justification for those acting to make it happen. The necessity of His redemptive shedding of His blood on the Cross provided no excuse for Judas's treacherous act of betrayal. Jesus said it would have been better if he had never existed than pay the penalty for his betrayal in everlasting torment in hell.

of the meal and the identity of the man a secret. The benefit of these secret arrangements kept Judas Iscariot from discovering the location of the Passover meal until it was too late for him to inform the chief priests. Jesus knew that Judas had already agreed to betray Him (Matt. 26:14-16), but did not want His Passover celebration with His disciples cut short by His arrest.

JESUS IDENTIFIES JUDAS AS HIS BETRAYER

Next, read Matthew 26:20-25 and note these key points in your discussion with your students:

- Since the Jewish day began at sunset, Jesus ate the Passover meal with His disciples on the same day as He became the sacrificial Lamb that the feast symbolized.
- The identification of Judas as the betrayer likely came near the end of the Passover meal. John reveals that it also

BIBLE EXTRA

My Father's Kingdom

After drinking from the cup Jesus said, "I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (vs. 29). What did He mean with that statement?

During first century marriage betrothals in Galilee, of which all the disciples would be familiar, the groom made a similar statement after drinking from the cup that finalized the wedding covenant with his bride. He stated that he would not drink any wine until all the wedding preparations were complete and he and his bride were celebrating at their wedding feast.

During the night before His crucifixion, Jesus thus assured His disciples of a future time when He and His Bride, the Church, would again celebrate together in the "Father's kingdom." Although saddened by the prospect of His departure, Jesus' reference to a future celebration in His Father's kingdom assured them of a future time of celebration with Him.

followed Jesus' act of washing the feet of the disciples (John 13:3-21).

- The disciples felt considerable sorrow as they reflected that one of them would betray their Master. Their response indicates that they did not suspect Judas, but rather asked, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?" (vs. 22).

Suggested Answer to Question 6

When Jesus revealed that one of the Twelve would betray Him, they each asked if they were the one.

Suggested Answer to Question 7

Just like the other disciples, Judas had watched

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Jesus' startling statement regarding His betrayal came later in the evening, after Jesus washed the feet of the disciples (John 13:3-21). He waited until after the main course of the meal to make His alarming announcement.

The deep sorrow of the disciples came from the fact that the betrayer was one of them. One by one, with sadness in their voice, they asked, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?" (v. 22). In the Middle Eastern culture, the act of eating a meal together signified a close bond of friendship. Sharing the Passover meal with Jesus before betraying Him made the treachery of Judas's act even greater.

Jesus' response in verse 23 did not help identify the villain as all of the disciples dipped their hands in the bowl. His answer confirmed, however, the enormity of the offence of the one who sat at the table with them, which He highlighted with these memorable words, "It would be better for him if he had not been born" (vs. 24). Finally, Judas spoke up and received confirmation from Jesus that He knew his identity.

6. What did the disciples do after Jesus said one of them would betray Him?

7. What made Judas's betrayal so reprehensible?

Remembering Jesus' Sacrifice for Us

Matthew 26:26-30, KJV

26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.

27 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;
28 For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

Matthew 26:26-30, NIV

²⁶While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

²⁷Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you.

²⁸This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out

Jesus performed many miracles, heard Him teach, and spent much time with Him. In the culture of Jesus' day, partaking of a meal together signified a close bond of friendship and loyalty; betraying Jesus after eating the Passover meal with Him would have been utterly reprehensible. It still seems unimaginable that someone so close to the Savior for so long could betray Him in such a treacherous way.

REMEMBERING JESUS' SACRIFICE FOR US

Read Matthew 26:26-30, and point out these important ideas in the Scripture:

- Now, Jesus instituted what we know today as the Lord's Supper.

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²⁹ But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

³⁰ And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

³⁰When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

After Judas departed, Jesus added something new to the Passover feast; He instituted what has come to be known as the Lord's Supper. All four Gospels record this, with Paul providing further instruction regarding it in 1 Corinthians 11:17-32. The taking of the bread and wine symbolizes Jesus' death on the Cross for us and its continued practice in the Church reminds us of His ultimate sacrifice on our behalf.

Jesus connected the shedding of His blood with our "forgiveness of sins." Even though the disciples likely did not understand its full significance of this at the time, this message would become central to the Gospel message they would later proclaim to the world. It's Jesus blood that covers our sins making eternal life possible for all who believe.

The evening in the Upper Room ended with Jesus and His

disciples singing a "hymn" (vs. 30). As was the custom at the end of the Passover feast, those gathered together would sing Psalms 115-118.

8. What's the significance of partaking in the bread and the cup as Jesus instructed in these verses?



This 6th century Rossano Gospels illustration shows the disciples reclining at the table for the Last Supper.

- Matthew, Mark, and Luke record what happened during the meal itself, and the apostle Paul gives more details in 1 Corinthians 11:17-32.

- The shedding of Jesus' blood on the Cross was necessary for God to forgive the sins of those who believe in Him.

- At the end of the supper, Jesus and the disciples sang a hymn before going out to the Mount of Olives and the garden of Gethsemane.

Suggested Answer to Question 8

As we partake of the bread and wine, we remember His death on the Cross, His sacrifice so that we might receive forgiveness of our sins and eternal life. For the Jews, the Passover meal commemorated the escape from bondage in Egypt. The Lord's Supper is our way of looking back to the Cross and realizing the common bond we share with other believers because of the Cross.

WINDOW ON THE WORD

The Passover Lamb

It was during the holy festivities of the Passover when Jesus performed what is now called the Last Supper. The Passover is a holiday remembering the liberation of the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery. It's a time when families eat together a special meal that includes unleavened bread, wine, and other foods. It's a seven day festival of rejoicing and celebrating. Another part of the celebration is rejoicing because the plague of the death of the firstborn "passed over" their homes because the blood of sacrificial lambs was placed over the doorposts as instructed by God. Jesus is our sacrificial lamb and because of His shed blood, the plagues of sin can "pass over" the lives of believers.

3 Bible Application

Photocopy this page and give instructions to each group. Give the sheet of newsprint and markers to the group drawing a heart.

Understand how hard it can be to remain loyal to Jesus.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Discussion Group

Read "Corrine's Loyalty Returns" and answer **Questions 9, 10, and 11.** We all have times when our loyalty to Jesus is tested. Temptations to be less than loyal to Him are all around us, and expanding every day. We may decide to give Him only lip service one day a week while doing other, sinful things the rest of the week. However, when we remember all that Jesus sacrificed for us, we can see that choosing to remain loyal to Him is what we need to do.

A Loyal Heart

On the sheet of newsprint, draw a large heart. In the heart, list things such as Scriptures, words, and phrases that would help us remain loyal to Jesus, our sacrificial Lamb. For example, you might write a phrase such as, "He gave His life for me—what will I do for Him?"

Close or Far Away

On a board or a sheet of newsprint, list in one column some things that draw us closer to Jesus, and in another column some things that tend to separate us from Him. Examine these and prayerfully decide how close your heart is to Jesus at the moment. You do not have to share your thoughts out loud, but pray as a group for the Holy Spirit to draw you closer to Him this week.

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Corrine's Loyalty Returns

Corrine, a recovering addict, was nervous about attending church with her grandparents. She did not know how everyone was going to accept her. It had been over eight years since she had been in church. She was once the choir president and director. She grew the choir from 15 members to 75 in a few months. She loved God and wanted the world to know. Corrine had most of her college classmates in church. It was glorious—until things changed.

Corrine had fallen in love with a young man who did not want to have anything to do with church, no matter how hard she tried to convince him otherwise. Dominique was loyal to the streets, and he wanted Corrine on his turf. Before she knew it, Corrine had stopped attending college and church and was on drugs. Her loyalty to Dominique had put her heart out of alignment with her first love—Jesus!

Everyone who knew Corrine tried and tried to bring her back to God and the church, but even after she decided that Dominique was no good for her and she needed to come back, she was too embarrassed and full of guilt to return. It was her son, who was now seven years old and living with her grandparents because she couldn't take care of him, who said he wanted her to attend church with them. His little eyes were filled with tears.

"I know you never stopped loving God," he said one day while hugging her. It was at that time she examined her wayward heart and chose Jesus again. That day she entered the church with her grandparents and son. The people—and her Lord—received her with joy.

9. Has your loyalty to Jesus wavered? If so, why did it happen?

10. What brought you back to Him?

11. How can remembering His sacrifice help you remain loyal to Him?

4 Life Response

The heart has a voice; sometimes it speaks softly and sometimes it speaks loudly. It speaks whatever is in it, whatever it is full of. If there is good, it speaks good. If there is evil, it will speak evil. With this in mind the heart needs to be examined often toward our God. Luke 6:45 says it well: "A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of."

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'In Remembrance of Me'

Jesus gave the ultimate sacrifice for us, and He asks us to give our all to Him. We must remember that when times get tough and our loyalty to Him might waver. Especially when we have Communion, we need to examine our hearts and renew our undying loyalty to Him.

► *If your congregation is celebrating Communion this week, it's a great time to examine your heart and your loyalty to the Lord. But anytime is the right time to examine our hearts and our loyalty to Him. You may write here a current situation where your loyalty is being tested, then pray that your heart remains with Him.*

KEY VERSE

But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.
—Matthew 26:29, KJV

"I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."
—Matthew 26:29, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of April 11 through April 17

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon. John 1:29-36—John Proclaims the Lamb of God.
- Tue. Matthew 26:36-46—Jesus Prays in Gethsemane.
- Wed. Matthew 26:47-56—Jesus Is Arrested.
- Thu. Matthew 27:35-43, 45-50—Jesus Is Crucified.
- Fri. Psalm 22:1-9, 14-19—Why Have You Forsaken Me?
- Sat. Psalm 118:14-17, 19-29—God Is My Salvation.
- Sun. Matthew 28:1-10—Jesus Is Risen!

Examine your heart and choose to remain loyal to Him.

Ask students to read, "In Remembrance of Me" in their student books. You may have Communion this week because it's the week before Easter. That is a perfect time to examine your heart. However, they can certainly list other situations where their heart is being tested for its loyalty to Jesus. Thinking of Jesus' sacrifice for us on the Cross at any time will help us remember what He did for us and strengthen our faith and loyalty to Him.

You may want to end the lesson with a time of reflection on Jesus' sacrifice by singing a hymn about that such as "Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed," "Beneath the Cross of Jesus," or "I Gave My Life for Thee."

You may also choose to end with a closing prayer of praise, thanking God for the perfect plan of salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God.



As the class members are leaving, hand out copies of this week's *Power for Living*. Take or mail copies of *Lesson Leaflet* to those who couldn't be with you today, or send them to those you would like to join your class.

Before Teaching Next Week's Lesson

Before teaching next week, read Matthew 28:1-10. Ask your students to think about things that cause people to be afraid.



The Paschal Lamb Lives!

Lesson Overview

Week of April 17

1 Life Need:

Note what is required to make someone who is spiritually dead come alive.

2 Bible Learning:

Learn how three women responded to Jesus' empty tomb.

Suggested Material:

■ Adult Teacher's Resource Kit: Poster and reproducible handout—Easter: Sacrifice and Salvation

3 Bible Application:

Discuss some ways we ought to respond to Jesus' empty tomb.

Suggested Material:

■ Several sheets of newsprint, markers, tape

4 Life Response:

Decide how to respond to Jesus' empty tomb.

Suggested Material:

■ Index cards, pens or pencils

Church/Home Theme: Our God's Love Heals

Lesson Focus:

Fear nothing! God has defeated death!

Lesson Scripture:

Matthew 28:1-10

Jesus Is No Longer Dead!—The Sabbath stopped Jesus' disciples from properly finishing the preparation of His body for burial. As soon as the Sabbath ended, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joses headed to the tomb. They felt the need to finish anointing the body. Jesus had repeatedly spoken of His resurrection. But the women still expected to find Jesus' dead body. How could He possibly be alive?

Before the women's arrival, there had been an earthquake and an angel rolling the stone from the tomb. The Roman soldiers guarding Jesus' tomb trembled with fear and fainted. They suffered an immediate death if they lost a prisoner. Once the gigantic boulder was gone, the angel invited the women into the tomb to see for themselves—He's gone!

Go Tell of Jesus' Resurrection—The angel further commissioned them to tell the disciples the good news and tell them to go to Galilee. Jesus would meet them there. The women wasted no time questioning the angel or arguing—they ran to tell the others.

Jesus Appears—The two Marys made haste to report the good news to the disciples. But before they had left the area, they encountered Jesus. Matthew, the author of this account, used two words to describe their emotions: fear and joy. They fell down at His feet in worship. He repeated the angel's directives to meet Him in Galilee.

Death Is Conquered!—One of the greatest human fears is death. But Jesus conquered death, so God's children will be victorious over the grave as well: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Cor. 15:55, KJV). The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a shout of victory! The shout started early that first Sunday morning when He rose from the dead and continues to this day. No follower of Jesus has anything to dread, especially on the day of their death. Jesus overcame the grave, thanks to His resurrection. He walked away from the tomb. And because He walked away, God's children will do the same on the day of their death! It's not death—it's a passing over into a glorious eternity!

As Your Students Arrive

Ask students to share some things that people fear. Their answers may include fear of an accident that could cause personal injury or material loss, fear of economic insecurity, fear of broken or irreparable relationships, and fear of death and the things that may precede or follow it. Then ask what helps people to overcome these types of fears. Their answers may include

confidence that they have the wherewithal to get through a difficulty, that God will sustain them in tough times, or that their faith in Him will result in a secure and better future.

Link to Last Week

Let some of your students volunteer to share something more they learned this past week about their loyalty to Jesus.

1 Life Need

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The Paschal Lamb Lives!

Sterling looked up from his cell phone and set it aside. What he heard in the voice of his 10-year-old son, Larice, was anger, but mostly fear.

"How do we know for sure that God will answer our prayers?" Larice asked.

Sterling had prostate cancer. But they had found it early, and the doctors were confident that he would make a full recovery. Larice had heard Sterling and his wife, Elesha, praying for healing from prostate cancer. Larice, or "Shadow" as his family called him, was a good kid who was fiercely loyal and loved his dad. They called Larice "Shadow," because he was always up under or close behind Sterling.

"Come here, son," Sterling said, and Larice came closer.

Sterling talked again about the wonderful, great and powerful God that they served. He spoke of the insurmountable love of the Father and the unerring obedience and agonizing death of Christ.

"Because of the Cross, death has been defeated," said Sterling. "Because of Christ's sacrifice, we can have salvation and live forever—even after we die. For those who trust Christ, we only fall asleep."

"I'm going to be fine son, the doctors caught the cancer in time for treatment," Sterling continued. "But I'm not afraid of death, because God has defeated hell and the grave. And one day, I will see Jesus face to face."

1. What are some characteristics of someone who is spiritually dead?

2. What are some characteristics of someone who is spiritually alive?

3. What is required to make someone who is spiritually dead come alive?

Note what is required to make someone who is spiritually dead come alive.

Read the opening story, then have the class form small groups to discuss their answers to **Questions 1, 2, and 3**.

For Question 1, the characteristics of someone who is spiritually dead may include having no desire to learn about God and what He says is right; consistently exhibiting behavior that is immoral or ungodly; being addicted to drugs, pornography, or other self-focused or self-destructive activities; being consumed by greed, corruption, contentiousness, or hatred; believing that one has no eternal destination or that this life is the only one that matters.

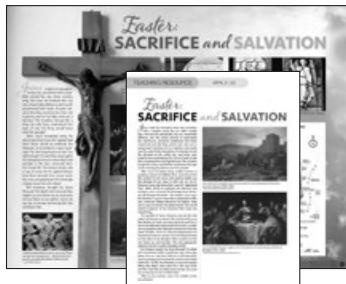
Regarding Question 2, a person who is spiritually alive exhibits some if not all aspects of the fruit of the Spirit; they generally have a desire to be in God's Word so that they can understand His will and do what is right in His eyes; they reflect a confidence that their eternal destination is secure and that they will have a place in it with Jesus.

Question 3 answers involve being resurrected from spiritual death. This was accomplished when Jesus died and then rose from the dead. We must put our faith in Jesus, however. When a person does this, it results in that person receiving the Holy Spirit, which in turn makes him or her spiritually alive.

LESSON FOCUS: Fear nothing! God has defeated death!

2 Bible Learning

Learn how three women responded to Jesus' empty tomb.



The three women who found Jesus' tomb empty that first Easter morning initially responded with fear. But when they finally understood the implication of what they'd witnessed, they rejoiced. They also couldn't wait to tell others about what they'd seen and heard.

BIBLE EXTRA

The Sabbath

Mark noted that the three women bought spices "when the Sabbath was over" and then left for the tomb at sunrise on the first day of the week (Mark 16:1-2). Since the Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday and ends at sundown on Saturday, it's likely that the women bought the spices Saturday evening shortly after sunset.

BIBLE EXTRA

An Empty Tomb and Changed Lives

Life would never be the same for the women who visited Jesus' tomb that first Easter morning. What these women saw with their eyes and heard with their ears changed their lives. Jesus was alive and was once again dwelling among them. And that was good news—news worth sharing with Jesus' disciples as well as with others, including those in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and eventually, the entire world.

We are called to do the same: to see, to hear, to believe, to rejoice, and to share. For what happened that morning is the greatest news one could ever receive—we can become spiritually alive now, be resurrected from the dead, and spend eternity with God.

The three women who found Jesus' tomb empty that first Easter morning initially responded with fear. But

On the poster, read the fifth paragraph and note the stained glass portrait of the women meeting the angel at the empty tomb.

AN EMPTY TOMB

Read Matthew 28:1-4 and highlight these points:

- When Mary Magdalene and two other women went to Jesus' tomb, they didn't know who was going to roll away the stone so they could anoint Jesus' body.

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An Empty Tomb

Matthew 28:1-4 KJV

1 In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.

2 And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

3 His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

4 And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

Matthew 28:1-4, NIV

¹After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

²There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

Mary Magdalene and the "other Mary" (whom Mark noted was the mother of James, as well as another woman Mark identified as Salome, Mark 16:1-3) arrived at Jesus' tomb early in the morning the day after the Sabbath that followed Jesus' crucifixion. Matthew says nothing more than that they wanted to "look at the tomb" (vs. 1), but other Gospel writers revealed that the women hoped to anoint Jesus' body (see Mark 16:1). This was a customary practice to mask the odor brought on by decay. It was also an act of devotion. So, the evening before, the women had bought spices to anoint Jesus' body.

While they made their way to His tomb the next morning, the Gospel of Mark says they wondered who was going to roll away the stone so that they could enter Jesus' tomb and complete His preparation for burial (Mark 16:3). God took care of this problem for them. Matthew noted that following a violent earthquake (a representation of



Further commentary on this Scripture passage can be found on pp. 84-86 in *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament*.

- God took care of this problem for them. An angel rolled the stone away.
- When the three women arrived at the tomb, they saw the angel sitting on the stone.
- The angel was clothed in white and appeared like lightning.
- The ones guarding Jesus' tomb responded to what happened like dead men. They were in a state of emotional and physical shock.

Suggested Answer to Question 4

The women expected to find the tomb secured

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the power of God) that an angel from heaven rolled the stone away. The angel did not remove the stone to enable Jesus to leave the tomb; rather, he did it to permit others to enter the sepulcher and see for themselves that Jesus' body was gone. When the women arrived at the tomb, they saw that the stone had already been removed. They also saw "an angel of the Lord" (vs. 2) dressed in clothes "white as snow" (vs. 3) sitting on it.

The guards reacted to what they witnessed with fear. The actual Greek word translated "fear" in the KJV suggests that the guards reacted with deep dread when they saw the stone being rolled away by a divine being. They were in a state of terror; their whole bodies shook, not unlike someone in seizures. They were in a state of emotional and physical shock and looked like they were dead.

4. What did the women who went to Jesus' tomb expect to find?

5. What did they actually discover?

6. How did the guards respond to what they witnessed?

An Urgent Message

Matthew 28:5-7, KJV

5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.

6 He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

7 And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

Matthew 28:5-7, NIV

5 The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 'He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

and that they'd have to find someone to roll the stone away. They also expected to find Jesus' body laying inside of it.

Suggested Answer to Question 5

What the women found when they approached Jesus tomb was that the stone had already been rolled away. They also saw someone in white with the appearance of lightning sitting on it.

Suggested Answer to Question 6

They undoubtedly believed that the mysterious stranger who rolled away the stone was divine. They shook with terror at this realization; they looked like dead men; they were in a state of emotional and physical shock.

