

Goals

God had not meant for His chosen ones to live like hermits, out of touch with the world. In fact, when He first called Abraham, He told him that through him, all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Gen 12:3). Yet, the hardest part about living on earth is actually dealing with interpersonal relationships successfully, and in accordance to God's teachings. In this section, the students will learn some biblical wisdom regarding how to dwell amiably with others.

unit
3**Teacher Devotional**

As God's children, we still live in this world. It is inevitable then that we would face problems and difficulties. When one is really close to God, life's problems can become insignificant. But, this is not always evident to us right away, especially when we are undergoing difficult times. It is at times like these that we have to hold on to God's teachings and not give in to our weaknesses and temptations. Sometimes, this is easier said than done. That's why God has given us brothers and sisters in the faith to help us along, to encourage us, to pray with us, and to remind us of the right things to do. So, when things seem hard for us to deal with, let us turn to God and also seek strength in our brethren.

Always Shine for God

"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden." (Mt 5:14)

Lesson 7

Loneliness and Depression

Listed Scriptures

Ps 23; Mt 28:20; 2 Tim 2:22

Lesson Aim

- 1) That the students will understand that loneliness is not particular to them but that it is a rather universal experience
- 2) That the students will know that God is always with them and they never should be afraid of loneliness
- 3) That the students will know that loneliness can be a step towards drawing closer to God

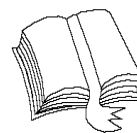
Memory Verse

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me." (Ps 23:4)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Ps 23; Mt 28-29; 2 Tim 1-4

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



The Bible does not directly address the issue of loneliness or depression as we know these terms today. But, from the lives of many biblical characters, we know that they faced periods of deep loneliness. Joseph was sold to Egypt at the age of 17, went through slavery, lived life as a prisoner and finally, even after becoming the premier of the kingdom, was nevertheless an alien in a foreign land. Moses spent forty years alone in the wilderness of Midian. After that, as the chosen one to lead the people of God out of the land of bondage, he suffered misunderstandings and accusations, even from his own sister and brother (Num 12). Much of his life was spent alone. At the end of his life, he was alone on Mount Nebo, and God buried him (Deut 34).

The Bible paints for us many vivid pictures of the lives of the saints of old like Joseph

and Moses. As we study the Bible, we can benefit more if we slowly try to understand the circumstances of these characters. We will see that in their loneliness, they drew closer to God. In their loneliness, they relied on God to accomplish great works. Loneliness is therefore not something to be afraid of. Loneliness without God is. This is a message relevant to both teachers and students alike.

W A R M U P



Do you know that in the USA, depression is the sickness for which most patients seeking mental health treatment are being diagnosed with? This problem has almost become a social problem. Each year, millions of dollars are being channeled into treatment and research in this area.

Why do you think depression is getting more and more prevalent today? (Let students respond.) There are many reasons. One of the causes of depression is loneliness. More and more, we see that it is hard for people to forge deep relationships. At work, most ties between people are purely at the professional level. Due to an increase in physical mobility, people move to different cities as they change jobs, and ties that have been built up can be easily loosened. With the emphasis on materialism, the human heart becomes more and more empty. All these can make a person feel very lonely and ultimately, depression can set in.

As Christians, we should never feel lonely. For our God has promised us that He will always be with us. All we need to do is to turn to Him. Of course, as Christians, we are to lead our lives in a way that benefits our fellow men, thus bringing glory to God's name. That means, among many things, we should make an effort to be friendly to people around us. A person who is friendly and practices the teachings of the Bible will have no problem finding friends.

B I B L E S T U D Y



Part 1

Lonely but Not Alone

Many characters in the Bible went through periods of loneliness. Yet, they never bowed down to loneliness. Instead, they drew closer to God because they were lonely, and by relying on God, they went on to accomplish great works for God. We will look at a few of these characters today, and study their relationships with God. Read the Bible references indicated below and answer the questions which follow.

A. Jacob (Gen 27:41-45, 28:10-22)

1. What do you think went through the mind of Jacob as he fled his own home in haste?

(Fleeing from the home that he had lived in all his life, Jacob found himself alone in a strange place, out in the wild. His thoughts probably included, "Will I be able to find Uncle Laban's house? Will I have enough water to drink and food to eat until I get there? What if I lose my way? I've never been out this way on my own before. What if Esau catches up with me?")

2. What were the possible dangers that Jacob faced as night fell and he was out in the wilderness all by himself (28:11)?

(As night fell, Jacob was probably afraid. There could be attacks from wild beasts. There could be weather changes and he had no shelter. And surely, there was the possibility of attacks from robbers.)