AN URGENT MESSAGE

Read Matthew 28:5-7, then note these key points in the text:

- The women responded with fear to the appearance of the angel on the stone. The angel told them that they had nothing to fear, however, as Jesus had risen from the dead.
- The angel reminded them of Jesus' earlier promise that three days after He

BIBLE EXTRA

Phobos

Phobos is the Greek word used to describe the fear the guards and the women expressed in response to what they witnessed that first Easter morning. This word is typically used to describe someone who is in a state of terror. It is not a sense of anxiety but instead is intense dread of what may come as the result of what one is seeing or experiencing. The guards may have dreaded what would happen to them since they had failed in their duty to keep the tomb secured. The women's fear was most likely due to the appearance of this spectacular being whose intent and purpose for being there was initially unknown.

was crucified He would rise from the dead.

- The angel told the women to see for themselves that the tomb was indeed empty. He then told them to tell Jesus' disciples what they'd seen and heard.
- They were also to tell Jesus' disciples that He was going on ahead to Galilee and that it was there that they would find their risen Lord.

Suggested Answer to Question 7

The women's reaction was similar to how the guards responded. What they encountered was not only unexpected and unsettling; it was terrifying. They responded with fear not knowing what they were seeing.

Suggested Answer to Question 8

He told them that there was nothing to fear; he acknowledged their desire to find Jesus; he reminded them that Jesus told them earlier that He was going to die at the hands of His enemies but that on the third day that He was going to rise from the dead.

BIBLE EXTRA

Chairete

Chairete, the Greek word translated in Matthew 28:9 in the NIV as "Greetings" and in the KJV as "All hail," is translated "Rejoice" in the NASB version of this verse. Chairete also shows up in the beginning of Matthew 5:12 but is translated "Rejoice" in both the NIV and KJV (NIV: "Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven"). Based on this, it seems that "Rejoice" reflects a helpful understanding of how Jesus greeted the women.

Chairete is perhaps best understood in this context as a response to the women's fear by encouraging them to rejoice instead of being afraid as they considered the implications of the reality that Jesus, their Lord and Savior, had risen from the dead.

Suggested Answer to Question 9

They were to remember what Jesus said; they were to enter the tomb and see for themselves that it was empty; they were to tell Jesus' disciples what they had seen and heard and where their risen Lord could be found.

A JOYFUL RESPONSE

Read Matthew 28:8-10, then discuss these important ideas:

- The women quickly left the tomb. They were still afraid but rejoiced as well as they considered what they'd seen and heard.
- As they hurried to where the disciples were staying, Jesus met them on the way. They clung to

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The women's initial reaction was similar to how the guards responded. What they saw was unsettling and terrifying. The angel quickly assured them that they had nothing to fear, however, and reminded them of what Jesus told them earlier: He must be crucified but He would "be raised to life" (Matt. 16:21).

The angel told the women to look into the tomb to see for themselves that it was indeed empty. He then urged them to share what they had seen and heard with Jesus' disciples. Finally, he instructed them to tell the disciples where they too could find Him. Jesus was going ahead of them to Galilee. If they headed in that direction, they too would encounter their risen Lord.

7. How did the women initially respond to what they witnessed?

8. What did the angel tell them in order to calm their fears?

9. What did he instruct them to do?

A Joyful Response

Matthew 28:8-10, KJV

8 And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.

9 And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

10 Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

Matthew 28:8-10, NIV

⁸So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

⁹Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

The women took the angel's words to heart and hurried

His feet and worshiped Him.

- Jesus reminded them of the angel's instruction to tell His disciples to go to Galilee.

Suggested Answer to Question 10

They quickly left the tomb. Although they were still afraid, they also rejoiced over what they had seen and heard. Jesus was alive, and they were eager to share this good news with His disciples.

Suggested Answer to Question 11

Jesus told them not to fear, but instead they were to go and share this wonderful news with His disciples. And they were to pass along Jesus' instructions to go to Galilee, where they would see Him.

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away from the tomb so they could share what they experienced. They were still afraid; but their fear was accompanied by joy. Although they didn't understand how it happened, they rightly concluded that Jesus was alive, and they couldn't wait to tell others about it.

"Suddenly" (vs. 9) Jesus met them and said, "Greetings." A better translation of this might be, "Rejoice." The empty tomb and the reality it confirmed—that Jesus had risen from the dead—was good news, something Jesus said should result in rejoicing, not fear.

The women responded to the recognition that the one walking with them was Jesus by clasping His feet and worshiping Him. They likely didn't want to let Him go. In John's dramatic account of Mary Magdalene mistaking Jesus for the gardener until He said her name, Jesus said to Mary, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (John 20:17). They weren't to hold onto Jesus as if He was there for them alone, but tell His "brothers" that He had risen from the dead and was going before them to Galilee.

Like the angel who addressed the women earlier, Jesus emphasized the importance of not responding with fear. Some would undoubtedly respond to what they shared with doubt. Some would deny, in spite of the evidence, that Jesus was no longer dead. Some would claim there was some other explanation for His empty tomb. But for the women who saw the empty tomb and for others who accepted the implication of it, there was no question Jesus was alive and once again dwelling with them. And that was something worthy of celebration and worth sharing. They had nothing to fear, for Jesus had defeated death and risen from the dead.

10. How did the women eventually respond to what they witnessed?

11. What did Jesus instruct them to do?

BIBLE EXTRA

How Many Women and Angels?

In Matthew's account, at least two women, "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary" (vs. 1) went to the tomb on Easter morning and saw one angel. Mark names those two women also, identifying the "other Mary" as "Mary the mother of James," and adds that "Salome" was there (Mark 16:1). Luke adds "Joanna" (Luke 24:10) to the list of named women, plus "the others with them," and mentions "two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning" (vs. 4) greeting the women at the tomb. John said that Mary Magdalene first saw only an empty tomb, but later saw two angels dressed in white sitting on the place where Jesus' body had been laid (John 20:1, 12).

The differences in the number of women and angels have led some to scoff at the Resurrection accounts, but two things are important. One is that the tomb is empty in every account. Second, the differences show there was no collusion among the Gospel writers in the accounts. They are like four different witnesses to any event, all of which will differ in their emphasis and details.

Comparing the accounts side-by-side results in this probable chronology of events: (1) Several women went to Jesus' tomb early on the morning following the Sabbath to anoint Jesus' body with spices. (2) The women found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. (3) They were told by at least one angel to share with Jesus' disciples what they'd seen and heard. (4) Jesus greeted them as they traveled to where the disciples were hiding. (5) The women told Jesus' disciples what they witnessed. (6) John and Peter went to the tomb with Mary Magdalene to see for themselves what happened. (7) John and Peter left. Mary stayed behind. (8) Jesus greeted Mary by the tomb.

3 Bible Application

This step will give students an opportunity to discuss ways they can or ought to respond to their knowledge that Jesus' tomb is empty and the implication: that He has risen from the dead. You may want to photocopy this page so that each group has its own set of instructions. Give sheets of newsprint, marking pens, and tape to the groups doing the listings and drawing the pictures.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Discussion Group

Read "God Has Defeated Death" in the Student Book and respond to **Questions 12, 13, and 14**. Although we may be afraid of things in this life, because Jesus rose from the dead, we are assured that there is nothing to fear when considering what comes next. And that is good news, news that is worthy of celebration and worth sharing with others.

Fear-Rejoice Listings

On one sheet of newsprint, list some things you are afraid of. On a second sheet, list some promises that can be of help to you as you consider how to respond to the fears. These could be Scripture verses or phrases such as "I will be with you always—Jesus." Also discuss how knowing that Jesus rose from the dead is helpful, or perhaps even critical, as you think about these fears.

Pictures of Reasons to Rejoice

As you consider the implication of Jesus' empty tomb, think about some effects this can or ought to have on your life now as well as your thoughts about the one that is to come. Draw some pictures, words, or symbols on a sheet of newsprint that represent these—some reasons Jesus' resurrection is worthy of celebrating.

Discuss some ways we ought to respond to Jesus' empty tomb.

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God Has Defeated Death

I fear many things in life. I fear that I may fall and not get up; I fear in these days of strange diseases that all the things I do to protect myself will be to no avail. I also fear I may get distracted while driving and miss seeing an errant vehicle careening in my direction, or that some tragic mishap may befall my household while I am asleep.

The one thing I do not fear is death. Although I do not look forward to the events that may precede it, I confidently believe in God's promise that what I will experience in the next life will be a world absent of death, pain, and sorrow.

What assures me of this is Jesus' empty tomb. The truth that Jesus has risen from the dead is not some vague concept in my mind or just wishful thinking. It is as much a reality as the rising and setting of the sun.

It helps me to read the stories of those who have attempted to discredit the accounts of this event by trying to prove that there are better explanations for Jesus' tomb being empty. It seems that many who have attempted to do so have concluded there is no reasonable explanation for why Jesus' tomb was empty that morning than the one Scripture presents—Jesus actually rose from the dead.

I know I don't worship a dead man who was sincere with His promises but who failed to live long enough to fulfill them. I worship a living Savior who defeated those intent on killing Him, who proved by rising from the dead that no grave can hold Him, and who showed that no human or supernatural forces can keep Him from fulfilling His mission to provide a path to eternal life.

12. What are some things you are afraid of?

13. How can knowing that Jesus rose from the dead be of help as you consider how to respond to these?

14. What are some ways you can or perhaps ought to respond to your knowledge that Jesus is alive and that God has defeated death?

4 Life Response

Decide how you want to respond to Jesus' empty tomb.

How do we respond to Jesus' empty tomb? Some will respond with rejoicing knowing that they no longer need to fear what happens after this life ends. Some will respond with appreciation that they aren't facing the difficulties of this life alone and that they have a living and caring Lord and Savior walking with them. Some may share that knowing Jesus is alive gives them a perspective on this world not available to those who don't know Him. Still others may conclude that they ought to

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Now What?

One of the biggest fears many people have is the fear of death and what follows. But because of Jesus' empty tomb, this is the last thing we should fear. Jesus has promised to lead us to a new world free of the pain, sorrows, and suffering of this one. He also promises to be with us as we travel the journey that will take us there.

Jesus has defeated death. He is alive! There is therefore nothing left to fear. And that is something worth celebrating.

► Consider what Jesus' empty tomb means for you personally, then complete the following: Jesus is alive. I can therefore respond to _____ with _____ instead of _____ knowing that _____.

KEY VERSE

Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

—Matthew 28:10, KJV

Then said Jesus to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

—Matthew 28:10, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON Week of April 18 through April 24

- (See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)
- Mon. Deuteronomy 15:12-15—Remember You Were Slaves.
 - Tue. Galatians 4:21-31—Children of the Promise.
 - Wed. Isaiah 61:1-3—Anointed to Proclaim Good News.
 - Thu. John 8:12-20—The Light of the World.
 - Fri. John 8:21-30—Jesus Is from Above.
 - Sat. Psalm 119:41-56—I Delight in Your Commands.
 - Sun. John 8:31-38—Jesus Brings True Freedom.

have a stronger desire to share this great news with others.

Ask students to read "Now What?" in the student book and complete the statement at the end. They may want to write the statement on an index card to keep handy. You may want to have students return to the groups they formed in Step 1 so they can share their responses with each other. They might answer the statement something like this: "Jesus is alive. I can therefore respond to my fear of death with courage instead of fear knowing that I will rise from the dead one day just as He did."

Close the session in prayer. Pray that students will allow the implications of Jesus' empty tomb to affect how they respond to what they fear—they will be confident because they have a living Lord and Savior walking with them in this life, and they will have assurance of a place set aside for them with Jesus in the next one.



As the class members are leaving, hand out copies of this week's *Power for Living*. Take or mail copies of *Lesson Leaflet* to those who couldn't be with you today, or send them to those you would like to join your class.

Before Teaching Next Week's Lesson

Read John 8:31-38. Ask students to think about what it means to "hold fast" to something and some words or phrases that are good substitutes ("cling to," etc).



Lesson Overview

Week of April 17

1 Life Need:

Note what people can be slaves to.

2 Bible Learning:

Learn what Jesus said must be done to be set free.

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit*: Poster and reproducible handout—Easter: Sacrifice and Salvation

3 Bible Application:

Discuss how we can be set free from what enslaves us.

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit*: Reproducible sheet—Abide in Me!

■ Sheets of newsprint, two sets of marking pens, tape

4 Life Response:

Hold fast to Jesus and His teachings so you can be set free.

Church/Home Theme: Our God's Love Heals

Lesson Focus: Hold to Jesus' teaching and be set free.

Lesson Scripture: John 8:31-38

Freedom in Christ Jesus

Some Christian men and women in prison have spoken about being freer behind bars than when they were out on the streets. How is this possible? When a person embraces Christ, they now walk in liberty, in a freedom beyond bondage or iron bars.

Accepting Christ—Jesus desires to be understood. He wants those who associate with His name to experience genuine salvation. Jesus desires for God's children to be steadfast in their faith and not wishy-washy. He loves for God's children to sit at His feet, hanging on to His every word, seeking to know His truth. This kind of behavior results in freedom.

The Truth Will Set You Free—Consistently reading, studying, and seeking to understand the Scriptures is one of the primary steps in becoming a true disciple of Christ. The next step is following His instructions. Those sincerely committed to the Lord are learners who adjust their actions accordingly. Truth is not only an intellectual understanding of words on a page in the Bible. One of Jesus' names is "the truth" (John 14:6). He is the source of all truth, the ultimate standard of what is right. The Lord breaks the chains of Satan's lies and deception.

Freedom Beyond Status—When Jesus talked about freedom, the Jewish people argued they had never been in bondage to anyone. They were Abraham's children. But Jesus was not referring to political or cultural status when He spoke of freedom. All humanity is born in bondage to sin and rebellion against God. Wrongdoing and wrong attitudes toward God control the unbeliever. Freedom from sin is why Jesus came, died on the Cross, and shed His blood. His sacrifice breaks the chains of sin for all who believe in Him (John 3:16).

Experience Jesus' Liberty—Only a few accept the real truth about Christ. Sadly, a lot of people think because they live in America, go to church, and try to do right by their fellowman, they are a follower of Jesus, a Christian. Yet they remain tormented by the shame of their past and bad habits they cannot overcome. This is not the liberty Jesus offers. Individuals often talk about feeling a heaviness within but do not know that it's sin, the rejection of the truth about Jesus Christ weighing them down. Jesus lifts the load. There is no freedom anywhere on earth like freedom in Christ.

As Your Students Arrive

Ask students what it means to "hold fast" to something and some words or phrases that are good substitutes. Summarize

responses on a board or newsprint. To “hold fast” means to cling to something so securely that it’s difficult to be separated from it. Some words or phrases that are similar include glued to, firmly attached to, or unfailingly associated with. Other phrases similar in biblical context include continue in, abide in, and abide by.

Link to Last Week

Ask several to share how they responded last week as they remembered that Jesus’ tomb is empty and that He has risen from the dead.

1 Life Need

Note what people can be slaves to.

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Freedom in Christ Jesus

While Jacinta was still sitting, she had tuned out her co-workers a while ago.

“It’s just too many restrictions, being a Christian,” said Alyssa.

“Well, I’m religious, and I still do what I want! God understands,” Brittany interjected. “What’s the big deal?”

The women were discussing going to one of the casinos in the area and later a male revue club for a night of fun. Sometimes several women from work would meet outside the office for a time of bonding. Many outings had been just a lunch date, and Jacinta had attended some of those.

“We understand that you can’t join in on the fun,” said Alyssa, “but I think everyone else will be excited.”

“It’s not that I can’t go,” offered Jacinta. “I don’t want to. I do fun and exciting things that honor God. Besides, I am not interested in a male revue or gambling.”

“Gambling? Who’s gambling?” asked Takira, who just entered the break room.

“We are planning an outing to a casino and a male revue,” grinned Brittany.

“I like the sound of it,” Takira exclaimed, “except I need to stay away from the slots and the game tables. I’m dodging bill collectors now! But what’s one more?”

It sounds like craziness, Jacinta thought to herself as she cleared up her lunch trash. She had peace of mind and freedom in Christ, and nothing could equal or surpass that!

1. What are some things people can be slaves to?

2. What can be of help if someone desires to be set free from these?

3. What must one do if they want to benefit from this help?

Read the opening story in the student book before your students form small groups to discuss their answers to **Questions 1, 2, and 3**.

For Question 1, people can be a slave to another person or to a belief or thought process. They can be enslaved by an addiction to a substance or to a harmful activity or be chained to ungodly tendencies they can’t seem to overcome or change. They may carry a burden of guilt for past sins or failures that weighs them down and dominates their lives.

Regarding Question 2, what helps to be set free from these includes encouragement from others who have experienced the same issues, a determination to act or live differently, professional counseling, recognizing that Jesus can forgive them, or understanding that it’s only Jesus who can set them free.

For Question 3, people can benefit from this help only if they accept it. They have to embrace the concept that without it, breaking the chains that bind them will be difficult if not impossible. They have to hold fast to wise and beneficial advice, especially if it comes from God and His Word, and ask Jesus to fill them with His Holy Spirit so that they can become “new creatures.”

LESSON FOCUS: Hold to Jesus’ teaching and be set free.

2 Bible Learning

Learn what Jesus said must be done to be set free.



On the handout, read the final paragraphs and point out the photo of Roman slaves in chains.

WE ARE SLAVES TO NO ONE!

Read John 8:31-33 and highlight these important points:

- Although many doubted Jesus' claim that He was the Son of God and His promise that He was providing a path to God's kingdom, some did believe in Him.
- What some of these so-called "believers" actually believed is revealed in today's passage.
- Jesus said that only those who held to His teachings would be His disciples and that doing so would result in knowing what is true in being set free.
- Some thought that Jesus was referring to being freed from physical enslavement and denied ever being

BIBLE EXTRA

Slaves to No One

Following the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70, around 1,000 Jews took refuge on Masada, a nearly inaccessible walled fortress on a mountain south of the Dead Sea. The Romans eventually built a ramp to the top of the mountain so they could attack and enter the fortress and take the Jews captive. Before the Romans broke through the walls of Masada, Eleazar, one of the Jewish leaders, made this statement: "Long ago we determined to be slaves to neither the Romans nor anyone else, save God." Shortly afterward, most of the Jews at Masada committed suicide so that none would be enslaved by the Romans.

slaves to anyone.

- When they said this, they were ignoring the history of their political and physical enslavement.

Suggested Answer to Question 4

Jesus said that those who were truly His disciples would be only those who held to His teachings. It wasn't just those who believed what He said; it was those who were committed to letting Jesus shape their way of thinking and their actions.

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We Are Slaves to No One!

John 8:31-33, KJV

31 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;
32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.
33 They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?

John 8:31-33, NIV

³¹To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.
³²Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

³³They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"

Many found Jesus' claim that God was His Father dubious and His message of redemption questionable. But as John noted, "many believed in him" (vs. 30). However, Jesus told these believers that they would truly be His disciples only if they held to His teachings. If they did, it would result in them knowing what is true and that this would free them from the sins that enslaved them. Few seemed to understand this, however, and thought that Jesus was referring to being freed from physical enslavement.

Many Jews in those days thought that, because of their special relationship with God through Abraham, they were slaves to no one except to God and never had been. But centuries earlier they had been slaves in Egypt. In the days of their kings, they were subject to those who ruled over them. Then, following the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., they were held in captivity in Babylon; now they were subjects of the Romans. Although they denied ever being slaves, they had often experienced political as well as physical enslavement.

Their understanding of Jesus' promise to be set free was also skewed by their desire for political freedom. Many



Further commentary on this Scripture passage can be found on pp. 258-259 in *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament*.

Suggested Answer to Question 5

This would result in them knowing what's true and in setting them free. What Jesus was referring to was the pathway He was providing to eternal life. Embracing this truth would result in being set free from their sin and its eternal consequences.

Suggested Answer to Question 6

Some Jews thought Jesus was referring to physical enslavement and said that they were slaves to no one except to God and never had been; some thought that Jesus was referring to political

freedom, something they believed that God's promised messiah was going to secure for them.

YOU ARE SLAVES TO SIN!

Read John 8:34-36, then note these key points:

- Jesus said that He was talking about being a slave to sin. He then talked about the difference between a son and a slave.
- Slaves had no permanent standing with their masters. They could be let go

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believed that God's promised messiah would set them free from them of foreign rulers. Some thought that Jesus' was going to lead an uprising that would restore Israel to its former glory. Peter brought a sword to the garden where Jesus was arrested thinking that this was the moment when Jesus was going to start the "revolution." And so, when they asked, "How can you say that we shall be set free," they were perhaps asking what Jesus was going to do to free them from their Roman oppressors.

4. *What did Jesus say would identify those who were truly one of His disciples?*
5. *What would this result in?*
6. *What did the Jews' response reveal about their understanding of Jesus' promise to set them free?*

You Are Slaves to Sin!

John 8:34-36, KJV

34 Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.

35 And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever.

36 If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

Jesus responded to their misunderstanding by pointing out the nature of their spiritual enslavement. They were slaves to sin, they could not help but sin.

Jesus illustrated this predicament by comparing it to the difference between a son and a slave. Slaves had no permanent standing with their masters. A slave's relationship with their owner could be severed at any time. Even a slave who had done everything their master demanded was not assured of a permanent place in the household.

John 8:34-36, NIV

³⁴Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

BIBLE EXTRA

A Promise of Eternal Life

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). He soon after said, "If you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins" (8:24). This is the context for Jesus' promise in today's passage that those who hold to His teachings will be set free. What they would be free from are the eternal consequences of their sin. This is consistent with what Jesus proclaimed later when He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

BIBLE EXTRA

Socrates and Freedom

The Greek philosopher Socrates (470–399 B.C.) said this regarding enslavement: "How can you call a man free when his pleasures rule over him?" This is consistent with what both Jesus and Paul noted about enslavement to sin. Because of our sin nature, there are times when we can't seem to help but sin. But when we put our trust in Jesus and hold to His teachings, He removes the yoke that binds us to our sin nature. We are now free to live without feeling that sinning is inevitable or that we have no choice but to sin. Although we may still sin, we are no longer slaves to it and are no longer ruled by it.

at any time for any reason.

- Sons had a secure connection to their households due to their association with their families by blood.

- Those who held to Jesus' teachings would be like a son. Their relationship with God would be secure and would not be based on performance.

- Those who held to Jesus' teachings would also be freed from being slaves to the worst parts of themselves.

Suggested Answer to Question 7

Slaves have no permanent standing with their masters. The relationship they have with their owners can be terminated at any time for any reason. A son's relationship is defined by his physical relationship with his family; it is based on blood, not performance. This remains intact even if what a son does is improper or dishonorable.

Suggested Answer to Question 8

Jesus was promising a different type of relationship with God, one based on sonship rather than performance. Those who held to Him and His teachings would become like a son; they would experience freedom from the fear that comes from not knowing if their relationship with God is secure or what it is based on; they would have the permanent standing of a son and not the temporary one of a slave.

LET'S KILL HIM!

Read John 8:37-38, then discuss the

BIBLE EXTRA

We Are Abraham's Children

Paul noted that, "It is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring." (Rom. 9:8). The Jews' relationship with Abraham was not sufficient to save them. What mattered to God was not their physical lineage but their belief in Jesus.

following ideas with your students:

- Jesus' promise to free the people should have resulted in appreciation. Instead, they planned to kill Him. There apparently was no room in their hearts for Him.

- This revealed that their father was not the same as His and that they were listening to different voices.

- Instead of embracing Jesus and His promise to set them free from their sins, they were looking for ways to get rid of Him.

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The same could not be said regarding a son. A son's connection to his household was based on blood, not conduct. A son was always a son even if he acted improperly or dishonorably. And, as noted in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), even an errant son will be accepted back by a father who really loves him.

Jesus was promising a relationship with God that was not tied to performance or lineage but instead was based on sonship. If they held to Him and His teachings, they would become one of God's children, free from the sins that enslaved them and that separated from God.

Those who held to Jesus' teachings would also no longer be slaves to the worst parts of themselves. Paul reinforced this when he wrote, "For we know that our old self was crucified with [Christ] so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin" (Rom. 6:6-7).

7. What is the difference between a son and a slave?

8. Why did Jesus point this out?

Let's Kill Him!

John 8:37-38, KJV

37 I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you.
38 I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father.

John 8:37-38, NIV

³⁷"I know that you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word. ³⁸I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father."

Jesus then addressed the Jews' argument that their relationship with God was secure and somehow "protected" because of their special relationship with God through Abraham. Jesus acknowledged that they were indeed

Suggested Answer to Question 9

Some were so focused on their special relationship with God through Abraham that they failed to recognize the true nature of the freedom Jesus was promising. Instead of embracing Jesus and His teachings, they wanted to kill Him.

Suggested Answer to Question 10

Their father—the voice or voices they were listening to—was not the same as Jesus'. Jesus' Father was Almighty God. The Jews' father was the devil (see v. 44).

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descendants of Abraham. What He was promising should therefore have been good news to them. But instead of responding with appreciation, they wanted to kill Him. Although John called them believers, there was in reality no room in their hearts for Jesus.

In this respect, Jesus' father was not the same as theirs. The voice or voices they were listening to were not the same. Soon after this, Jesus said to them, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires" (v. 44). Because they believed their identification with Abraham and their obedience to the law was sufficient to gain them right-standing with God, they failed to recognize it would take something more to guarantee their place in God's family. They failed to recognize that Jesus came to set them free from the sins that enslaved them and that kept them from being a part of God's kingdom.

Jesus came to set them free from being a slave to sin; but instead of accepting and embracing Jesus and this wonderful truth, they were looking for ways to get rid of Him.

Hopefully we won't be like them. Hopefully we will hold fast to Jesus and His teachings so that we will know the truth and be set free.

9. How did these "believers" respond to what Jesus was promising?

10. What did this reveal about their hearts?



An ancient Roman slave collar saying anyone who finds this slave if he escaped would receive a gold coin.

Photo: Rabax63

BIBLE EXTRA

Satan and the Religious Leaders

Bible commentator Warren Wiersbe discusses the relationship between Satan and the religious leaders: "Satan is a liar and a murderer. He lied to our first parents ('Yea, hath God said?') and engineered their deaths. Cain was a child of the devil (1 John 3:12), for he was both a liar and a murderer. He killed his brother Abel and then lied about it (Gen. 4). Is it any wonder that these religious leaders lied about Jesus, hired false witnesses, and then had Him killed?"

"The worst bondage is the kind that the prisoner himself does not recognize. He thinks he is free, yet he is really a slave. The Pharisees and other religious leaders thought that they were free, but they were actually enslaved in terrible spiritual bondage to sin and Satan. They would not face the truth, and yet it was the truth alone that could set them free."

BIBLE EXTRA

His Father, Their Father

Earlier Jesus emphasized that His authority to speak on behalf of God was valid because His Father was God (John 8:18). The Pharisees challenged Jesus regarding this and asked, "Where is your father?" (vs. 19). Jesus responded by noting that they didn't know Him or His Father for if they did, they would know both. This resulted in a dispute over Jesus' true nature (vss. 21-30), something that wouldn't be resolved until He was "lifted up" (i.e., "crucified," vs. 28).

The meaning of Jesus' statement that their father was not the same as His (vs. 38) is clarified in the verses that follow (vss. 39-47). Although the Jews claimed that Abraham was their father, they were not responding the same as Abraham did when he heard from God about His plans for him and his descendants. Their desire to kill Jesus showed that the devil was their real father (vs. 44). Although they claimed that being one of Abraham's children was sufficient to make them one of God's children, their response to Jesus revealed that they did not belong to God at all.

3 Bible Application

This step will give students an opportunity to share what they feel they are a slave to and what they can do to be set free from it. You may want to photocopy this page so that each group has its own set of instructions. Give sheets of newsprint, marking pens, and tape to the group doing the listings and the one drawing the pictures. Make copies of the handout from the Resource Kit for the group using it.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Discussion Group

Read “The Chains Are Broken!” in the student book and respond to **Questions 11, 12, and 13**. We can’t fully appreciate our relationship with Jesus or enjoy life now to its fullest if we are carrying a load of guilt, shame, regret, or sin. Trusting in Jesus and holding fast to His teachings can free us from the chains that bind us to these so we can walk our journey with Him unencumbered by them.

Now and What Now

List on one sheet of newsprint some things you feel you are a slave to. List on a second sheet what Jesus has done or promised so you can be set free from these. Discuss how holding fast to what’s on the second sheet can be of help as you seek to be set free from what’s on the first.

Picture This

On a sheet of newsprint, draw some words, symbols, or pictures that represent some burdens, sins, failures, harmful traits, or other things you seem to be a slave to. Discuss what Jesus did or promised so you can be set free from these. On a second sheet of newsprint, draw what you need to do so you are holding fast to this.

Discuss how we can be set free from what enslaves us.



Handout: ‘Abide in Me!’

Read the handout and respond to the questions at the end.

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The Chains Are Broken!

Pilgrim’s Progress, a book written in 1677 by John Bunyan, is an allegorical story about the journey of a man named Christian from his hometown, the “City of Destruction,” to the “Celestial City.” Along the way, he carries a bag that weighs him down and makes it hard to reach his destination. This weight—his doubts, fears, guilt, and temptations—nearly causes him to drown in the “Slough of Despond.” After being rescued by Help, he is told by Mr. Worldly Wiseman that his burden can be lifted only through the Law with the help of Mr. Legality from the village of Morality. This fraud is eventually exposed by Evangelist. But it is only when the straps of his bag are broken at the “place of deliverance” that Christian is freed from the load he is carrying. Although the rest of his journey is not without difficulty, the guilt and shame that weighed him down so heavily has been removed.

Sometimes I feel that I am like Christian in this story. Sometimes the weight of shame, guilt, and regret I carry keeps me from appreciating my actual standing with Jesus and enjoying life now to its fullest. Sometimes my struggles with sin result in a sense of hopelessness and a belief that I will forever be a slave to the worst parts of myself.

What helps in those times when I feel I’m not good enough or that my past cannot be put behind is remembering what Jesus did to free me from being a slave to my sin, my guilt, my shame, and my past failures. Being freed from the yoke of these allows me to appreciate my relationship with Jesus and to enjoy life now unencumbered by their chains.

11. What are some things you feel you are a slave to?

12. As you think about these, what promises or truths do you need to hold fast to?

13. What else can you do so that you are enjoying the fruits of being set free by Jesus?

4 Life Response

Hold fast to Jesus and His teachings so you can be set free.

Being yoked to our sins, to our guilt, or to the failures of our past can wear us down physically and emotionally; it can keep us from experiencing the best this life has to offer; it can also keep us from appreciating our relationship with God. But there is good news! Jesus has done what's required to set us free from these. He has promised to be with us, to forgive us, and to free us from whatever we feel we are chained to.

Ask students to read "I Am Free! Now What?"

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I Am Free! Now What?

Jesus promised to free us from enslavement to our sin. He promised as well to free us from the burdens of shame and guilt we feel for our past failures, but we may continue to believe that we're doomed to be a slave to our sin and chained to our past. Holding fast to Jesus and His teachings is the only choice that will result in an unencumbered, eternal relationship with Him.

► *What truth do you need to hold fast to so you can be set free from what enslaves you?*

KEY VERSE

If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.
—John 8:36, KJV

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.
—John 8:36, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of April 25 through May 1

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon. Psalm 130—Out of the Depths I Cry.
- Tue. John 7:53–8:11—Go and Sin No More.
- Wed. Romans 3:19–31—Righteousness Disclosed in Christ.
- Thu. Romans 5:1–11—The Justified Have Peace with God.
- Fri. Romans 5:12–21—God's Free Gift Brings Life.
- Sat. Isaiah 55:6–13—Seek the Lord and Find Joy.
- Sun. Romans 6:1–14—Baptized into Christ's Death.

in the student book and write out their response to the question at the end. Some specific truths or promises they intend to focus on as they consider what they feel they are a slave to may include remembering they've been unconditionally forgiven, or that they have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them and that this is what gives them the power to break the chains that bind them. They may also note some specific guidance from Scripture that needs to become their focus as they consider how they can be set free from what enslaves them.

End the class in prayer. Thank Jesus for doing what's required to break the chains of those things we are slaves to. Pray that students will hold fast to Jesus and His teachings so that they can indeed be set free.



As the class members are leaving, hand out copies of this week's *Power for Living*. Take or mail copies of *Lesson Leaflet* to those who couldn't be with you today, or send them to those you would like to join your class.

Before Teaching Next Week's Lesson

Before next week, read Romans 6:1–14. Encourage students to think about a time they were glad they left something behind them. For example, they may be glad they left old furniture and bought new or left paying a mortgage behind them.



Freedom from Sin

Lesson Overview

Week of May 1

1 Life Need:

Discuss why we need freedom from sin.

2 Bible Learning:

Discover how Jesus has given us power over sin and new life.

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit*: Poster and reproducible handout—Letters of Redemption and Freedom

3 Bible Application:

Identify ways we die to sin and live in Christ.

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit*: Reproducible sheet—Living New in Christ

4 Life Response:

Daily die to sin and live in Christ.

Suggested Material:

■ Words and music for the hymn 'Moment by Moment'

Church/Home Theme: Our God's Love Heals

Lesson Focus:

Leave your sin in the grave and live with Christ.

Lesson Scripture:

Romans 6:1-14

Letting Go of Sin—Some people take advantage of God's forgiveness. They think, *I can live any old way I please, and God will forgive me*. The apostle Paul said absolutely not! A person with that kind of attitude and thinking is uninformed about the seriousness of sin and God's price to wipe it out through Christ's crucifixion. Once a person professes his or her belief in Jesus as Savior and becomes a Christian, the relationship to sin changes. That person should not desire to habitually sin. Jesus releases the burden of having to carry our sins around. To continue in sin would be to ignore the price Jesus paid on the Cross.

Baptism—In baptism, the new believer reenacts Jesus' death (being buried with Him) and then the resurrection (being raised to new life). Baptism shows something has changed inside the person. Following baptism, the person has a new, daily walk in faith proclaiming a relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Right Thing to Do—Paul said the new, resurrected self replaces the old person. No more speaking and acting against God. The Christian is now His representative, His advocate. However, the temptation to sin is still there. The right thing to do is to honor God by obeying His commands and walking in the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Those committed to Christ long to live a life in spiritual harmony with Him.

Walking in Liberty—Paul gave instructions as to how to walk in liberty, free from sin. Rebellion and wrongdoing against God can naturally exist within through temptation by the devil. Our flesh wants to do wrong, to satisfy the wrong appetites. But Paul said, devote your whole body to God, ask Him to use it for His plans and purposes, and exhibit right living.

Why Battle This Out?—Believers are under grace, not law, right? Legalism is living by the law. The law can tell you where you fall short, but who wants to continually live under condemnation? The Bible is full of God's grace, His favor toward us in spite of our wrongs. Recognizing the Lord's love and generosity should cause us to listen to His voice and heed His instructions.

As Your Students Arrive

Ask students to give examples of a time they were glad they left something behind them. For example, they may be glad they left old furniture and bought new or left paying a mortgage behind them. This week's lesson provides us with an opportunity to examine the importance of life in Christ with sin left behind.

Link to Last Week

If some of your students are willing to share, let them share how the truth of Jesus set them free from something this past week.

1 Life Need

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Freedom from Sin

That was an icy response from her," said Clarence, stopping to look over the hood of his car at Dontrell before climbing into the driver's seat.

Dontrell looked at his friend, his eyes pained and guarded. "That was one of Brianna's girlfriends we just saw. She has every right to hate me as much as Brianna does."

Brianna and Dontrell had been married for six years, and Dontrell had been selfish and unfaithful for practically the entire time. The couple had divorced three years ago.

Things got worse for Dontrell after the divorce, and he found himself listening to his new friend, Clarence. It was Clarence who encouraged Dontrell to attend church, where he eventually accepted Christ.

"I still feel bad about all I put Brianna through," Dontrell said. "If I told you some of the stuff I did...."

"I don't want to know," said Clarence, "but I understand about regrets. We all have them. It's good that you're not proud of a sinful past, but that's just what it is—past. When you accepted Christ, your sins were no longer counted against you, because He died and rose again."

"You make it sound so easy," Dontrell murmured.

"It wasn't easy. Jesus died on the Cross. It cost Christ everything so that we could be saved. The least we can do is to leave our old life and sins behind and walk in the victory He won for us on Calvary."

1. How did Jesus' death and resurrection set free from the power of sin in your life?

2. What role does the Holy Spirit have in overcoming your sins and living for Christ?

3. Is there a specific sin that you still need to ask the Holy Spirit to give you victory over?

Discuss why we need to be free from sin.

Read the anecdote in *Comprehensive Bible Study*, then form small groups for discussion and respond to **Questions 1, 2, and 3**.

Question 1 directs your students to reflect personally on how Jesus' death and resurrection has given them victory over sin. Encourage them to be specific—for example, victory over lying or worrying or smoking or drinking.

Question 2 provides an opportunity for your students to acknowledge how the Holy Spirit is empowering them to live for Christ. Guide your students to see how the Holy Spirit not only convicts us of our sin, but enables us to obey God's Word as we daily live for Christ. Remind them that the Holy Spirit teaches us to change our mindset toward sin.

Question 3 allows your students to reflect personally on their lives and discover if there is sin that they need to die to in order to be completely free. We can't hide anything from God. He knows and sees everything about us. Guide them to see that they can't stop sinning on their own. The Holy Spirit empowers us to stop sinning and live for Christ.

Freedom from sin comes not from our own efforts, but from the Holy Spirit that lives within us once we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior.

LESSON FOCUS: Leave your sin in the grave and live with Christ.

2 Bible Learning

Discover how Jesus has given us power over sin and new life.



Before you teach this step, put up the poster "Letters of Redemption and Freedom" from the Resource Kit. Make copies of the handout that goes with the poster. You will be using it the rest of this quarter.

On the handout, read the first paragraph, and on the poster, point out the photo of a baptistery in the ruins of the ancient Basilica of St. John in Ephesus, Turkey.

DEAD TO SIN

Read Romans 6:1-4 and highlight the following truths in your class discussion:

- The apostle Paul clearly told the Christians he wrote to in Rome that God's grace does not provide us with a license to continue in sin.
- Our baptism "into Christ Jesus" means being baptized into death from sin.
- Jesus' resurrection empowers us to daily walk in newness of life.

Suggested Answer to Question 4

The answer to Paul's question regarding continuing in sin that grace may abound is absolutely no because of our position in Christ. In Him and His work on the Cross, we are dead to sin, therefore we are no longer to live in it.

Suggested Answer to Question 5

When we were baptized into Christ, we were baptized into His death. Therefore, as He was placed in the grave for three days, we, in a sense, were buried with Him. And as the Lord arose

from the grave, we were also raised with Him by the glory of our Father in heaven.

Suggested Answer to Question 6

Because believers are raised with Christ, we can live in the power of the new life we have in Him. Apart from Christ, we are bound in sin, but in Him, we are freed from sin and blessed with new life. Therefore, we are now free to walk and live in a manner that pleases and glorifies God.

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Dead to Sin

Romans 6:1-4, KJV

1 What shall we say then?
Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

2 God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Romans 6:1-4, NIV

¹What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ²By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

The first three chapters of Paul's letter to the believers in Rome provide a clear indictment of sin against all humanity, and because of our sin, we are condemned in the eyes of a holy and righteous God. Thankfully, God has graciously offered us the gift of eternal life in Jesus.

Considering all this, our lesson's Scripture begins with a question about whether God's people should continue sinning so God's grace could increase in their lives. The obvious answer is absolutely not! Since we have died to sin, we should no longer live in it. When we were "baptized into Christ Jesus [we] were baptized into his death" (6:3). When He died on the Cross, those who put their faith in Him also died with Him. Further, just as Jesus was raised from the grave, so too are those who died with Him raised to walk in the "new life" (vs. 4). Christ's resurrection glorified the Father, and such should be the heart's desire of those who walk in the new life that is ours in the Lord.



Further commentary on this Scripture passage can be found on pp. 423-425 in *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament*.

FREED FROM SIN

Read Romans 6:5-10 with your class and discuss these important truths from the text:

- Our identification with Jesus' death and resurrection frees us from sin's power.
- Just as sin has no power over a dead person, it has no power over us, and we are given the power to live a new life with Christ.

Suggested Answer to Question 7

As our Lord died, was buried, and rose from the dead, so too did we in Him. As a result, our old sin

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Everything we do should bring glory to Him. However, living for the glory of God is impossible on our own. Thankfully, He who died for us and rose again now lives within us, so we can now live for the glory of our Father.

4. Paul asked if we should continue to sin so God's grace may increase. Why is the answer a resounding no?

5. What does our baptism into Christ do for us?

6. What are the practical results of believers being "buried" and "raised" with Christ?

Freed from Sin

Romans 6:5-10, KJV

5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:
6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

7 For he that is dead is freed from sin.

8 Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:

9 Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.

10 For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.

Romans 6:5-10, NIV

⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—⁷because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

⁸Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

Because of our identification with the death, burial, and

nature was buried with Him; therefore, we no longer have to serve sin that once enslaved us.