3. How did God show Jacob that he was not alone? How did Jacob react?

(In spite of all his fears, Jacob managed to fall asleep using a stone as a pillow. It was then that God's assurance came to him, showing him that he was not alone. Jacob dreamed of a ladder leading up to heaven and angels going up and down on that ladder. God was standing at the top of the ladder, and gave him a great promise: "I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descen-

dants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you." When Jacob awoke, he was full of awe, realizing that God was with him at this lonely place, throughout the night. In his gratitude, he set up an altar with the stone he had slept on and poured oil over it as a form of offering. He also made a vow to offer a tenth of all that he would have if God allowed him to come back safely to this place, which he named Bethel, meaning "House of God.")

B. Moses (Ex 2:15–22, 33:18–23; Num 12:3; Deut 34)

1. What was the reason Moses had to flee to the wilderness of Midian?

(Moses held the status of the prince of Egypt. But he was brought up to know that he was a Hebrew. When he saw one of his fellow Hebrews being beaten up by an Egyptian, he felt he had to defend his own brother. So, he killed the Egyptian and buried him secretly. Of course, nothing is really done in secret. Moses' act of murder was somehow known. One day, when he tried to intervene in a fight between two Hebrews, one of them asked if he was going to kill him like he killed the Egyptian. That was how Moses realized that people knew about his murderous act. The Pharaoh got news about this too and sought to kill Moses. He had no choice but to flee to the wilderness.)

2. Was there a change in the personality of Moses before and after he spent the forty years in Midian as a shepherd?

(In the wilderness, Moses spent time shepherding and enjoying nature. Living in such a tranquil environment changed him a great deal. Before, he was a impetuous young prince, full of aspirations and ideals about how the world should work. After forty long years of isolated life in the wilderness, Moses mellowed down completely.)

3. Discuss what you know about the life of a shepherd. Moses was an aggressive man who killed a man. After the forty years in the wilderness, he became a very meek person. How much do you think being a shepherd contributed to the change in Moses? Why?

(It has been said that God is present only in a quiet environment. In a way, this is true of Moses' life. He had to rely on God in the wilderness, for there

was no one else readily at hand to help him deal with whatever might have come up.)

4. Many times, Moses was lonely. But it was also during those times that he got close to God. What do you think would be the modern day equivalent of Moses' experiences in Exodus 33 and Deuteronomy 34?

(Exodus 33 and Deuteronomy 34 are depictions of closeness with God that is almost the highest level any person could ever hope to achieve. In Exodus 33, God allowed Moses to see Him. But, in order that His glorious light would not cause Moses' death, God covered Moses with His own hand. A modern day parallel would be a deep prayer with God, or some deep experience of God. In Deuteronomy 34, God spoke with Moses and accompanied him to his death. This is the ultimate bliss, for death is a painful and lonely experience for any man. To have God by his side when he was about to depart from this world is one of the greatest blessings to have. If a believer can hold fast to God and His commandments until the end of his life, it is worth much more than any treasure on earth!)

C. Joseph (Gen 37:2, 41:46)

1. Joseph was about seventeen years old when he was sold as a slave to Egypt. He was thirty years old when he became the premier of Egypt. Recount what happened in his life in those thirteen years.

(We are all familiar with the life of Joseph after his brothers sold him to the Midianites. The Midianites sold him off to Potiphar as a slave. Being a faithful and hardworking servant, Joseph soon gained the trust of his master, who put everything in his household under his charge. Unfortunately, good times did not last for Joseph. The wife of his master saw that he was a handsome young man and wanted to seduce him. Joseph held fast to his integrity. Being spurned by Joseph, his mistress then framed him and accused him of trying to seduce her. The evidence she used was his cloak which fell when he was running away from her! So, poor Joseph was sent to jail, a captive once again. In jail, he interpreted the dreams of the baker and the butler of the Pharaoh. The baker was beheaded as Joseph had said he would be. The butler was reinstated to his position. However, he did not remember his promise to Joseph to mention him to the Pharaoh to have him released. Hence, Joseph remained in prison for another two years until he was called to interpret the dreams of the Pharaoh. It was through this that he was released from prison, and made the premier of the land of Egypt.)

2. In those thirteen years as a slave and prisoner, what questions do you think Joseph had in his mind? How would you characterize his feelings during those years?

(During these thirteen years, Joseph must have had doubts about himself, and about God's love for him. There must have been times when he thought he would remain a servant or a prisoner for the rest of his life. When he thought of his family, especially his father who loved him most, he must have felt very sad for he might never see them again. He probably thought too, that the best years of his life were wasted in slavery and imprisonment.)

3. Read Acts 7:9 & Genesis 39:1. Do you think that having God with us necessarily means that we are successful by worldly standards? Explain your reasons.