Suggested Answer to Question 8

Death is separation. Physical death is separation of one's spirit from the body. Spiritual death is separation of one's spirit from God. Likewise, by our death

BIBLE EXTRA

Death Is Separation

When God told Adam that he could eat from every tree of the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, He also gave the man a warning. For on the day Adam ate of that tree, he would surely die (Gen. 2:16-17). Sadly, Adam and Eve did eat of the forbidden tree (3:6), yet they remained alive to have children together. And Scripture reports that Adam lived to be 930 years old (5:5). So, was the warning that Adam would die the day that he disobeyed God incorrect? The answer to that is a resounding no, for though Adam lived physically many years after his disobedience, he and Eve died spiritually the moment they ate that fruit.

This is because death is not annihilation or ceasing to exist. Rather, it is separation. Being dead physically means that the person's spirit is separated from his or her physical body. Being dead spiritually means that the person's spirit is separated from God. So though Adam and Eve did not die physically immediately upon eating from the tree of knowledge, they did die spiritually. And with that, they did ultimately die physically as part of God's curse upon them.

With this understanding in mind, we can now appreciate what Christ's death means for us. When He died, those who trust in Him for the forgiveness of sins died with Him. And as such, we are now separated from the penalty and power of sin that once enslaved us. And one day we will ultimately be permanently separated from sin altogether in heaven with the Lord.

with Christ, our old body of sin died with Him. Therefore, those in Christ have been separated from sin and thereby are freed from its rule over us.

Suggested Answer to Question 9

Believers are freed from sin in three ways. We are freed from the penalty of sin, for we are forgiven in Christ. We are also daily being freed from the power of sin, for it no longer needs to have dominion over us. And ultimately, we

BIBLE EXTRA

The Truth of the Resurrection

The Gospel—the good news of salvation from sin by faith in Christ—is grounded in the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior. As Paul put it, “Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved. . . For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:1-4). The truth of our Lord’s resurrection was attested to by multiple witnesses over several weeks, as well as more than 500 people at one time (vss. 5-8).

Many of these eyewitnesses were persecuted and some died for their testimony of faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And by their suffering, they powerfully attested to the truth of the Lord’s resurrection. People are often willing to die for what they believe is true, even if their belief is false. But most people are not willing to die for what they know is a lie. These early martyrs knew that they died for the truth, because they had seen the resurrected Lord with their own eyes. And because of their testimony, which is documented in God’s Word, people today can also know the truth that our Savior lives. As a result, those who trust in Him are freed from sin and receive eternal life. Therefore, we too can joyfully proclaim, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (vss. 55-57, KJV).

will one day be freed from the very presence of sin in glory with our Lord.

POWER OVER SIN

Read Romans 6:11-14 and note these important truths in discussing the text:

- Our daily actions should reflect our death to sin and life in Christ.
- Being alive to God in Christ Jesus means that we are dead to sin.
- We must live in the righteousness of God, not the unrighteousness of sin.
- Sin should not rule in our lives even though we live by grace and not by the law.

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resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are no longer slaves to sin. Rather, in Christ we have been freed from the slavery and bondage that sin brought us. When someone trusts in Jesus for the forgiveness of sin, their old self—the sin nature we are born with—has been crucified with Him.

However, since the Lord rose again, believers also have risen to eternal life in Him. In so doing, we left that old self that was ruled by sin in the grave where it belongs. Now, we no longer have to serve sin because Jesus freed us from it. Having died with Him, we can now live with Him. Death has no “mastery” over our Lord or over us (vs. 9).

Our freedom from sin is threefold. First, in Christ, believers have been freed from the penalty of sin, for Jesus took our penalty upon Himself when He died for us. Second, we are being freed daily from the power of sin, for as death no longer has dominion over our Lord, sin need not have rule over His people. And third, we live in the great hope that one day we will be freed from the very presence of sin in eternity with Jesus.

7. What hope do we have because of the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord?

8. How does death bring freedom from sin?

9. In what three ways are believers freed from sin?

Power over Sin

Romans 6:11-14, KJV

11 Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.

13 Neither yield ye your

Romans 6:11-14, NIV

¹¹In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

¹²Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an

Suggested Answer to Question 10

Being alive to God means that we are dead to sin. Therefore, sin should no longer reign over us. As a result, we need not yield to its power and the wicked desires that come with it.

Suggested Answer to Question 11

Instead of sin, righteousness should reign over those who are alive to God in Christ. Being freed from the bonds of sin, we can now do what is right to the glory of our heavenly Father.

Suggested Answer to Question 12

Before trusting in Christ, we were condemned under God's law. But after trusting in Christ,

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members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

14 For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

That believers are dead to sin is great news, but in Jesus Christ, we are also alive to God. This is not something that comes automatically. Rather, God's people must believe that they are dead to sin and alive to Him, and then by faith they must act upon that truth. Those who have been freed from sin should no longer be blinded by it. Therefore, they can now reason clearly and draw the right conclusion about being dead to sin and alive to God. As a result, we neither have to let sin reign in us nor obey its lustful desires; rather, we now yield to God, who gave us eternal life in Christ. Instead of being instruments of sin and the wickedness it brings, we can be "instrument[s] of righteousness" (vs. 13) to His glory. Prior to coming to Christ in saving faith, we were under the condemnation of God's law. But by the grace of God we can live to His glory. Sin is not our "master" (vs. 14). We are now under His grace. We can be free from the chains of sin and alive to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

10. Because we are alive to God in Christ, what should not reign over us?

11. Instead, because we are alive to God in Christ, what should reign over us?

12. Why should sin no longer have mastery or dominion over God's people?

we came under God's loving grace. It is by grace we are saved and freed from the chains of sin, and it is by grace that we no longer need to be under its power and rule in our lives.

BIBLE EXTRA

The Hope of Eternal Life in Christ

Those who have been saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ have eternal life in Him. For if we believe that Christ rose from the grave, we can know that one day He will return for us and take us to heaven to be with Him forever. Because of this hope of eternal life, we do not have to grieve over the deaths of our Christian family members and friends like unbelievers do who have no hope. There is truly great comfort in knowing that we will spend eternity with the Lord (see 1 Thess. 4:13-18). Jesus is preparing a place for us in heaven, and though the Bible does not give us all the details of what heaven will be like, we do know that in His presence is great light and abundant joy (see John 14:1-3; Rev. 22:1-5). It is that hope of eternity with God that gives us strength to stand for righteousness and live to His glory.

By God's grace we are saved, and by God's grace we can serve Him by doing the good works He has planned for us. This is good news for those who have trusted in Christ for forgiveness. If you have trusted Christ, you are free from sin and alive to God. And it is also good news for those who have not yet trusted Christ, because it is not too late. If this applies to you, do not wait any longer, because "now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2b, KJV).

WINDOW ON THE WORD

Becoming New in Christ

"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:12-13). Becoming new in Christ is the spiritual result from actively believing and receiving Christ personally. It's two-fold—personal surrender to Jesus and new birth in Christ through the Holy Spirit coming to live in us.

3 Bible Application

This lesson step provides your students an opportunity to explore various ways we can daily die to sin and live in Christ. You may want to photocopy this page so that each group has its own set of instructions. Make copies of the handout from the Resource Kit for the group using it.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Discussion Group

Read "From Death to Life" from the student book and respond to **Questions 13, 14, and 15**. The apostle John clearly says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8, KJV). We need to admit our sins and let the Holy Spirit work on our hearts and habits to change us. When the Spirit is working in and through us, we show "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22), not "the works of the flesh" (vs. 19).

Life in Christ

Read Colossians 3:5-17 and answer the following questions. How does this Scripture help us understand how to die to sin and live for Christ?

- What are some sins that we need to put to death?
- What are some of the characteristics that demonstrate our new life in Christ?
- What should rule in your life as a new person in Christ?



Identify ways we die to sin and live in Christ.

Handout:

'Living New in Christ'

Read the handout and follow the instructions. After you have completed the handout, share your answers with one another. You may also choose to discuss your answers as a class.

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From Death to Life

"Spiraling down a deep dark hole" describes Lewis's life from the time he was 18 years old until his 30th birthday. After his mother's death, he turned to drugs for release from his grief and lost his job. His older sister let him move in with her, but after he stole from her, she kicked him out. Lewis moved from one drug house to another. He lost contact with his sister and friends.

On Lewis's 30th birthday, he wanted to die as he laid under a bridge ready to overdose. Then within himself, he heard his mother's voice saying, "I'm praying for you." Something within him pushed him to the nearest church. The doors were open. Lewis went inside and knelt at the altar. He begged Jesus to give him power to overcome his drug addiction. He didn't hear an audible voice, but once he said, "Jesus, take over my life," he felt peace.

Lewis didn't know how long he laid on the altar, but suddenly a young man was sitting next to him. The young man prayed and asked Jesus to make Lewis a new man.

This young man, the church janitor, offered Lewis to join him in his small room in back of the church. Lewis shared his story, then the janitor picked up an old Bible and started reading about being made new in Christ. Lewis knew he wanted that new life.

Lewis stayed with the janitor while he attended a support group for his addiction. The janitor found Lewis a janitorial job at another church, but even as the temptation to return to his old life frequently appeared, the Holy Spirit empowered him to overcome the temptations, and his janitor friend helped him continue to live for Christ.

13. Why is it necessary to acknowledge sin in order to die to it?

14. What role does the Holy Spirit play in living a new life in Christ?

15. How have you experienced death to sin and new life in Christ?

4 Life Response

Your class has studied the topic of dying to sin and living in Christ. Dying to sin and living in Christ is easier said than done. It is a moment by moment choice.

Have your students read "Moment by Moment" and follow the instructions given. Some actions they might take to avoid sinning could include praying, walking away from temptation, talking to Christian friends, and reading Scripture. To live for Christ, they might ask the Holy Spirit for help,

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Moment by Moment

"Dying with Jesus, by death reckoned mine; Living with Jesus a new life divine;

Looking to Jesus till glory doth shine, Moment by moment, O Lord, I am Thine."

As the hymn says, living for Christ is an intentional, moment by moment choice. Jesus' death and resurrection enables us through the power of the Spirit to daily die to sin and live for Christ. It's our choice if we will do so.

► Complete the following sentences as they apply to your life personally:

I intentionally daily die to sin by _____.

I daily choose to live for Christ by _____.

KEY VERSE

For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.

—Romans 6:5, KJV

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.

—Romans 6:5, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of May 2 through May 8

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- | | |
|------|---|
| Mon. | Romans 6:15-23—No Longer Slaves of Sin. |
| Tue. | Ezekiel 36:25-30—God Bestows the Spirit. |
| Wed. | Romans 7:1-13—We Have Died to the Law. |
| Thu. | Romans 7:14-25—A Struggle to Obey. |
| Fri. | Romans 8:1-4, 10-17—No Condemnation for Heirs. |
| Sat. | John 20:19-23—Receive the Holy Spirit. |
| Sun. | Romans 8:18-30—All Things Work Together for Good. |

renew their minds by focusing on God's Word, and serve others. Encourage your students this next week to intentionally be aware of their choices concerning dying to sin and living for Christ.

Close the class by singing the hymn, "Moment by Moment," or end in prayer, allowing several students to pray and thank Jesus for His death and resurrection and for the Holy Spirit to empower them in daily living for Christ.



As the class members are leaving, hand out copies of this week's *Power for Living*. Take or mail copies of *Lesson Leaflet* to those who couldn't be with you today, or send them to those you would like to join your class.

Before Teaching Next Week's Lesson

Before next week, read Romans 8:18-30. Ask your students to think about something they are hoping for in the near future.



Lesson Overview

Week of May 8th

1 Life Need:

Discuss why we need hope in Christ as we endure trials.

2 Bible Learning:

Learn why we can rejoice and hope during trials.

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit*: Poster and reproducible handout—Letters of Redemption and Freedom

3 Bible Application:

Consider ways we can rejoice and have hope during trials.

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit*: Reproducible sheet—Rejoicing in Trials

4 Life Response:

Press forward toward future freedom while enduring trials.

Church/Home Theme: Our God's Love Heals

Lesson Focus:

Rejoice and hope in future freedom while enduring trials.

Lesson Scripture:

Romans 8:18-30

Freedom for the Future

Hope—What God has prepared in heaven for His children cannot compare with the earthly existence they are experiencing now. It's understandable why a person would feel hopeless and sad when a loved one dies; there is an illness, stress about finances, or other personal concerns. Paul suggests that we can find joy amid difficulty because we have a living hope.

A Taste of Heaven—When Christians come into the fullness of sonship, they get a taste of heavenly fruit that whets the appetite for more of what is to come eventually. But the final coming to the heavenly home and receiving all the benefits of being in God's family is yet to be experienced.

The Holy Spirit—While the spiritual soldiers are in the thick of this earthly battle, God has not left His army to fight alone. He gives the greatest weapon in His arsenal—the Holy Spirit. When the suffering can't pray at their lowest point, God reminds the helpless, "I am here." He comes in the person of the Holy Spirit, who meets the deepest inner longings, emotions, desires, and thoughts of the heart. The third person of the Trinity can shape a human's words to God and be in harmony with His will.

All for Good—God is sovereign and able to manage everything that happens in life. He can bring it all together, causing it all to turn out for good in the end. Individuals can see this promise unfold because of their love for God. They are now confident of their purpose in this life.

The Creator conceived this plan for each life long before He brought the earth into being. He is the author of the book called "My Life." The Father selects the characters and lays out each chapter. Then He is in the middle of the story, making sure each scene goes according to His plan. The ultimate goal of each life is to become like Christ. We yield our inner will. He shapes and molds us.

What we are walking through right now is not always going to be the case. God has good things planned for His children in the future, and even as we go through life now, He is with believers and will continue to be there to show the way and give peace.

As Your Students Arrive

Before class, write on a board or sheet of newsprint this question: "What is something you are hoping for in the near future?" It may be buying something new, getting a job promotion, or just being around for as long as God allows them to be. God's Word promises that we can rejoice and have hope in our

future even as we go through trials because He is working all things for our good and His glory. This week's lesson provides us with an opportunity to learn how to experience hope in trials and rejoice because for the future freedom we have in Christ.

Link to Last Week

Some of your students may want to share ways they chose this past week to die to sin and live for Christ.

1 Life Need

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Freedom for the Future

Share a room!" chorused Chloe and Rashona.
"Yes," Lauren said calmly.

At 51 years old, Lauren didn't think she would be "starting over." But the single mother of two had no choice than to scale down—way down. Lauren had been laid off her job last year. Her salary as a bank branch manager wasn't overly lucrative, but it had been good pay. When the branch closed, Lauren lost her job, and the bank was not able to place her anywhere else. It took her six months to find another job as a teller—which was only half of her previous salary.

It didn't take long for Lauren to fall behind in the mortgage on her ranch-style home. So, the family was moving into a "cute, little apartment" until things got better. Her 13 and 15-year-old daughters thought it was the end of their world. Lauren also had her new car repossessed.

"Mom, this is awful," said Chloe.

"How are we going to make it?" asked Rashona.

"Oh, girls. God continues to care of us," Lauren said. "The Lord has proved time and again that He is our provider. We have what we need. Money and material things come and go, but our security in Christ can never be taken."

"So, you're not worried?" asked Rashona.

"Not at all," smiled Lauren. "I'm excited about what's going to happen, because with Christ, we have good things in store!"

1. What are some natural responses to trials in our lives?

2. What role does hope in Christ have in providing us with a different response during trials?

3. Can you share one promise God gives Christians concerning enduring trials?

Discuss why we need hope in Christ as we endure trials.

Read the anecdote in *Comprehensive Bible Study*, then form small groups for discussion and response to **Questions 1, 2, and 3**.

Question 1 directs your students to reflect on how we naturally respond to trials in our lives. For example, we often become bitter, angry, blame God, and feel hopeless. Guide your students to discuss why these responses so easily occur during trials.

Question 2 provides an opportunity for your students to discuss the importance of having hope in Christ when trials occur in our lives. We can't stop trials, but our response to them can make a difference on their effect in our lives. With Christ, we can respond to trials with hope and even rejoice in the midst of them.

Question 3 asks your students to look at His promises in the midst of trials. They may point to particular verses from God's Word such as Exodus 14:14, Romans 5:3-5, or James 1:2-4. His Word encourages us to endure trials on earth, for they can't compare to our future hope and freedom in Christ (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

God's Word encourages us to endure trials on earth, for they can't compare to our future hope and freedom in Christ.

LESSON FOCUS: Rejoice and hope in future freedom while enduring trials..

2 Bible Learning

Learn why we can rejoice and hope during trials.



On the handout, read the second paragraph, and on the poster, point out the photo of a gravestone showing a Roman family.

PATIENTLY WAITING ON GOD'S PLAN

Read Romans 8:18-21 and highlight these important points in your class discussion.

- Paul told the Roman Christians to remember that our present suffering can't compare to the glory we will receive in eternity.

- Also, our sufferings may not be the result of our own choices.
- God's children will have freedom from their present suffering.

BIBLE EXTRA

Three Phases to Freedom

In our last lesson, we saw that in Christ we have freedom from sin, which comes in three phases. First, we are immediately freed from the penalty of sin because Christ took our punishment upon Himself. Then, as we walk in the Spirit and grow in faith, we gain increasing freedom over the power of sin in our lives. And ultimately, when we leave this life, we have the great hope of being freed from the very presence of sin forever. It is this hope that allows God's people to stand and endure trials and tribulations faithfully. God has amazing plans for us that we cannot even begin to imagine. But He has given us some glimpses into what He has in store for us, and He gives us the strength to be able to wait patiently, prayerfully, and purposefully until His great plan for the ages comes to fruition.

Suggested Answer to Question 4

Paul said that our present sufferings were not worthy to be compared to the glory that will one day be revealed in us. And considering how much suffering the apostle experienced, his statement was indeed profound.

Suggested Answer to Question 5

God's creation, which was cursed when sin entered the world through Adam and Eve's

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Patiently Waiting on God's Plan

Romans 8:18-21, KJV

18 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

19 For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

20 For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope,
21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Romans 8:18-21, NIV

¹⁸I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

When we walk in the Spirit and not the flesh, we can have victory over sin in our lives (Rom. 8:2-4), but living in this fallen world brings us "sufferings" (vs. 18). Yet, we have a future hope in those times, knowing that one day the Lord will set all things right. Our present suffering will pale in comparison to the "glory that will [one day] be revealed in us" (vs. 18). Suffering for Christ gives the hope of blessings in this life, and the hope of glory to come.

When sin came into the world, it also brought God's curse on His creation that continues today. However, even as He was pronouncing His curse, God proclaimed great hope through the "seed" of the woman (Gen. 3:15). Jesus would crush the enemy's head and one day deliver creation from the curse of sin.

Our hope and eager expectation is that everything will be set right for humanity as well as for all God's creation.



Further commentary on this Scripture passage can be found on pp. 430-431 in *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament*.

disobedience, now awaits the revelation of God's glory in His children. This is great hope that awaits all God's creation: heaven, earth, and all therein.

Suggested Answer to Question 6

When God's glory is revealed in His children, all creation will be delivered from the bondage of corruption that is so pervasive today. Life's frustration and vanity that now prevail will vanish, and nothing but the joy of the Lord will remain.

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The chains of corruption and decay will be broken when the glory of God is ultimately manifested in His children.

4. To what did Paul say our present sufferings were not worthy to be compared?

5. For what does creation wait?

6. From what will creation be delivered?

Prayerfully Waiting on God's Plan

Romans 8:22-27, KJV

22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

23 And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

24 For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?

25 But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.

26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the

Romans 8:22-27, NIV

²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

²³Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

²⁶In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

²⁷And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit

PRAYERFULLY WAITING ON GOD'S PLAN

Read Romans 8:22-27 and note these important points.

- We all experience sufferings as we wait on God's eternal plan for us.
- The Holy Spirit lives within us to give us hope during sufferings.
- We are saved by an unseen hope and wait patiently for that hope during sufferings.
- As we pray during suffering, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us when we don't know what to pray.

BIBLE EXTRA

Paul's Sufferings

When Paul spoke of "our present sufferings" (Rom. 8:18), he was not speaking glibly of superficial slights and ridicule for his testimony for the Lord, though he experienced plenty of that. Rather, Paul's sufferings for the cause of Christ were quite severe, ultimately culminating in martyrdom, according to church tradition. When He called Paul to His service, Jesus promised that the apostle would suffer greatly for His name's sake (Acts 9:16). And the Lord did indeed keep that promise.

When defending his apostleship to the Corinthian believers, Paul described some of his sufferings for the name of Christ (2 Cor. 11:23-28). The apostle labored hard, was imprisoned often, and received severe whippings. Five times he received 39 lashes from the Jews, and three times he was beaten with rods, with death often knocking at his door. He was stoned once and shipwrecked three times. So when Paul said that he considered the sufferings of this present time unworthy to be compared to the glory to come, he was speaking profoundly from intimate experience with severe trials and tribulations. Though most of us will not experience that kind of suffering, we will all experience pain and sorrow as we walk this sin-marred earth. And we, too, can cling to the hope that no matter how hard it is here, it will be infinitely better when Christ's glory is ultimately revealed in us.

Suggested Answer to Question 7

All of creation groans under the weight of suffering and sorrow that sin brings. And God's people are not exempt from the effects of sin. Though we are saved from the penalty of sin, we still suffer and sorrow under the weight of it. However, we can stand because of the hope we have.

Suggested Answer to Question 8

Despite the suffering and sorrows that sin brings into this world, God's people can stand because of the great hope we have that our adoption into God's family will culminate in the redemption of our bodies when the Lord returns for us.

Suggested Answer to Question 9

There may be times when we are so overwhelmed by the circumstances and storms of life that we do not even know

BIBLE EXTRA

The Blessed Process of Adoption

Anyone who has gone through the process of adopting a child understands that it can take time, even years, for an adoption to be finalized in the courts. Similarly, being adopted into God's family is a process that will take time to finalize. Upon trusting Christ as Savior, people receive "the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15b, KJV). As such, we become heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ (vs. 17). And it was Jesus Himself who made the way for our adoption, for "when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship" (Gal. 4:4-5, NIV).

Furthermore, according to our lesson's passage, the final step in our adoption process into God's family will come with "the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:23b). This is the hope of our resurrection. As His heirs, God's adopted children wait patiently and prayerfully for the culmination of our adoption when we are gathered together in the air to be with our Lord forever (see 1 Thess. 4:17).

how to pray. During such times, we can trust that when we cry out, our inward groanings will be translated by the Holy Spirit as He intercedes for us and brings our heart needs before the throne of grace.

PURPOSEFULLY WAITING ON GOD'S PLAN

Read Romans 8:28-30 and highlight these points in your discussion:

- God works our suffering for His glory and our good.
- Our suffering isn't a surprise to God and conforms us to be more like Christ.
- We are called to be God's children, justified through Christ, and the final state will be

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mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

All of creation currently suffers under the painful weight of sin. This includes God's people. As with all creation, Christians also groan inwardly as we await the culmination of our adoption, which will be the redemption of our bodies at the resurrection.

As a ship that is firmly anchored can weather a fierce storm, so too can God's people who firmly hope in His promises stand against the fierce attacks of those who hate the Lord and His people. This hope that steadfastly anchors the soul is not in what we currently have and can see, for we do not hope in what our five senses can already confirm for us. We do not hope that He provided the way of salvation and forgiveness of sins—that already happened two millennia ago on the Cross. However, we do hope and wait with eager expectation for the redemption of our bodies one day.

Thankfully, our hope is not in our own strength, for we could not stand alone. Rather, our hope is in the power of God to whom we can pray and receive the strength we need to prevail. This is so even if the cares and sorrows of life are so overwhelming that "we do not know what we ought to pray for" (vs. 26). When life's storms seem like they are about to sweep us under, we can cry out to the Lord, knowing that the indwelling Spirit of God will intercede on our behalf. And the Lord, who knows and searches our hearts, will answer us in accordance with His good and perfect will. In so doing, we can trust that He will work everything out for our good and His glory.

7. How does sin affect all of creation, including God's people?

8. In what do God's people hope?

9. How does the Holy Spirit help us pray?

glorification as the last step in being conformed to the image of Christ.

Suggested Answer to Question 10

God works in all circumstances for the good of those who love Him and who answer His call upon their lives to carry out the purposes He has for them.

Suggested Answer to Question 11

God's people are to be conformed to the image of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We do this by faithfully answering God's call on our lives, and when the trials come, the dross and impurities will be washed away, making us more like Him.

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Purposefully Waiting on God's Plan

Romans 8:28-30, KJV

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.

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

We can trust that God's plans will ultimately work out for good even in trials and tribulation "for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (vs. 28). One of the great purposes of our calling is to proclaim the Gospel. And, the more we are like Jesus by being conformed to His image, the more credible is our testimony for Him.

While Christians have different viewpoints on how God chooses those He calls, by faith in Him we receive His two-fold gift of being "justified" and "glorified" (vs. 30). Being justified, God's people are made righteous in His sight as if they had never sinned. With justification comes the promise of glorification, that one day we will stand completely purged of any sin.

10. For whom does God work all things together for good?

11. To whose image are God's people to be conformed?

12. What does God do to those who answer His call?

Suggested Answer to Question 12

When people faithfully answer God's call on their lives by faith in Christ, He justifies them, thereby allowing them to stand before Him just as if they had never sinned. And if that were not enough, God also glorifies His people, giving the great promise of eternity with Him in glorified, sin-free bodies.

BIBLE EXTRA

Answering God's Call

As our passage helps us understand, God calls His people to fulfill His good purposes here in this life. And down through the ages, people faithfully answered His call. There is no better passage of Scripture to see how some of the Old Testament saints answered God's call than Hebrews 11. For instance, faithful Noah answered God's call to build an ark, thereby saving his family and condemning the world of sin (vs. 7). Faithful Abraham and Sarah answered God's call to leave the land of their ancestors and go to the land of promise, thereby together starting the nation of Israel (vss. 8-12). Faithful Moses answered God's call to leave the house of Pharaoh and to deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage (vss. 23-29).

With all these great examples, and so many more found throughout Scripture, God's people are called to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1, KJV).

WINDOW ON THE WORD

Temporal Suffering

God's Word teaches that although Christians will experience trials and suffering (Phil. 1:29; 3:10), the suffering is temporary compared to eternal glory with God. "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

3 Bible Application

This lesson step provides your students an opportunity to consider ways that they can rejoice and have hope during trials. You may want to photocopy this page so that each group has its own set of instructions. Make copies of the handout from the Resource Kit for the group using it.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Read “Hope in Trials” from the student book and respond to **Questions 13, 14, and 15**. Even though we have hope in God as we go through life’s trials, we are not immune to experiencing sorrow and disappointment. We have hope in the future, but we are still living day-to-day now. However, God’s promises in Scripture help us see beyond the day-to-day discouragements and shift our focus to the future He has for us.

Quote Responses

Read the following famous quotes about the trials in our lives and discuss how they can help us see that God can bring forth good things from our trials even if we can’t see them. Also discuss in what ways you have seen these ideas work in your own lives.

Trials come to prove and improve us.
—Augustine

We are always in the forge, or on the anvil; by trials God is shaping us for higher things.

—Henry Ward Beecher

Only desperation opens our eyes to God’s love.

—Pastor James Denney

Trials, obstacles, difficulties and sometimes defeats, are the very food of faith.

—George Muller

Trials are medicines which our gracious and wise Physician prescribes because we need them.

—John Newton



Consider ways we can rejoice and have hope during trials.

Handout:

‘Rejoicing in Trials’

Read the handout and share answers with one another. You may also choose to discuss your answers with the rest of the class.

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Hope in Trials

Three months before her 18th birthday, Joni Eareckson Tada’s life changed forever when she became paralyzed from the shoulders down after diving into shallow water in the Chesapeake Bay. How can she live with hope when her body is wasting away in a wheelchair and she has recurring cancer, lung problems, and chronic pain? Joni believes God’s promise that despite her body decaying each day, she is being renewed spiritually. Her hope grows day by day as she experiences more of God’s love and grace. Joni believes “deep, great trials bring deep grace from God.”

Horatio Spafford experienced financial loss, the death of his four-year-old son to scarlet fever, and then the death of his four daughters in a shipwreck. Yet, filled with hope, he wrote the hymn, “It Is Well with My Soul.” He actually wrote these words as he was passing over the exact spot of the shipwreck that took his daughters’ lives. His faith in a loving God enabled him to have hope in trials.

I understand that. Cerebral meningitis led to 36 hours in a coma, bell palsy on the left side of my face, and hearing loss in my left ear. My family and friends prayed that I would survive. Almost 20 years later, I am still alive. My slightly crooked face with my almost closed left eye draws attention from children. The effects of cerebral meningitis slowly attack my aging body. Yet, every day is filled with hope as I experience God’s love, joy, and grace through my family, friends, and the ministry He has given me. My hope in a new body in heaven is real, but my hope in the midst of trials is just as real. For God has demonstrated through His Son that there is future freedom from trials.

13. Does having hope in trials mean that we don’t experience sorrow or disappointment? Explain your answer.

14. How does knowing God’s promises in the Bible give us hope in trials?

15. What trial(s) are you going through that you need God’s hope to endure?

4 Life Response

Press forward toward future freedom while enduring trials.

Your class has discussed and studied how to rejoice and hope during trials. When trials come into our lives, we can become weary and lose hope or we can press forward holding onto God's promise for future freedom. Ask your students to read "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize" in the student book. Remind your students that God desires for us to trust Him and press forward as trials come into our lives. One way we can do that is to focus on His promises of present freedom from sin and

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Keep Your Eyes on the Prize

In 1957, Alice Wine rewrote a famous spiritual song, "Keep Your Hand on the Plow," and titled it "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize."

"Paul and Silas thought they was lost/ Dungeon shook and the chains come off

Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on/ Freedom's name is mighty sweet

And soon we're gonna meet/ Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on."

Paul and Silas kept their eyes on the prize of God's promise of freedom either here on earth or in heaven. We should do the same with rejoicing and hope.

► *Describe some ways you can keep your eyes on the prize of becoming more like Jesus while enduring a present trial. Think too of things you have done during past trials that can help.*

KEY VERSE

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

—Romans 8:18, KJV

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. —Romans 8:18, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of May 9 to May 15

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon. Galatians 3:1-5—Receiving the Spirit through Faith.
- Tue. Galatians 3:6-17—The Blessing Comes through Christ.
- Wed. 2 Peter 1:2-4—God's Power Grants Life and Godliness.
- Thu. Hosea 2:16-23—Betrothed in Faithfulness.
- Fri. Luke 6:45-49—A Wise and Faithful Builder.
- Sat. Genesis 17:1-8—Walk Blameless before God.
- Sun. Galatians 3:18-29—No Longer Subject to the Law.

future freedom with Him eternally. We must also deliberately choose each day to rejoice and hope during life's trials.

Close the class by providing your students a few silent minutes to reflect on trials in their lives. Encourage them to thank God for these trials and pray for strength to press forward in upcoming trials of life. Challenge your students to memorize and meditate on one of the Scripture verses read in this lesson to strengthen them in the next trial.



As the class members are leaving, hand out copies of this week's *Power for Living*. Take or mail copies of *Lesson Leaflet* to those who couldn't be with you today, or send them to those you would like to join your class.

Before Teaching Next Week's Lesson

Before next week, read Galatians 3:18-29. Ask your students to think about ways we are all different, yet the same.



Lesson Overview

Week of May 15

1 Life Need:

Discuss characteristics of unity in the Body of Christ.

2 Bible Learning:

Study the concepts of the law of Moses and faith in Christ Jesus.

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit*: Poster and reproducible handout—Letters of Redemption and Freedom

3 Bible Application:

Identify specific ways we can accept God's promise of freedom.

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit*: Reproducible sheet—Our Inheritance

4 Life Response:

Commit to living in unity with fellow believers in the Body of Christ.

Church/Home Theme: Our God's Love Heals

Lesson Focus:

Seek unity: we are all one in God's family through faith.

Lesson Scripture:

Galatians 3:18-29

Freedom and the Law

Reason for the Law—One part of the reason God gave Moses the Law was to implement some restraint before Jesus came to earth. Without some standard of behavior, people would have destroyed one another through the fleshly nature. The Law also shows us how desperately we need a Savior.

Moses and all the Old Testament people needed a mediator. But once Jesus came, the veil in the temple was torn, symbolizing no more priestly separation between God and people. Jesus' sacrifice made a way for those who believe to gain access to God.

Falling Short—Scripture makes it clear: all have sinned, meaning all humanity has fallen short of God's perfect standard. We can only gain access to God by believing by faith and thereby be covered by the blood of Jesus Christ. Those who take advantage of that access rest in the freedom of Christ. Satan delights in convincing people, "You are fine—you do not need Jesus, you do not need His blood and God's forgiveness." That is a lie.

More Like Christ—When a person becomes a Christian, he or she is swallowed up in Christ. A follower of Christ, little by little, more and more, evidences Christ—we see more of Christ, less and less of the person.

Once a person commits to Jesus, he or she now becomes part of the Body of Christ. Labels like I am a Jew, I am a priest, I am a Gentile are obsolete. When it comes to identifying Abraham's seed, who is in the Jewish family, it includes all that have committed to Christ, not just those who are Jewish by family or cultural association.

As Your Students Arrive

On a board or sheet of newsprint, start a list of ways students tell you that people are all different, yet the same. For example, we have different colors of eyes, different heights and weights, different shoe sizes, but we are all made in God's image, we all need sleep every night, and 99.9% of the DNA in all human beings is similar. We are more alike than different. This week we will talk about our differences but focus on the freedom and inheritance we share equally in Christ.

Link to Last Week

Encourage a few students to share how they are making it through a current trial by focusing on their hope in Jesus.

1 Life Need

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Freedom and the Law

Rodney listened, his mind not on his booth of novelty Memorial Day wreaths. The man at the next craft table, a jewelry booth, was talking to a festival-goer about plans to start a Christian youth activity center. When Rodney's wife, Kala, returned from the restroom, he told her he was going to visit with the man in the next booth.

Rodney introduced himself and learned that the jewelry maker was Pastor Leonard. The two exchanged cards, and Pastor Leonard was pleasantly surprised that Rodney was also a pastor. Their churches were in neighboring cities.

"It's nice to meet you, but excuse me for asking," said Pastor Leonard, "but why would you want to help us? You could just pursue the idea with your church members and your community."

"Well, why be separated when we can work together?" Rodney said. "We're all part of the same body, and we want to see the same thing—more souls in the kingdom of God."

"I'm sorry," said Pastor Leonard, "but I've had some bad experiences with churches trying to outdo each other."

"The Lord wants us working and fellowshiping together," said Rodney. "We're all one in Him."

"Amen!" smiled Pastor Leonard.

"Honey," Rodney beckoned to his wife, "come meet our brother in Christ."

1. When have you experienced the reality of being part of the Body of Christ?

2. Why is it sometimes difficult to connect with other believers who are different from us in some way?

3. What can we do to develop unity with fellow believers?

Discuss characteristics of unity in the Body of Christ.

Begin your lesson reading the opening anecdote from the student book, then forming small groups to answer **Questions 1, 2, and 3**.

For Question 1, ask class members to share examples of times when they have experienced a sense of unity when gathered with other believers. Discuss what prompted the experiences—studying a passage of Scripture together, working together with a common goal and purpose, or overcoming differences of opinion and agreeing on a compromise.

Question 2 asks students to consider why believers might not always experience unity in the Body of Christ. Sometimes our difficulty may come from not understanding another person's background or perspective. It's easy for us to separate ourselves into "us" versus "them" groups based on comparison and differences.

That leads into Question 3, which asks what we can do to overcome our difficulties to develop unity with other Christians. The gospel message encourages us to overlook our differences and focus on what we share in Christ. We have all been adopted into God's family through our faith and trust in the redemptive work of Jesus on the Cross.

LESSON FOCUS: Seek unity: we are all one in God's family through faith.

2 Bible Learning

Study the concepts of the law of Moses and faith in Christ Jesus.



On the handout, read the fourth paragraph, and on the poster, note the relief of a Roman teacher with three students.

THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW OF MOSES

Read Galatians

3:18-22 and highlight these important points:

BIBLE EXTRA

Christian Liberty vs. the Judaizers

Many Bible scholars have called Paul's letter to the Galatians the "Magna Carta of Christian Liberty." What gave rise to his stringent teaching on Christian liberty was the question of whether Gentiles must convert to Judaism and observe the law of Moses before they could be regarded as true believers. Legalistic Jewish Christians were accusing Paul of downplaying the importance of the law in order to make his message more appealing to Gentiles.

Some of these Judaizers had visited the churches in Galatia that Paul had founded. They taught that, in order for the Gentiles to become truly Christian, they had to submit to Jewish edicts and customs. Heading the list for the Judaizers was the Gentiles' need to be circumcised. Paul followed the Jewish laws and customs. Nevertheless, he adamantly opposed the efforts of the Judaizers to force Gentile converts to the faith to heed these requirements.

In the Letter to the Galatians, the apostle repeatedly stressed that we are saved and justified by faith, not by keeping the law. For instance, Paul pointed out how the Galatians received the Holy Spirit after hearing about the Messiah and trusting in Him for salvation. Circumcision was not required.

- The law of Moses does not invalidate God's earlier promise to Abraham.
- God promised He would bless Abraham's descendants apart from the law.
- Moses was God's representative to the people.
- The law of Moses was given as a temporary measure to prepare people for the coming Messiah.
- God established the law alongside the promise to reveal our sins and transgressions.
- The law shows how people violate God's moral

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The Purpose of the Law of Moses

Galatians 3:18-22, KJV

18 For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

19 Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.

20 Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.

21 Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

22 But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

Galatians 3:18-22, NIV

¹⁸For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

¹⁹Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. ²⁰A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one.

²¹Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. ²²But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

In Galatians 3:17, Paul stated that the law God gave to Moses, even though it came 430 years after the covenant God ratified with Abraham, did not invalidate the earlier "promise." Despite the addition of the law of Moses, the "inheritance" (vs. 18), or blessing, of Abraham's descendants continued to be based on God's pledge.

Paul next asked and answered two questions that might



Further commentary on this Scripture passage can be found on pp. 561-564 in *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament*.

standard and stand in need of salvation.

- When Messiah came to fulfill God's promise, the law had prepared people to trust Messiah for forgiveness of sins.
- God gave the law, and His people were responsible to obey it.
- In God's covenant with Abraham, He is the only active party and will unconditionally fulfill His promise.
- The law of Moses did not bring new spiritual life; right standing before God is not based on keeping the law.

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naturally have arisen in his readers' minds. The first question asked why the law was given. Paul explained that it was temporary to prepare people for the Messiah's advent.

To be more specific, God established the "law" alongside the "promise" to reveal to people their "transgressions." Accordingly, when the Son (referred to as the "Seed," Gal. 3:19) came as the fulfillment of Father's promise, the chosen people should have been ready to seek the forgiveness of their sins by trusting in the Messiah.

Unlike God's promise to Abraham, which was permanent, the law was temporary to get people ready for Jesus. Even though the law came from God, it was administered through "angels" by a "mediator"—Moses (vs. 19).

Normally, binding agreements that require an intermediary are those in which both parties are active. The covenant of Moses fits this description: God gave the law, but His people were responsible to obey it. God's covenant with Abraham had only one active "party" (vs. 20), the Lord, who unilaterally gave His promise to Abraham and unconditionally pledged He would fulfill it.

In verse 21, Paul posed his second question. Do the distinctions between the law of Moses and the covenant with Abraham mean there is a conflict between these two? The short answer is not at all. The longer explanation is that the "law" and the divine "promises" are not contrary to one another, for they merely worked on different levels.

The law could not bring new "life" (vs. 21) to its adherents. It not only brought about a knowledge of sin, but also placed all humanity under its curse until the Messiah, who fulfilled God's promise to Abraham. Those who trust in Jesus for salvation receive God's promise of freedom.

4. What is the basis for believers receiving God's promises?

5. What was the purpose of the law of Moses?

6. How is it that the law does not stand in opposition to God's promises?

- The law makes people aware of their sin and also places them under the curse of sin.
- Messiah fulfills God's promise to Abraham and offers freedom from the law and sin's bondage.

Suggested Answer to Question 4

Some among Paul's readers thought they had to obey the law of Moses to receive the Creator's blessings. The apostle countered that this was a flawed understanding of what Scripture taught. The believers' "inheritance" (Gal. 3:18) was due solely and entirely to God's "grace" (NIV).

Suggested Answer to Question 5

Paul noted that God never intended the "law" (Gal. 3:19) to be a means of salvation. Its purpose was to show that all people are transgressors of the Creator's will. Just as importantly, the legal code highlighted every person's need of salvation through faith in the promised descendant of David.

Suggested Answer to Question 6

On the surface, it might have appeared to Paul's readers that the law of Moses was antagonistic to what the Father had pledged to believers in the Son. Yet, as the apostle noted, the law had no inherent power to bestow eternal "life" (vs. 21). Instead, the law prepared the eventual heirs of the divine promise for the advent of the Savior, Jesus of Nazareth.