(From the human perspective, Joseph must have been a horrible person for God's blessings were not with him. But, Acts 7:9 says something different: "And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him." This tells us that we should not judge if God is with a person by worldly success. Often, the end of a person's life is more indicative of whether he abided with God and God abided with him, as in the case of Joseph.)

D. Lord Jesus (Mt 8:20; Lk 9:58; Mt 13:53-58, 26:36-43)

1. Mt 8:20, Lk 9:58 - What comes to your mind when you read the verse where the Lord Jesus says He has nowhere to lay His head? What does it mean to not have a place to lay one's head? Why did Jesus Christ not have a place to lay His head? Do you think He was an outcast?

(When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He came as a poor man. He had to go to different places to preach the gospel, so as a result, He had no fixed resting place. Often we read about Him retreating to the mountains to pray, probably not having His meals or even proper sleep. We read about believers who received Him in their houses, such as Martha and Mary of Bethany. But, these are actually rare occasions. Most of the time, our Lord Jesus had to simply settle for outdoor lodging.)

2. Mt 13:53 - 58 - Have you ever been left out by friends? Maybe they were hanging out and didn't include you? Even when you have a lot of people around you, do you feel very excluded or alone? Do you think Jesus Christ felt the same way when peo-

ple from His own hometown rejected Him?

(Our Lord Jesus knew that He did not come to this world to make friends and enjoy life. Loneliness was surely something He experienced. But, He spent His time preaching, healing, comforting people and praying rather than indulging in self-pity or depression.)

3. How did the Lord Jesus handle the problem of loneliness? (Cite examples from the gospel books.)

4. Mt 26:36 - 43 - Why was it so crucial for the disciples to pray with the Lord Jesus at the Garden of Gethsemane? What do you think were the feelings of the Lord Jesus when He came back twice and found the disciples sleeping?

(At the Garden of Gethsemane, right before He was arrested to be crucified, He badly needed His disciples to pray with Him. In human form, He felt fear, for crucifixion is, after all, a really painful process, a very frightening way to die. Our Lord Jesus must have felt very hurt upon seeing His three most beloved disciples falling asleep, not once but three times, when they were supposed to be praying with Him. However, our Lord Jesus was not overcome by loneliness. The Bible records that angels came to strengthen Him. This was because He prayed.)

5. Do you think the Lord Jesus was overcome by loneliness? Explain your answer.



Part 2

Unity is Strength

"A man who has friends must himself be friendly" (Prov 18:24). One of the best solutions to the problem of loneliness is to be proactive in making friends. However, we must exercise caution when we make friends. The Bible has a very good guideline - "Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim 2:22). In the Bible, we can see examples of how believers in God stuck together and helped each other out and hence, accomplished great works for God's glory.

A. Esther

Esther was alone in the palace, but united with the other Jews (Esther 3:8 – 4:16).

1. What was the crisis facing the Jews at the time when Esther was queen to King Ahasuerus (Xerxes)?

(Haman tricked the king into giving him the authority to kill the Jews: "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from all other people's, and they do not keep the king's laws. Therefore it is not fitting for the king to let them remain. If it pleases the king, let a decree be written that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who do the work, to bring it into the king's treasuries" (3:8,9).)

2. Why was Esther not able to save her own people even though she was the queen? What did she ask Mordecai and all the other Jews to do?

(Although Esther was queen, wife of the king, she could not approach the king whenever she liked. Hence, she could not simply go up to the king and tell him about Haman's ploy. So, she asked Mordecai and all the rest of the Jews to fast and pray with her. She would approach the king without his permission and ask him to revoke the order to have the Jews killed.)

3. Are there similar situations in our life today that resemble the situation of Esther?

(Today, we are not likely to face situations as dire as this. But we may have trouble with other things, such as our work or studies. Any situation in which we feel helpless can be likened to what Esther was going through. There simply did not seem to be any way out. But, if we were to do as Esther did, which is to turn to God and pray for help, we will have victory just like she did!)

B. Daniel

Daniel and his three friends held on to their faith in a foreign land (Daniel 1 & 3).

1. In Daniel 1, what was the dilemma Daniel and his three friends faced when they were selected to be among the special group of youths to serve in the king's palace?

2. In Daniel 3, what was the tough choice that befell the three youths?

3. Do you think it would have been easier for just one person to succumb to the king's command if Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego) had not had each other's company?

(As exiles, the allure of good food offered by the king seemed too hard to resist. Yet, Daniel and his three friends knew that the food offered by the king was probably offered to idols. They refused to eat of such food. They would rather go hungry and settle for plain vegetables and grains than go against God's commandment and eat food offered to foreign gods. This shows great integrity, fear of God and self-control. It is not easy resisting good food if you're a captured prisoner. In chapter 3, when everyone else in the nation succumbed to fear and bowed down to the huge statue erected by the king, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego refused. They chose to die rather than to bow down to any other but the true and living God. It is always easier if one has companions in faith. In the case of Daniel, the resolution that is shared by three other friends in a similar situation is easier to carry out than if he were alone in the court of the king. In addition, Daniel and his friends must have had very strong foundations in the word of God, as well as training in self-control, to be able to maintain their stand.)