THE CHILDREN OF GOD THROUGH FAITH

Read Galatians 3:23-29 and then discuss the following key ideas:

- The law held people in protective custody, prisoners in bondage to their sin, until the time of the Redeemer.
- This legal and moral code held people captive and exposed

transgressions and provoked action.

- The legal code figuratively fulfilled the role of a guardian who trains and disciplines charges, revealing and condemning sin until Messiah came.
- Now through faith in Jesus'

BIBLE EXTRA

Coheirs with Christ

In Galatians 3:1–4:7, Paul explained our position in God's family using an illustration from the first century A.D. of a child heir before becoming an adult. This heir, even though he would someday inherit his father's entire estate, was treated no differently than a slave when he was a minor child. Under Roman law, the father set the time for coming of age. A sacred family festival celebrated this time of the child's maturity when the child was recognized as an adult and heir. Paul compared the childhood state to the condition of someone under the law, while the ascent into adulthood represents the freedom that both believing men and women share as coheirs with Christ.

BIBLE EXTRA

God's Solution to Humanity's Problem

What is the basis for the believers' "righteousness" (Gal. 3:21) and justification (vs. 24)? The answer is found in Romans 3. Paul explained that everyone has "sinned" (vs. 23), which means both Jews and Gentiles are guilty of violating God's will. More sobering was the apostle's indictment that all human beings "fall short" of the Father's infinitely perfect moral standard. Humanity's problem of not measuring up compelled God to provide a solution, one that is found in justification (vs. 24).

Like two sides of a coin, the Greek verb translated "justified" has two complementary meanings. On one side of the coin, the term denotes a person being pronounced not guilty before the Creator. On the other side, the verb means that same individual is declared to be in a right relationship with God. Justification is a wonderful event that happens at the moment of conversion. It begins a lifelong process of transformation called sanctification (or growth in holiness) in which the believer becomes more like the Son.

redemptive work we are declared righteous and there is no longer need for the law.

- Although Gentiles had not been raised with the law, Jews and Gentiles alike become spiritual adults when they trust in Christ for salvation.

- All those who trust God's Son have reached spiritual adulthood and become "sons" of God.

- When we receive salvation, we are baptized into Christ and clothed with Him.

- We identify and participate with the Messiah in His death and resurrection through baptism, and take on His righteousness by faith.

- In Christ there are no distinctions of race, social status, or gender.

- All people are worthy to follow Him and

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The Children of God through Faith

Galatians 3:23-29, KJV

23 But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

29 And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:23-29, NIV

²³Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed.

²⁴So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith.

²⁵Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

²⁶So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

In the Roman world, wealthy families often had a servant who supervised the conduct of the family's sons. Paul compared the law of Moses to this servant. In a manner of speaking, the law held us in its protective "custody" (vs. 23). The legal code was also like a guard who kept us "locked up" as prisoners until the time when we would believe in the Redeemer.

The Greek noun rendered "guardian" (Gal. 3:24) refers to a guide or custodian for younger children, often a slave who trained and instructed his master's children. In a

become children of God.

- All who trust in the Redeemer are Abraham's spiritual descendants and heirs of God's promise.

Suggested Answer to Question 7

Paul disclosed that in the era preceding the coming of Christ, God's people were confined "under the law." In a manner of speaking, they were held captive with a view to the future. Their opportunity to be set free from the law would come when the Father unveiled the way of "faith" in the Son.

Suggested Answer to Question 8

Galatians 3:26 states that personal merit was not the way in which anyone became one of God's

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figurative sense, the law code operated as a disciplinarian by revealing sin and condemning it.

The law continued in this function until the Messiah came. Now that the Father has established "faith" (vs. 25) in His Son as the way to be declared righteous (or "justified," vs. 24), we no longer need the law as our custodian.

Jewish Christians had grown up (in terms of their relationship to the law) and reached spiritual adulthood (in terms of their relationship to the Messiah). The Gentile believers in Galatia had not been raised according to the law. Nonetheless, they had also become spiritual adults when they trusted in the Messiah for salvation.

Paul described salvation not only as becoming adults in God's spiritual family, but also as being "baptized into Christ" and "clothed . . . with Christ." Through faith, they are "baptized" into and "clothed" with the Messiah (vs. 27). Put another way, they took on His righteousness by faith. They became God's adult "children" (vs. 26).

Jesus broke down worldly divisions by coming. Race, social status, and gender have no bearing on who can become a follower of the Savior. It also means that all people in society should be seen as persons of equal worth.

Prejudice existed between Jews and non-Jews over religious, political, and cultural issues. Hundreds of thousands of people in the Roman Empire were enslaved. Women had limited legal rights and were often looked down upon by men. Thankfully, through the influence of Christian principles, many of these social divisions have been abolished. As verse 29 says, all who have trusted in the Redeemer are Abraham's spiritual descendants and heirs.

7. In what sense were God's people once imprisoned by the law?

8. How is it possible for anyone to become a member of God's spiritual family?

9. What is the implication of being joined to Christ by faith?

"children." Rather, it was by trusting in the Messiah that people joined the Creator's spiritual family. Likewise, they could rest in the assurance of being freely accepted and loved by Him.

Suggested Answer to Question 9

Paul indicated that being united with the Savior was comparable to putting on a new set of clothes (Gal. 3:27). This wonderful truth applied to every believer, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, and status in society.

BIBLE EXTRA

Christ Is All That Matters

Galatians 3:28 is not the only place where Paul declared that commonly recognized divisions between groups of people were eliminated among Jesus' followers. Colossians 3:11 says that Christ is all that matters for His followers: "Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free." Paul explained that for the remainder of the believers' time on earth, the Son renews their minds and transforms their thinking, with the result that they choose to do the Father's perfect will. In this new way of living, there are no distinctions between any of us who belong to Him.

WINDOW ON THE WORD

Unity in a Divided World

Our global society makes it possible for believers to unite as never before. We can now hear perspectives from Christians who have different backgrounds and experiences than our own. We can choose to unite to form a great light against the darkness of the world. Positive stories encourage believers to come together with a common focus on our redemption and shared inheritance as God's children. Whether we meet in person or online (for whatever reasons), believers now access online tools to overcome differences and celebrate unity in exactly these ways.

Let us share peacefully and joyfully in our inheritance, knowing that in God's kingdom there are no dividing lines, as there are in the world.

3 Bible Application

This lesson step helps students make connections between freedom from the law and living as children of God through faith. Ask class members to participate in one of these activities. If possible, photocopy this page and give instructions to each group. Make copies of the handout from the Resource Kit for the group using it.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Discussion Group

Read “Freedom in Christ” from the student book and respond to **Questions 10, 11, 12, and 13** in the student book. We trust in Christ’s redemptive work on the Cross when we recognize the only way we receive right standing before God is to rely on what He has done to reconcile us to God. God’s promise extends to all who trust Jesus for forgiveness of and freedom from sin. Since God accepts anyone without partiality, we can live in unity as believers who are part of the Body of Christ. When we take on His righteousness, we can also accept others in spite of our differences.

Invitation to Receive God’s Promise

Write a letter or invitation to someone you know inviting them to join God’s family and receive the inheritance God has waiting especially for them. Consider especially the promise of adoption into God’s family of believers and His acceptance of all without division or partiality. Refer to what you have learned in your study of this passage in Galatians for additional ideas. If possible, deliver your invitation to its recipient.



Identify specific ways we can accept God’s promise of freedom.

Handout: ‘Our Inheritance’

Work together with your group to find and read Scripture verses that describe believers’ inheritance and how Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham (for example, Rom. 9:8; Gal. 3:7). Summarize your ideas and share with the rest of the class.

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Freedom in Christ

Paul’s words are as relevant today as they were when he wrote. Anyone who seeks the blessing of God’s promised inheritance may receive it. God’s promise is based on His grace in sending Jesus, not on obeying the law of Moses. Although the law may not be readily apparent in current society, its tenets still provide a moral compass. Paul said, “we were held in custody under the law” (Gal. 3:23), which was given to show how people violate God’s standard. The law points us to our need for salvation. For those who claim they have kept all the commandments, Jesus reminded His followers to consider sins of the heart and mind as well as deed.

The Good News of the Gospel is even though the law does not give spiritual life, it leads us to Christ, the source of true life and our eternal inheritance. Our risen Savior lives today to break down the same worldly divisions of race, politics, social status, gender, and culture. Just as all are held captive to the bondage of sin, anyone may experience freedom from the law through faith in Jesus. When we trust in Christ’s redemptive work, when we live clothed with His righteousness, there are no distinctions between us as believers.

Jesus dwells in all believers and unites them into one body despite our differences. We are all children of God, but all children are different. We can unite under the freedom we have in Him.

10. What does it mean to trust in Christ’s redemptive work?

11. What divisions between believers have you noticed?

12. What are some ways we can unite together in the Body of Christ in spite of our differences?

13. What might it mean in practical terms to live clothed with Christ’s righteousness?

4 Life Response

Commit to living in unity with fellow believers in the Body of Christ.

Your class has studied Paul's teaching on the purpose of the law of Moses and how it relates to freedom from sin and living as children of God through faith. Once we trust Christ for salvation, we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. In Him there are no distinctions, and we are free to live in unity as children of God.

Ask students to read "Living in Unity" in *Comprehensive Bible Study* and think about how they would answer the question. They may want

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Living in Unity

We see the word unity within the larger word community. The Body of Christ functions as a community of believers, who then reach out to others to invite them also to become part of God's family through trust and faith in Jesus.

► How can we overcome differences with fellow Christians to show unity to our community? How can we then show and extend God's grace to invite others to receive the fulfillment of God's promise?

KEY VERSE

And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. —Galatians 3:29, KJV

If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. —Galatians 3:29, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of May 16 through May 22

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon. Galatians 4:1-7—Children and Heirs through God.
- Tue. Philippians 3:1-8a (end with "my Lord")—Losing All for Christ.
- Wed. Philippians 3:8b-14 (begin with "For his sake")—Press toward the Goal.
- Thu. 1 John 4:7-13—Let Us Love One Another.
- Fri. Matthew 5:43-48—Love and Pray for Your Enemies.
- Sat. Proverbs 17:13-17—Avoid Strife; Love Always.
- Sun. Galatians 5:1-15—Faith Working through Love.

to return to the groups they had in Step 1 and discuss possible answers. Encourage them to write a sentence of intent—how they might carry out any answers they thought of. They may write something such as, "I will visit with my friend from Fellowship Church and ask her about ways we can cooperate to show Christ to the community," or "We will reach out to a class at Agape Church to help sponsor a city picnic the community can come to."

End the lesson with a closing prayer, something like, "Lord, thank You for fulfilling Your promise by sending Your Son Jesus to give us salvation. Thank You for adopting us into Your family. Please help us to live in unity, accepting others in the Body of Christ as co-heirs of the promise."



As the class members are leaving, hand out copies of this week's *Power for Living*. Take or mail copies of *Lesson Leaflet* to those who couldn't be with you today, or send them to those you would like to join your class.

Before Teaching Next Week's Lesson

Before next week, read Galatians 5:1-15. Ask students to think about one or more acts of humble, loving service they have observed.



Lesson Overview

Week of May 22

1 Life Need:

Discuss what it means to live a life of freedom in Christ

2 Bible Learning:

Study what it means to be free in Christ

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit*: Poster and reproducible handout—Letters of Redemption and Freedom

3 Bible Application:

Identify specific ways we can use our freedom in Christ to love and serve others

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit*: Reproducible sheet—Gifts of Love

4 Life Response:

Commit to seeking specific ways to love and serve others

Suggested Material:

■ Index cards

Church/Home Theme: Our God's Love Heals

Lesson Focus:

Express your freedom in Christ through humble and loving service.

Lesson Scripture: *Galatians 5:1-15*

The Nature of Christian Freedom

Freedom in Christ—Paul challenged the Galatian church to continue to walk in their liberty in Christ. He called this group of believers to minister to the unbelievers with humility and compassion. God offers this freedom as a gift to His children. Unbelievers may say, “I’m free to do anything I want,” but that is not genuine freedom, only more bondage to sin. Paul encouraged the Galatian church to keep sharing their newfound faith. Do not go back to trying to follow rules and regulations. This kind of living leads to anger and frustration. And most of all, don’t attempt to put this burden of keeping the Jewish law on others.

The Judaizers and the legalists wanted adherence to the law in addition to believing in Christ. Paul said, “No!” He said God has generously given favor and grace, not because of human behavior. By grace we are saved through faith. Only because of what Christ did on the Cross can anyone come into the presence of God. Nothing must be added to faith. What is most important is walking in love, combined with faith.

Keep Walking—Paul said the Galatians were off to a good start but then turned away from the truth. Those with legalism and false doctrines came into the church and challenged those talking about freedom in Christ. The religious leaders insisted on following the old way, the old rules, and rituals. On the other hand, Paul said to get back on the road of truth and keep walking there.

Paul concluded that trying to stick to Jewish rules and rituals, along with following Christ, is no little thing. The apostle wished the false teachers preaching erroneous doctrine would be cut off from the people. The confusion hindered the believers from growing and being all God intended them to be. Knowingly spreading untruths about the Gospel is a grave offense in the eyes of God—and it won’t go unpunished.

Freedom to Love—Freedom in Christ is a call to love one another and serve one another. Loving God and loving each other sums up the law in one phrase.

As Your Students Arrive

Invite students to share one or more acts of humble, loving service they have observed. Perhaps they saw someone allow a person to cut ahead of them in a long line or saw a good Samaritan helping someone change a tire.

Link to Last Week

A few students may want to tell how they tried to help bring unity in the Body of Christ this past week.

1 Life Need

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The Nature of Christian Freedom

Those are some cute, new planting gloves," said Danielle, as she took survey of the gardening tools and chicken wire laid out on her friend's deck. "What are you planting?"

"Lettuce, tomatoes, peppers, and squash," answered Clarissa, digging around in her gardening tote bag.

"But you already have those," Danielle said, looking out at the southeast end of Clarissa's expansive yard. "Are you planting more?"

"Yes," smiled Clarissa, "but at Mrs. Odessa's house."

"That mean old woman?" frowned Danielle.

"She's not all bad," offered Clarissa.

"She's not all good, either," Danielle rebutted. "She doesn't even speak to people in the neighborhood."

"I've been talking to her," said Clarissa. "It has been one-sided most of the time. I did mention my garden a while back, and her eyes lit up. Then I offered to plant a small garden in her back yard, and help her tend to it."

"Mrs. Odessa said she was a farm girl and would love to have something in her yard to do. So, wah-la!" Clarissa gestured expanding her hands over the gardening tools.

"Well, she sure doesn't deserve your kindness," Danielle murmured.

"I don't deserve the love and goodness of God," Clarissa said somberly, "but He gives it to me anyway. He tells me to love others, and thank God He empowers me to do it!"

1. What different motives do people have when choosing a church to attend? Which motives more accurately reflect living from a perspective of freedom in Christ?

2. What does it mean to exercise and live a life of freedom in Christ?

3. How might we use our freedom in practical ways to live God's way?

Discuss what it means to live a life of freedom in Christ.

Begin your lesson reading the opening anecdote from the student book, then form small groups to answer **Questions 1, 2, and 3**.

For Question 1, encourage students to expand on and discuss reasons people choose to attend one church over another. Often, our motives are not simply what we can give to or receive from what a church offers to the community. Community factors such as people we know or location may also influence our decision, and may reflect selfless or selfish reasons.

Question 2 invites students to reflect on Paul's message of freedom in Christ. As people who now have a relationship with God, we are set free from the bondage of sin. This enables us to choose to live God's way, which is the way of love.

This leads into Question 3, which asks class members to discuss practical ways they might exercise their freedom in Christ. The anecdote provides a starting point for the conversation with words such as affection, empathy, compassion, and service. Paul reminds us that we love best out of an understanding of Christ's redemptive love for us.

LESSON FOCUS: Express your freedom in Christ through humble and loving service.

2 Bible Learning

Study what it means to be free in Christ.



On the handout, read the fifth paragraph, and on the poster, point out the photos of the piles of bread for sale in Jerusalem and the ruins of the Roman stadium in Aphrodisias, Turkey, where races were run.

BIBLE EXTRA

The Circumcision Controversy

Circumcision figures predominantly in our lesson text. God instituted this practice as a sign of the covenant between Himself and Abraham's descendants. Circumcision was intended to mark their entry into the community of faith in the Lord (see Gen. 17:9-14, 23-27; Rom. 4:11). In ancient Israel, circumcision was done on the eighth day after the son's birth, usually by the father.

On the one hand, Paul affirmed the propriety of his ethnic peers being circumcised. In fact, on at least one occasion he circumcised a believer when he thought it was appropriate to do so (see Acts 16:3). On the other hand, the apostle objected to anyone teaching that a right standing with God comes through obeying a religious ceremony such as circumcision. Paul's view was that his religious peers were free to decide whether to circumcise themselves and their sons. Yet, no one should try to force Gentile Christians to be circumcised.

Paul transformed the meaning of circumcision from an external mutilation of the flesh, which could be done only to males, to the internal work of God's Spirit that marks every believer's union with the Father based on the Son's redemptive work (see Col. 2:11, 13). Paul declared that it is Jesus' disciples—namely, everyone worshiping and serving God by the power of the Spirit (see John 4:23-24)—who are the true "circumcision" (Phil. 3:3) and the real people of God (see Gal. 3:6-4:7).

BEING SET FREE IN CHRIST

Read Galatians 5:1-6 and review these important points with your class:

- Jesus offers unconditional spiritual freedom to those who repent from their sins and trust in Him.
- Jesus purchased our freedom from sin and the law through His death on the Cross.
- Although we are free from sin, it is our responsibility to stand firm and live in that freedom.
- Those who rely on works-based righteousness

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Being Set Free in Christ

Galatians 5:1-6, KJV

1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

2 Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.

3 For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.

4 Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

5 For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.

6 For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

Galatians 5:1-6, NIV

¹It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

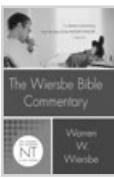
²Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. ³Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. ⁴You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

⁵For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope.

⁶For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

Paul began Chapter 5 with a declaration that the Messiah offered spiritual "freedom" (vs. 1) to repentant, believing sinners, with no preconditions to their redemption.

But with spiritual liberty comes personal responsibility. While the Galatians could not have set themselves free, Paul said they had the duty to resist being enslaved again. The Judaizers—those who said that Gentiles must convert to Judaism to be true believers—tried to place on the Galatians the burden of observing the law. Yet, they had to stand firm as free people, and not allow themselves to be



Further commentary on this Scripture passage can be found on pp. 570-573 in *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament*.

choose to subject themselves again to the law.

- Circumcision was an outward sign of submitting to the law.
- Those who return to the law of Moses (circumcision) turn away from grace and Christ's redemptive work.
- Those who follow one aspect of the law find themselves obligated to heed it all.
- We cannot obtain right standing with God through following the law.
- Our faith in Christ and God's grace expresses itself in love toward others.

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weighed down under legalistic burdens.

Paul tried to convince the Galatians not to accept circumcision by warning them about two negative consequences of the step. First, he assured them that if they got circumcised, Jesus would be of no use to them—if they depended on circumcision to reconcile them to the Father, they would not be depending on the Son to receive the Father's pardon.

Second, the Galatians would be "obliged to obey the whole law" (vs. 3). The sinful person had to observe all the law perfectly. Some were seeking to get right with God by slavishly observing the law, but Paul bluntly declared that as a result, they had abandoned the "grace" of God and had denied the sufficiency of Jesus' sacrifice.

Believers are instead justified in the presence of the Father through faith in the Son. As the Holy Spirit works in their lives, they become increasingly devoted to God. Therefore, circumcision has no effect on believers' right standing before God—neither its presence nor absence mattered. Instead, what matters is "faith" in the Messiah demonstrating itself in genuine acts of "love" toward others (vs. 6).

4. In what sense had the Galatians been misled?

5. What was the result of trying to be justified by the law?

Censuring for the Agitators

Galatians 5:7-12, KJV

7 Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?

8 This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you.

9 A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.

10 I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise

Galatians 5:7-12, NIV

⁷You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth?

⁸That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. ⁹"A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." ¹⁰I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing

Suggested Answer to Question 4

False teachers had deceived some of the believers in the churches in Galatia about the nature of their salvation in Christ (Gal. 5:1). Supposedly, they needed to observe Jewish religious rituals to enjoy God's favor. This countered the truth of the Gospel that Christ had freed His followers from all forms of legalism.

Suggested Answer to Question 5

The false teachers claimed that scrupulously following the law of Moses legal code was necessary to be declared righteous. Paul countered that the opposite was true. Specifically, those who tried to get right with God by keeping various rules and regulations "alienated" (NIV) themselves from the Savior.

CENSURING FOR THE AGITATORS

Read Galatians 5:7-12 and then discuss the following key ideas:

- Paul claimed the legalists hindered

BIBLE EXTRA

Grace Means Freedom

After Paul won the Galatians to Christ, they undoubtedly struggled to find their way. The new believers strained to grasp how "grace" had changed them. They also faced staggering social upheaval. For instance, the Gospel put Gentiles on an equal basis with Jews.

In this explosive atmosphere, a spark was struck. Judaizers introduced their brand of the Gospel. They believed God's grace was for Jews only. According to the legalists, if Gentiles wanted salvation, they first had to become Jewish.

Paul's message was quite different from that of the Judaizers. He taught that grace means freedom. To return to the law of Moses was to abandon grace. To use freedom irresponsibly was unloving, contradicting grace. Paul stressed to the Galatians that they needed to mature in Christ and live in the power of the Spirit, not the flesh.

the Galatian believers in their Christian walk.

- Their teaching caused some believers to disobey and stray from the truth of the Gospel message.
- Paul's message (Gospel) of freedom in Christ is the truth that comes from God.
- Like yeast, a small amount of false teaching, or evil influences, spreads and impacts all it touches.
- Paul was "confident" in the "Lord" that his readers were true believers who would reject the false teaching.
- Contrary to the Judaizers' claim, Paul did not teach the necessity of circumcision for salvation.
- Paul pointed to his persecution as proof that he did not teach that circumcision was necessary.
- Requiring circumcision would nullify the value of Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the Cross.
- Circumcision had no redemptive value for believers and is not a requirement for eternal life.
- Instead, this false teaching was detrimental to the spiritual well-being of Galatian believers.

Suggested Answer to Question 6

Paul's reference to the "truth" was to the Gospel. Religious legalists convinced some believers in Galatia to no longer be persuaded by the good news of freedom in Christ. Just as dire was that these believers began to disobey, rather than heed, the "truth."

Suggested Answer to Question 7

The apostle's detractors insinuated that he declared the necessity of "circumcision" (Gal. 5:11) for Gentile Christians. Paul, however, stated this allegation was false. After all, the apostle continued to be "persecuted" for making the "cross" the central focus of his "preaching."

SERVING ONE ANOTHER

Read Galatians 5:13-15 and highlight these key ideas in the text:

- Freedom in Christ does not give believers freedom to sin by living without regard for others.
- Paul warned the Galatians not to attack and exploit each other, in much the same way animals attack and devour one another.
- We are not to use our freedom to indulge in anything that leads to iniquity or opposes God.
- We have been set free to love others as Christ loves.
- Paul encourages us to use our freedom to serve one another in love.
- The word "serve" means to become

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minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be.

11 And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased.

12 I would they were even cut off which trouble you.

you into confusion, whoever that may be, will have to pay the penalty.¹¹Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished.¹²As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

Most cities in the Roman Empire had a large stadium where athletic events were held. Paul compared his readers to runners in a "race" (vs. 7), and he compared the legalists to unfair competitors who had "cut in on" the Galatians, causing them to break their runners' stride and hindering them from heeding the "truth" of the Gospel. Verse 9 quotes a popular saying of Paul's day—that a small amount of leaven (considered to be an evil, corrupting influence) was enough to cause an entire mass of dough to rise. False teaching, like yeast, spread and impacted everything it touched such as the believers in Galatia. But Paul was sure his readers belonged to the Lord, and God would judge those who created "confusion" (vs. 10) for the Galatians.

Apparently, the Judaizers had falsely claimed that Paul taught the necessity of circumcision, perhaps because he did not object to Jews living according to the law. Paul responded that if he had advocated circumcision for all, the Judaizers would have been supporting him rather than persecuting him. He used a sarcastic, crude statement to declare they should emasculate themselves (as pagans would do in their rituals), so they would become impotent in spreading their heretical views.

6. What did Paul have in mind when he referred to the "truth" (Gal. 5:7)?

7. What accusation did Paul's antagonists make about his preaching?

bondservants of one another.

- We keep the essence of the “law” when we love and serve others sacrificially with compassion.
- The law of Moses can be summed up by loving others as much as we love ourselves.

Suggested Answer to Question 8

Paul explained that the believers’ “liberty” (Gal. 5:13, KJV) in Christ was never meant to be an excuse to do whatever they wanted. Instead, Jesus set His followers “free” (NIV) to “serve” their fellow disciples. Moreover, they were to do so in Christlike “love.”

Suggested Answer to Question 9

The apostle’s detractors claimed that the slavish observance of rites and rituals was the key concern of the “law” (Gal. 5:14). In contrast, the apostle taught that the law of Moses legal code could be summed up by the single tenet of loving others as much as we love ourselves. Doing so was a true demonstration of the believers’ freedom in Christ.

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Serving One Another

Galatians 5:13-15, KJV

13 For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

15 But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.

Though Paul told the Galatians that they didn’t need to follow the practices of Judaism, he also emphasized that their Christian liberty was not a license to sin, to gratify their “flesh” (vs. 13). Instead, the Galatians were to use their freedom to minister to one another with Christlike love. The Greek verb rendered “serve” is a strong term often used for slavery. Paul urged the Galatians not to enslave themselves to the law but to become servants of one another. When Christians love and serve others, they fulfill the essence of the law. The apostle quoted Leviticus 19:18 to stress that believers are closest to pleasing God and keeping His commandments when they sacrificially reach out to others with the Savior’s compassion and kindness.

Paul reminded his readers about the importance of love because they were continually harming and exploiting each other. He drew upon the image of ravenous animals attacking and devouring one another (Gal. 5:15). The result was mutual self-destruction.

8. What is the purpose of Christian freedom?

9. What did Paul say was the essence of the law of Moses?

Galatians 5:13-15, NIV

¹³You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. ¹⁴For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁵If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

BIBLE EXTRA

The Believers’ Freedom in Christ

Paul urged the Galatians not to give up their Christian freedom for bondage to the law of Moses. If they tried to win God’s favor by obeying the law, they would be denying His grace. As long as the Galatians continued in legalism, it would hinder their spiritual growth and create division among the members of their churches. That’s why Paul reminded them once again of their liberty in Christ, and their freedom to serve God and others out of love.

If we want to please God and obey His Word, we must trust in Christ and live by the power of the Spirit. Through the ministry of God, we will realize that all that the law of Moses says can be summed up in the command to love others as we love ourselves. As those who are characterized by the love of God, Paul warns us not to verbally attack one another. Instead, we should show compassion, understanding, and kindness to our fellow Christians.

3 Bible Application

This lesson step encourages class members to make connections between being set free in Christ and loving one another. Ask class members to participate in one of these activities. If possible, photocopy this page and give instructions to each group. Make copies of the handout from the Resource Kit for the group using it.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Discussion Group

Read “Pursuing the Goal” from the student book and respond to **Questions 10, 11, and 12**. We cause others to stumble or stray away from the truth of the Gospel whenever we add man-made requirements to God’s Word. Believers receive salvation from their sins and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Once saved, it is our responsibility to stand firm on the truth of God’s Word and not allow ourselves to be led astray by false teaching. Any teaching or actions we choose to participate in—out of “freedom”—that do not have Jesus at the center may lead to unloving actions. Once we are set free from the bondage of sin, we have the ability through Christ to love and serve others as He has loved us.

Service in Action

Work together with your group to plan and prepare a short skit to demonstrate one or more acts of humble, loving service to one another. Present your skit to class members and invite them to discuss how the action(s) depicted illustrate service expressed in love.



Identify specific ways we can use our freedom in Christ to love and serve others.

Handout: ‘Gifts of Love’

Discuss with your group spiritual gifts you have seen evident in your lives. Write each person’s gift in a separate inner segment of the graphic organizer. Then discuss the questions on your handout and complete the graphic organizer by writing acts of love that might arise out of each spiritual gift. As time allows, share your insights with the rest of the class.

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Pursuing the Goal

Kenneth enjoys challenges in his running, so he and his friend chose to compete in the Rugged Maniac, an obstacle course race. The air horn blasted and his group was off. Kenneth soon approached the tire obstacle, where runners would jump in and out of a long line of tires. Another runner came up from behind and pushed him aside to make a beeline through the obstacle. Landing on his wrist, Kenneth got up, pain radiating from the injury.

He rushed back to the field to dash through the mud pit and up over the bleachers. Wrist throbbing and slower runners constantly obstructing his path, he waded through three obstacles. The final obstacle, the Giant Wall, loomed. With every last bit of breath, Kenneth screamed up the wall and scaled the top. Then, with the finish line straight ahead, he encouraged his now-adjacent friend who started with him to finish strong.

In our Christian walk, we encounter opposition as we strive to become more like Christ. Unbelievers or false teachers may take unfair advantage of us, cutting in or hindering us. Like Kenneth, we face obstacles, hindrances, opposition, and a choice to pursue our goals while encouraging our co-runners and serving them.

Jesus purchased our freedom from sin and the law through His death on the Cross. We are set free in Him when we fully rely on His redemptive work for our salvation. Our expression of faith in the free gift of God’s grace is apparent whenever we offer loving encouragement and service to others.

10. What are some ways Christians hinder fellow believers or cause them to stray from the truth of God’s grace?

11. How have you experienced freedom in Christ in your life?

12. What does it mean to be set free to serve others, not ourselves?

4 Life Response

Commit to seeking specific ways to love and serve others.

Your class has studied the nature of freedom in Christ and what it means for how we live as believers. We express our freedom in Christ and our gratitude for God's grace when we in turn extend humble, loving acts of service to others. Christ's redemptive work on the Cross frees us from the bondage of sin, and we offer that same freedom to others when we treat them with kindness and compassion rather than placing legalistic burdens on them.

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Serving in Love

Paul encouraged his readers to serve one another humbly in love. Now that they were free from bondage to the law, with its demands, they were free to focus on others. We fulfill the essence of the law and please God when we reach out to others with the same love Christ has shown us.

► Complete these sentences. Copy them on an index card as a reminder to actively love and serve one or more specific people this week.

- Since Jesus has set me free from the bondage of sin, I can choose to become a servant of _____ and serve him or her by _____.
- Because Christ lives in me, I can set aside my desire for _____ and focus on others by _____.

KEY VERSE

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. —Galatians 5:14, KJV

For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." —Galatians 5:14, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of May 23 through May 29

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- | | |
|------|--|
| Mon. | Psalm 1—The Righteous Yield Fruit. |
| Tue. | John 15:1-8—Abide in Christ and Bear Fruit. |
| Wed. | James 3:13-18—Wisdom's Harvest of Righteousness. |
| Thu. | Isaiah 32:9-20—The Spirit Produces a Fruitful Field. |
| Fri. | Matthew 7:15-20—Known by Their Fruits. |
| Sat. | Ezekiel 47:1-7, 12—God's Presence Brings Fruitfulness. |
| Sun. | Galatians 5:16-26—Live by the Spirit. |

Encourage class members to consider ways they might choose to love and serve one or more specific people. Challenge and encourage them to commit to an action step in response to the freedom they have received from Christ, but do not demand or command.

Ask students to read "Serving in Love" in *Comprehensive Bible Study* and complete the sentences there. Provide index cards for those who wish to copy their sentences as a reminder to take action this week.

Close in prayer, asking God to help your students honor the commitment they made to humbly love and serve others out of the freedom they have received in Christ.



As the class members are leaving, hand out copies of this week's *Power for Living*. Take or mail copies of *Lesson Leaflet* to those who couldn't be with you today, or send them to those you would like to join your class.

Before Teaching Next Week's Lesson

Before next week, read Galatians 5:16-26. Ask your students to think about the fruit they love the most. Bring real or artificial fruit to class next week. Your students would probably appreciate real fruit the most!



The Spiritual Fruit of Freedom

Lesson Overview

Week of May 29

Suggested Material for As Your Students Arrive

- A variety of fresh fruits or artificial fruit

1 Life Need:

- 1 Discuss what it means to live a new life in Christ

2 Bible Learning:

- 2 Explore what it means to live by the Spirit

Suggested Material:

- *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit:* Poster and reproducible handout—Letters of Redemption and Freedom

3 Bible Application:

- 3 Identify specific ways we can live in step with the Spirit

Suggested Material:

- *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit:* Reproducible sheet—In Step with the Spirit
- Index cards; string, cut into 3" or 4" pieces; tape
- Small pieces of paper, a trash can

4 Life Response:

- 4 Commit to cultivating the fruit of the Spirit in your life.

Church/Home Theme: Our God's Love Heals

Lesson Focus:

- Live by the Spirit—refuse the deceitful desires of the flesh.

Lesson Scripture: **Galatians 5:16-26**

Walk in the Spirit, Not the Flesh—Walking in the Spirit and walking in the flesh cannot happen simultaneously. The walk of a Christian should display His walk. If not, the person is walking in the flesh. Paul gives examples of works of the flesh versus works of walking in the Spirit—having sex with someone who is not your spouse, sex between singles, pornography, or any thought or act opposite of the pure loving relationship God intended between a man and a woman. Religious and relational sins include worshiping another god, following occultic experiences, or using drugs to alter reality. Those walking in the flesh mistreat others, continually fight, wish for another's possessions, have uncontrolled anger, cause disunity, insist on always being right, and misuse alcohol.

Paul said if you look at this list and realize you are doing some of these things repeatedly, maybe you should be asking yourself some serious questions if you are truly trusting in Christ and listening to the Holy Spirit. Those who continually practice works of the flesh will not enter heaven. Those who are in all-out rebellion against God are not going to make it in.

Fruit of the Spirit—On the other hand, Paul laid out examples of walking in the Spirit, showing the fruit of the Spirit. The desires of the flesh can seem overwhelming, but God has given us His power in strength through the Holy Spirit to be overcomers. Through the Spirit, we love persons we do not like or find hard to love, we practice peace, we are long-suffering with others, we are generous, persevering, faithful to God and each other, and gentle.

What to Do with My Stuff—Stuff from the past such as guilt, shame, failings, and fearing not doing better in the future can haunt our daily thoughts. How can one get rid of these inner nagging? When Jesus comes and takes the believer home, the fleshly battles will end. But even now, in this life, Christians can experience victory by regularly, humbly kneeling at the foot of the Cross depositing their stuff there and saying, "I'm done with this."

As Your Students Arrive

Invite students to share about the fruit they love the most. If you have real fruit, be sure to share it with your class before you begin talking about the fruit of the Spirit this week.

Link to Last Week

A few students may want to share if they took action on the statements they wrote in their books last week.

1 Life Need

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The Spiritual Fruit of Freedom

I have really enjoyed staying with you," said LaVaughn. He was sitting at Ashton's breakfast nook, finishing his coffee and cinnamon bun. "I feel like I've grown spiritually."

LaVaughn had come to Colorado Springs to visit his old college friend, mainly because he had never been before, and also to meet up with a cousin in Denver.

"First thing in the morning, I hear you playing some kind of Bible recording, then you are watching some minister on YouTube. It really does set the tone for the day. Also, you don't seem to binge watch television like I do."

Ashton was conscious of expanding his spiritual appetites. What he found out was the more he filled his life with Christ and godly things, the less time and opportunity he had for other things to pull him away for what he now wanted first and foremost—communion with God.

"You have really grown spiritually," LaVaughn said. "I wish I could be more like you. You're almost like a preacher or something."

"No, I'm not called to preach," Ashton smiled. "I'm doing more of what Christ wants for all of us, and that is to walk in the Spirit. The more you do it, the more you want to do it. And the more it keeps you, comforts you, and changes you."

1. What does it mean to live by the Holy Spirit's direction?

2. Why might people find it difficult to break away from previous lifestyles to fully and freely live by the Spirit?

3. What things might we do to practice living by the Spirit?

Discuss what it means to live a new life in Christ.

Begin your lesson reading the opening anecdote from the student book, then form small groups to answer **Questions 1, 2, and 3**.

For Question 1, class members may say that living by the Holy Spirit's direction means doing what He says rather than living by our own wants and desires. For example, sometimes what we may think is the "right" or "logical" thing to do may not be what God would have us do. God's ways are often not our ways.

Question 2 brings up an important point—it takes intentional action on our part to make a choice to live by the Spirit. It's not always easy to recognize our need for Christ and follow through to seek God's grace and forgiveness.

For Question 3, once we accept God's saving grace through faith, He calls us to live by the Spirit. We can do this in part by showing love and care to others. We can read God's Word and make conscious choices to leave behind anything in our past lifestyle that will pull us away from living a new life in Christ.

LESSON FOCUS: Live by the Spirit—refuse the deceitful desires of the flesh.

2 Bible Learning

Explore what it means to live by the Spirit.



On the handout, read the final paragraph and point out the photo of a fruit market in Israel.

FLESH AND SPIRIT IN OPPOSITION

Read Galatians 5:16-18 and point out these important

ideas in the text:

- Many of Paul's readers came out of

BIBLE EXTRA

The True Mark of Christian Freedom

Paul's Letter to the Galatians is an ongoing argument against the idea that people are saved by adhering to the law of Moses. Having led the charge to reinstate and reiterate the believer's freedom in Christ, the apostle, in the closing chapters of his letter, defined what kind of freedom the believer experiences as well as what it entails. Paul warned that Christian liberty is not a freedom toward the self-indulgence of decadence. Instead, he pointed to the exercise of loving service as the truest mark and measure of Christian freedom. The apostle directed his readers away from their self-interest and recalled for them that loving service is measured by the way they treat other people. Love, as demonstrated through service to others, is the fruit of Christian freedom.

Although Jesus' followers are free from the condemnation of the law of Moses, Paul said they are not free from ethical responsibility. It's possible that his teaching on Christian freedom had led some to allege he had no ethical priorities. It's also possible that the apostle intended to answer and refute those who had labeled him as such. Yet, his teaching in Galatians remains the same as that throughout his other letters. The message that we are justified by grace through faith in Christ comes through clearly, but so also do Paul's moral imperatives for the believer.

pagan cultures and struggled with immorality.

- Living in the flesh is in opposition to living by the Spirit.
- In the context of this passage, "flesh" refers to moral and ethical behavior.
- Paul is not saying our physical bodies are evil, but that our human nature is corrupt and sinful.
- The Spirit transforms a believer's life from one dominated by sin to one that seeks to please God.
- The sinful nature strives to do the exact

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Flesh and Spirit in Opposition

Galatians 5:16-18, KJV

16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

18 But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

Galatians 5:16-18, NIV

¹⁶So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

¹⁷For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

The threat of the Judaizers was the biggest problem in the Galatian churches, but it was not the only one. Between Galatians 5:16 and 6:10 we see that Paul's readers also had a problem with immorality. Converts coming out of pagan cultures had a difficult time adjusting to Christian morality.

The Greek noun rendered "flesh" is one of the most frequently used words in Paul's vocabulary—it occurs 17 times in Galatians. He associated the term with a number of meanings, including the human body (2:20), but the noun's seven occurrences between 5:13 and 6:8 are all in an ethical context.

By giving "flesh" an ethical meaning, Paul was not implying that the body is evil. Instead, he meant that ever since the Fall, human nature has been corrupt or sinful. Furthermore, Paul often placed the "flesh" in conflict with the "Spirit." That's because when the Spirit comes into a believer's life, He begins transforming that person's nature from one that is dominated by sin to one that desires to please God.

Paul stressed in 5:17 that we may want to do good, but if we follow the dictates of our sinful human nature, we will not do good. We can do good only when we live by



Further commentary on this Scripture passage can be found on pp. 574-576 in *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament*.

opposite of what the Spirit wants.

- When we live in the flesh, we focus our thoughts and feelings on sinful things, while living by the Spirit frees us from following the lusts of the flesh and doing evil.
- To live by the Spirit is to allow Him to control our thoughts, emotions, actions, and behavior.

Suggested Answer to Question 4

Paul had in mind the way in which believers live. When the Spirit controls their behavior, their thoughts, emotions, and actions are Christlike.

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the Spirit. The reason is that (as noted above) our sinful nature and the Spirit are in opposition to one another, and each have incompatible goals. When we are led by the Spirit, we do not do the wickedness prompted by our sinful nature, and neither are we living under the condemnation of the law of Moses (vs. 18).

4. *What does it mean to “walk by the Spirit”?*
5. *In what way is the flesh opposed to the Spirit?*

Works of the Flesh

Galatians 5:19-21, KJV

19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,
20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,
21 Envying, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Up until this point in his letter, Paul had talked generally about how wrong it is to indulge one's sinful nature and how right it is to live by the Spirit. Now, the apostle got specific about what he meant by these two diametrically opposed options, first by describing the negative consequences of giving into the "flesh" (vs. 19).