C. The Apostles

The apostles were always working together (Acts 3:1–8, 12, 13:1–2).

1. In the examples you read above, which apostles were paired together in their ministry?

(When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He sent out His disciples two by two. After He ascended to Heaven, the apostles also worked in pairs most of the time. We see Peter and John preaching together in Acts 2, and Paul and Barnabas in Acts 12 and 13.)

2. Read Mark 6:7 – why do you think workers should work in pairs (or in groups)? What are the disadvantages of working alone? What are the advantages of working with someone else?

(Working alone has many disadvantages:

* Loneliness

* Decision-making that is not always well thought-out

- * Less strength as two are always better than one
- * More easily prone to disillusionment due to lack of support/encouragement

Working in pairs/groups has a lot of advantages:

- * Looking out for each other
- * Complementing one another's strengths and weaknesses
- * Overcoming loneliness and fear
- * Make better decisions, as two heads are often better than one
- * Encouragement to one another

C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G



1 How did God show Jacob that he was not alone when he was fleeing from his brother?

2 What were some of the benefits that Moses reaped by being alone?

3 What were the difficulties Daniel and his three friends overcame by standing united as exiles in the foreign land of Babylon?

4 Give two examples of apostles who paired up and worked together.

L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N



Part A – Loneliness

It is often said that the best cure for any problem is to understand the cause of the phenomenon and thereby preventing it.

Loneliness, to varying degrees, is something young adults like you have to deal with at times. Let's now look at some possible causes of loneliness and as a class, suggest ways to help someone who may be in that predicament. The first one has been done for you as an illustration.

Example

Cause of loneliness

- Not joining in the worldly activities of friends at school

Result

- Being "left out" of the cliques formed among classmates
- Not having close friends at school to hang out with

Advice/suggestion to overcome loneliness

- Draw close to friends in church. Involve yourself with the activities of church friends and activities organized by the church

Case 1

Cause of loneliness

- Not having enough attention and care from parents

Result

- Often feeling bored being alone at home
- students' response

Advice/suggestion to overcome loneliness

- students' response

Case 2

Cause of loneliness

- A lot of one's peers already have close boyfriends or girlfriends

Result

- Feels as if one is "falling behind" and wishes to have the experience of intimacy with someone special too
- students' response

Advice/suggestion to overcome loneliness

- students' response

Case 3

What other causes of loneliness can you think of?

- students' response

Part B- Footprints in the Sand

Life is full of times when we feel lonely. Even when we have people by our sides, we sometimes feel very lonely too. It is as if there's a void in our souls that others can never fill. That is why we need to draw closer to God in times of loneliness. We should always believe that God is with us. The following is a poem that may

be familiar to some of us. Read the poem and then discuss the questions that follow with the rest of the class.

Footprints in the Sand

One night, a man had a dream.
He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord.
Across the sky flashed scenes from his life.
For each scene, he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand:
One belonging to him and the other to the Lord.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him,
He looked back at the footprints in the sand.
He noticed that many times along the path of his life
There was only one set of footprints.
He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in his life.

This really bothered him and he questioned the Lord about it:
“Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you’d walk with me all the way.
But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don’t understand why when I needed you most You would leave me.”

The Lord replied, “My son, my precious child,
I love you and I would never leave you.
During your times of trial and suffering,
When you see only one set of footprints,
It was then that I carried you.”

(Attributed to Mary Stevenson)

Questions to think about:

1. *At what times in your life do you really feel that God is walking with you side by side?*
2. *Have there been times in your life when you felt that you were walking alone and God was not with you? In retrospect, do you still think that God was not with you at those times? Why?*
3. *The person in the poem asks God directly why there was only one set of foot-*

prints during his most lonely times.

- a. *Do you think that asking God directly is the most efficient way to deal with loneliness? Why or why not?*
- b. *Have you had your problems solved by directly talking to God? Share these experiences with your classmates.*

4. *What encouragement would you give to someone who feels lonely in (a) church and (b) life?*

R E F L E C T I O N & P R A Y E R



Sing Hymn 391. The Lord Jesus promises us that He will never leave us, “and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20). Let us be assured that God is always watching over us. In times when we think we’re all alone, forsaken and forgotten, God is with us. In times when we are misunderstood, or when no one even tries to understand us, God is with us. Let us never lose faith in this great assurance promised to us by God Himself.