For instance, when the wayward impulses of one's fallen human nature are gratified, the results are "obvious." This probably means that it is plain to see these acts are wrong and spring from the sinful nature.

Paul cataloged 15 ungodly acts to stand for all the ways

Galatians 5:19-21, NIV

¹⁹The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Indeed, every aspect of the believer's existence is animated by the Spirit's presence and power.

Suggested Answer to Question 5

At every level of the believers' existence, the sinful nature strives to do the exact opposite of what the Spirit wants. Expressed differently, the will of the flesh is antithetical to that of the Spirit. And this is not just an occasional circumstance, but a constant battle between the sinful nature and the Spirit.

WORKS OF THE FLESH

Read Galatians 5:19-21 and then discuss the following key points:

- When the flesh is in control, we become self-centered, ungodly, and destructive.
- Paul listed specific ways people indulge their sinful natures.
- This list is not all inclusive, but

BIBLE EXTRA

Another List of Vices

Besides Galatians 5:19-21, in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Paul discussed the divine Kingdom alongside another list of vices. Specifically, those who wallowed in this cesspool of iniquity would one day be banned forever from God's holy presence. The apostle likewise made a similar declaration in Ephesians 5:5.

Included in Paul's list of vices recorded in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 were people who practiced illicit sexual activity, idol worshipers, adulterers, male prostitutes and homosexual offenders, thieves, people greedy for material gain, drunkards, people who use abusive language, and people who use violence to take other people's belongings. Paul noted that before his readers trusted in the Lord Jesus for salvation, they were guilty of committing these sorts of iniquities. Yet, the Spirit of God brought about a profound and miraculous change in their lives (vs. 11).

includes deeds related to sensuality, pagan religions, interpersonal conflict, and alcohol.

- When we gratify the desires of the flesh, it is obvious these wrongful acts come from the sinful nature.

- Negative consequences come from giving in to the flesh and positive benefits from living by the Spirit.

- Those who practice evil acts such as these will not inherit the Kingdom.

- Those who continually and willfully live this way demonstrate that they are not truly following Christ.

Suggested Answer to Question 6

When the sinful nature rules people's lives, they behave in ways that are self-centered, ungodly, and destructive, so one's existence is characterized by confusion and chaos.

Suggested Answer to Question 7

The apostle was stern in his declaration that those who incessantly gratified

BIBLE EXTRA

The Fruit of the Holy Spirit

While the "acts of the flesh" (vs. 19) are many, the "fruit of the Spirit" (vs. 22) is a singular, internal attitude that comes from the Spirit controlling our lives. "Love" is seeking the well-being of others despite who they are. "Joy" means experiencing happiness despite our circumstances. "Peace" is the harmony in our relationship with God that brings tranquility to our minds. "Forbearance" means putting up with others when severely tried. "Kindness" is our acting toward others in a way similar to how God treats us. "Goodness" involves behaving in a generous manner toward others. "Faithfulness" means showing that others can always rely on us, while "gentleness" (vs. 23) signifies being considerate and courteous to others, even in adverse situations. Finally, "self-control" means demonstrating the Spirit's presence with victory over fleshly desires. Unbelievers are unable to bear the fruit of the Spirit (vs. 22) because He has no place in their lives.

their sinful nature would not "inherit the kingdom of God" (vs. 21). These are individuals who luxuriated in the tarpits of wickedness. By doing so, they demonstrate that they have no real and lasting interest in God's values and priorities.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Read Galatians 5:22-26, then note these ideas in the text:

- Paul also provided a list of godly virtues that result when we yield our lives to the Spirit.

- The singular word "fruit" indicates all of these qualities should be found in believers.

- All of the virtues develop out of love, which is the opposite of the selfishness of the flesh.

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people do evil. The representative nature of the list is clarified by his addition of "and the like" at the end (vs. 21).

Paul might not have intended to list the 15 acts of the "flesh" (vs. 19) in any particular order. Nonetheless, they seem to fall into four categories. The list includes three vices of sensuality (sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery), two vices associated with pagan religions (idolatry, witchcraft), eight vices of interpersonal conflict (hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy), and two vices related to the misuse of alcohol (drunkenness, orgies).

Paul warned his readers about the consequences of these sins. As the apostle had told the Galatians earlier when he was with them, those who practiced such things would not "inherit the kingdom of God" (vs. 21). This declaration of Paul indicates that people who continually commit these acts of the sinful nature demonstrate that they are not following Jesus and have no place in His unending kingdom.

6. What results when the flesh is in control?

7. What warning did Paul give to the believers in Galatia?

Fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:22-26, KJV

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

26 Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one

Galatians 5:22-26, NIV

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not become conceited, provoking and

- The fruit of the Spirit is an internal attitude that results from allowing the Spirit to control our lives.
- Our lives exhibit these qualities when we live in harmony with God and others.
- Unbelievers do not bear the fruit of the Spirit because they are controlled by their sinful nature, not the Spirit.
- Our sinful nature is put to death when we trust in Jesus because He breaks the bondage sin has over us.
- We need to consciously yield to the Spirit's control and allow Him to lead in our lives.

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another, envying one another. | envying each other.

To balance the inventory of acts of the sinful nature, Paul presented a catalog of godly virtues produced by those who yield their lives to the Spirit. This list, too, is representative rather than exhaustive.

Paul used a singular Greek word for "fruit" (Gal. 5:22). He could have said "fruits," but he did not. He might have wanted to suggest that the aspects of the "fruit of the Spirit" grow together like a bunch of grapes. They are not separate pieces of "fruit" existing independently of each other. All the elements of the "fruit of the Spirit" should be found in all believers.

"Love" is at the top of the apostle's list because all the other virtues develop from it. Love is the opposite of the selfishness of the flesh. "Joy" and "peace" follow. Paul then listed "forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

Jesus' followers receive the Spirit when they trust in the Messiah. At the moment of salvation, their sinful nature (in one sense) is "crucified" (vs. 24) or put to death. Because of what Jesus did on the Cross, He sets believers free from the death grip of sin when they believe in Him. However, though believers have the Spirit living in them, they need to consciously let the Spirit lead and empower them. Because the Spirit is the source of every believer's life, they should allow Him to chart life's course.

Paul gave a few specific examples of what he did not mean by keeping "in step with the Spirit": being "conceited," "provoking" others to anger, and "envying" others (vs. 26). Most likely, these were particular problems among the Galatian believers. They are also some specific kinds of unspiritual behavior that we should avoid.

8. What results when the Spirit is in control?

9. What place does the Cross of Christ have in the lives of believers?

Suggested Answer to Question 8

Jesus' followers are characterized by virtue rather than vice. For instance, instead of being ego-centered, they are sensitive to other's needs. Also, rather than being combative, believers who submit to the Spirit endeavor to show compassion to all whom they encounter.

Suggested Answer to Question 9

Galatians 5:24 conveys that the Cross is the center of believers' existence. So, instead of gratifying the "flesh," Jesus' followers allow all their sinful "passions and desires" to die at the foot of the Cross, where they find new life through faith in their Savior.

BIBLE EXTRA

Life in the Flesh versus Life in the Spirit

In Romans 8:5-13, Paul wrote at length about the nature of the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit touched on briefly in Galatians 5:17. The apostle said that those who allow their lives to be controlled by the sinful nature anchor their thoughts and feelings on sinful things. In contrast, those who are controlled by the Spirit focus their mind and heart on that which pleases God (Rom. 8:5). The apostle emphasized the mind because that is where all sin originates. Before one engages in a sinful act, evil has been conceived in the mind. By contrast, those who live by the Spirit have their minds anchored on what He desires.

There is always a battle for control being waged between the old self and the regenerated (born-again) spirit. The mindset of the old self results in hostility to God and eventually ends in death. It will not and cannot acknowledge the lordship of Christ. By contrast, the mind controlled by the Spirit brings life and peace (vss. 6-7). Paul elaborated on the sinful way of thinking (along with feeling and acting) by giving us two key characteristics: (1) this mindset is hostile to God and (2) it does not submit to God's law and cannot do so (vs. 7). Individuals having such an orientation cannot even please God (vs. 8).

3 Bible Application

Photocopy this page and give instructions to each group. Provide scrap paper and a trash can for the “Turn and Toss” activity. Give the index cards, string, and tape to the group using it. If possible, tape each end of a piece of string to a card, creating sets of two cards taped together, connected by a piece of string. Make copies of the handout from the

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Discussion Group

Read “A Messy Struggle” from the student book and respond to **Questions 10, 11, and 12.** Living by the Spirit results in freedom from bondage to the law, sin, and getting caught up in destructive behaviors.

Turn and Toss

Discuss with your group specific actions or behaviors that might be described as “desires of the flesh.” On a slip of paper, write one deceitful desire of the flesh you will commit to refuse, reject, or turn down opportunities to participate in. Crumple the paper into a ball so no one else will read what you have written. Take turns throwing your paper balls into the trash can, saying a statement of accountability and commitment as you do so. Your statement might be general or specific, depending on your level of comfort.

Cut the String

Take a set of taped-together cards and write one or more phrases to describe your life before you received Christ’s forgiveness on one card. On the other, write a description of your life with Christ. Share your descriptions with a partner if you’re comfortable sharing, especially any aspects of your life before Christ that tempt you to return. Finally, cut apart the cards to symbolize your freedom in Christ from a previous lifestyle of bondage to sin.

Identify specific ways we can live in step with the Spirit.

Resource Kit for the group using it.



Handout: **'In Step with the Spirit'**

Discuss examples of desires of the flesh that Christians may continue to struggle with after they receive new life in the Spirit. Brainstorm specific actions we can put in place of these desires in order to walk more closely in step with God.

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A Messy Struggle

Two teams stand opposite each other, each player grasping the rope. Perhaps without any obvious signal, one team tugs on the rope. The muddier the playing field, the higher the stakes. The more people on a team, the more force exerted. Many feet trample the mud into a mucky, slippery mess, making it nearly impossible to gain traction and secure footing. Each team strives to drag their opponents down, through the mire, across the line and into their own control. The rough rope frays, with individual fibers tearing into players’ hands. An ankle may twist, weakening one with a burst of pain. The struggle is real.

Our struggle against the desires of the flesh is equally real, but more treacherous and with higher stakes. Much of the battle Paul describes begins in the mind, then extends outward to physical actions. Our sinful nature is hostile toward God, resulting in a battle for control.

Finally, one team overcomes the desires of the opposition to win the contest. Players drop their hold on the rope. The strife is over.

In our Christian lives, we walk away from the conflict with the goal to live in harmony, as if we’re on the same team with one another. We claim victory over the sinful nature that would drag us down into opposition against all God desires for our lives. When we choose God’s team, it’s as if we have the strongest player of all at the end of the rope, pulling for us. He’ll guide us onto firm footing where we won’t easily slip. Living by the Spirit enables us to walk away from the tug of war.

10. What freedom(s) do we experience when we choose to live by the Spirit?

11. Why is the fruit of the Spirit a valuable part of the believer’s life?

12. What is an area of your life in which you struggle to yield to the Spirit?

4 Life Response

Commit to cultivating the fruit of the Spirit in your life.

Your class has studied what it means to walk in the Spirit, or the practical application of our freedom in Christ. In the previous lesson, we learned that we express our freedom in Christ through humble and loving service. This lesson explains how our sinful nature is in opposition to the Spirit, and concludes with an overview of the fruit of the Spirit.

Paul's list of vices includes some things that everyone does because we are taken in by deceitful

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Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit

After Paul listed various types of sinful behaviors that can lead people astray, he listed active virtues that exhibit our willingness to yield control of our lives to the Spirit and follow God's leading. Loving service to others, as demonstrated by these qualities, is the fruit of Christian freedom. Cultivating this fruit in our lives is one way we can live by the Spirit, in step with our new life in Christ.

► Which aspect of the fruit of the Spirit comes easiest for you? Which aspect would you like to ask God to help you cultivate more? Pray about one specific action you can take this week to demonstrate a particular aspect of the fruit of the Spirit.

KEY VERSE

If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

—Galatians 5:25, KJV

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

—Galatians 5:25, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of May 30 through June 5

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- | | |
|------|---|
| Mon. | Jeremiah 29:8-14 — Babylon's Days Are Numbered. |
| Tue. | Psalm 79 — Let Your Compassion Come Speedily. |
| Wed. | Mark 13:1-13 — Persecution Foretold. |
| Thu. | Mark 13:28-37 — Keep Awake! |
| Fri. | Psalm 74:10-23 — Rise Up, O God! |
| Sat. | Isaiah 47:1-9 — The Humiliation of Babylon. |
| Sun. | Isaiah 47:10-15 — No Security in Wickedness. |

desires, some of which hurt others deeply, but we don't think of the consequences. The fruit of the Spirit comes from Christian freedom and always has positive consequences. This fruit is demonstrated through love and service to others. How we treat others demonstrates our desire and intent to live by the Spirit.

Ask students to read "Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit" in *Comprehensive Bible Study* and answer the questions there. Encourage class members to choose to yield to the Spirit's control and ask God to help them develop the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. Encourage students to write their prayers in response to their answers to the two questions. Challenge without demanding; we can each make a choice daily to take a small step to demonstrate a particular aspect of the fruit of the Spirit to another person in some way.

Close in prayer, asking God to help your students honor the commitment they made to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.



As the class members are leaving, hand out copies of this week's *Power for Living*. Take or mail copies of *Lesson Leaflet* to those who couldn't be with you today, or send them to those you would like to join your class.

Before Teaching Next Week's Lesson

Next week we will begin a study of the books of Isaiah, John, and Revelation as we look at how God creates. Before next week, read Isaiah 47:10-15 and have your students think about what we mean when we say we have "trust issues" in our lives.

EVANGELISM

Leading Your Students to Christ

Did you know your Sunday school classroom can be a mission field?

Most or all of the people attending your class may already have a personal relationship with Jesus.

But others may not, and unbelievers may visit your class. If you sense that an unbeliever is ready to accept Jesus as his or her Lord and Savior, take the time to encourage this person and share the Gospel message. You may know the thrill of introducing someone to the kingdom of God.

Here are some guidelines to consider when speaking to someone about becoming a Christian.



• Present the Gospel clearly and simply.

Here are four points the unsaved adults in your class should know.

1 All of us have sinned and need forgiveness if we are to have eternal life with God (**Rom. 3:23**).

2 Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the Cross for our sins and rose again (**1 Cor. 15:3-4**). In His death, Christ paid for our sins (**1 Pet. 2:24**), and in His resurrection, He overcame the power of death (**Heb. 2:14-15**).

3 You need to acknowledge your sins and repent, believing that Christ died and rose again. “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (**Rom. 10:9, KJV**).

4 You will be saved, forgiven, adopted into God’s family, and given heavenly riches (**Eph. 1:3-7**).

• **Explain how someone can respond to Christ’s invitation.** Tell the students that they can come to Christ through a sincere prayer of faith in Christ for eternal life.

• Describe the adventure of discipleship.

If one of the adults in your class receives Christ as his or her personal Savior, make sure the new believer knows that conversion is just the beginning of life as a disciple of the Lord.

But God commendeth **His**
love toward us, in that,
while we were yet sinners,
Christ died for us.
—Romans 5:8, KJV

ADULT TEACHER'S COMMENTARY

LESSON CYCLE

FOR 2020—2023

SEPTEMBER

DECEMBER

MARCH

JUNE

2020/21

Love for One Another
(Studies in Genesis, 1 Samuel, Luke, John, Acts, Epistles and New Testaments)

Call in the New Testament
(Studies in Gospels, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Hebrews)

Prophets Faithful to God's Covenant
(Studies in Deuteronomy, Lametations, 1&2 Kings, Ezra, Nehemiah, Prophets)

Confident Hope
(Studies in Leviticus, Gospels, Romans, 2 Corinthians, Hebrews, 1 John)

2021/22

Celebrating God
(Studies in Exodus, 2 Samuel, Psalms, Mark, Acts, Revelation)

Justice, Law, History
(Studies in Pentateuch, 2 Samuel, Ezra, Job, Isaiah, Nahum)

God Frees and Redeems
(Studies in Deuteronomy, Ezra, Matthew, John, Romans, Galatians)

Partners in a New Creation*
(Studies in Isaiah, John, Revelation)

2022/23

Chosen, Not Choice
(Studies in Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Judges, 1 Samuel, Ephesians)

Chosen, Not Choice: Darkness to Light
(Studies in 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Joel, Luke, 1 Corinthians, 2 Timothy, James, 1 Peter)

Chosen, Not Choice: Jesus Calls Us
(Studies in the Gospels, Acts)

God's Kingdom Come
(Studies in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Matthew, Romans, Galatians, 1 Corinthians)

*Adult Teacher's Commentary lessons are organized according to the *International Sunday School Lessons'* thematic study of the Bible. In six years, this cycle will touch on the Bible's key themes and messages through studies of the books of both the Old and New Testaments.*

* Next quarter's study

Coming Up Next Quarter

June, July, August 2022

'Partners in a New Creation'

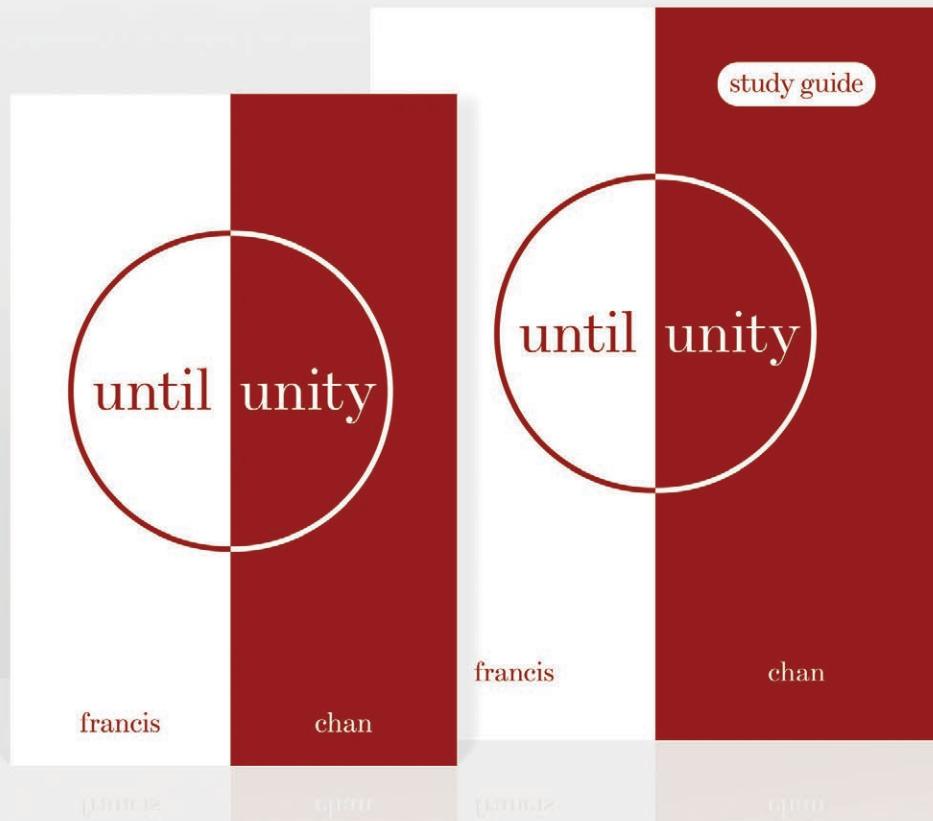
This quarter considers ways in which believers are partners with God in creation. In Unit 1, a study of Isaiah explores God's predictions of the future destruction of Babylon and deliverance for Israel. God grants mercy and redemption to the penitent and restores God's people to a state of peace and prosperity.

In Unit 2, lessons from John's Gospel stress how Jesus, the Creating Word, at work in and with humanity, became flesh, healed the sick, saved the lost, resurrected the dead, and granted—through the Holy Spirit—peace.

Unit 3 studies Revelation to help us envision the new home and city God has prepared for the redeemed. In this heavenly environment, the saints will enjoy the new water of eternal life.



Church unity is *not* optional



In *Until Unity*, New York Times–bestselling author Francis Chan challenges us to see what keeps us from being unified as Christians across denominations and cultural differences and why it needs to change.

Chan's emphasis on worship and praise, along with his passionate teaching, make this book a unique and life-changing exploration of why unity is not just God's wish for His Church—it's His command.

Book, study guide, and free online videos are now available at untilunitybook.com.

Available from David C Cook
and everywhere books are sold

DAVID C COOK™
transforming lives together

A Adult
Comp Teacher's
Commentary
No. 5080