

Goals

With one single step of faith out of the land of Ur, Abraham set into motion the salvation plan of God. This plan culminated in the Lord Jesus who came to the world to save all sinners. In this unit our students will learn about characters such as Abraham, Zacchaeus, and Cornelius who all responded to the call of the Lord. They responded to God's calling with immediacy, earnestness and simplicity of faith. They turned from their unbelief to a total commitment in God. While it is important to get off to a good start, it is even more crucial to hold onto our faith to the very end. Naaman and Gehazi provide our students with an interesting antithesis of those who started off well in their faith and those who failed tragically at the end. Our students will learn that faith is a seed that has to be planted and constantly nurtured and pruned through the plethora of life's experiences so that we progress from a dependent faith to one that is mature and independent.

unit
1**Teacher Devotional**

In one family lived a mother and her three daughters. One evening after a hearty meal, the daughters thanked their mother profusely for her love and the wonderful meal. With this the mother exclaimed, "Mom has had such a long and hard day. I wonder who would be willing to do the dishes tonight?" The daughters looked at each other. The oldest was the first to speak up. "Sorry mom," she said. "I would love to help but I have an essay due tomorrow, so I have to go." And with that she ran into her room and closed the door. The second daughter grimaced and said, "Ugh! I hate touching grease!" and she too slithered quickly away. Now only the mother and the youngest daughter remained at the table. The youngest glanced at her mother and without saying a word she began to carefully clear away the dirty dishes. Who would you say truly loved mom?

Blessed Are the Doers

*"For not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified."
(Rom 2:13)*

Lesson 1

Abraham,
the Father of Faith***Listed Scriptures***

Gen 11:24-25:11; Ac 7:1-8; Rom 4; Neh 9:7-8; Heb 6:13-15, 11; Gal 3:6-9

Lesson Aim

- 1) To identify the events that helped shape Abraham's faith and conviction of God.
- 2) To enable students to imitate Abraham's faith in God and love for men.

Memory Verse

"For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.'" (Rom 4:3)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Isaiah 1-5

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

**Covenant**

A covenant (Heb. *berit*, meaning "cutting") is a term applied to transactions between God and man and man and his fellowman. In a compact between men or tribes or nations, each party bound himself to fulfill certain conditions and was promised certain advantages. God was solemnly invoked as a witness when the expression "a covenant of the Lord" (1 Sam 20:8; Ezek 17:19) and an oath was sworn (Gen 21:31). Accordingly, a breach of covenant was regarded as a heinous sin. Ceremonies were not only concluded with an oath, but at times, confirmed by slaughtering and cutting an animal into two halves between which the parties passed to show that if either of them broke the covenant it would fare with him as with the divided beast. Covenanting parties often partook of a common meal (Gen 26:30; 31:54), or at least of some grains of salt (Num 18:19; 2 Chron 13:5). Throughout the Old Testament, God made covenants with men; among them were:

Edenic promise of redemption (Gen 3:15); Noah (Gen 9:9); Abraham (Gen 12-25); Israel (Ex 19:5-6); Levites (Num 25:12,13); David (2 Sam 23:5).

In the Abrahamic promises, God established His covenant through various ways: with a verbal promise (Gen 12:4-7), through a burning torch passed between the sacrificial pieces (Gen 15:17), through circumcision (Gen 17:9-11), by swearing (Gen 22:16-18).

The covenants established between God and Abraham are found throughout chapters 12 to 22 of the Book of Genesis. God promised: to make him fruitful (Gen 17:6; 12:2; 15:4-5; 22:17), to give the land of Canaan to him and his descendants as the everlasting inheritance (Gen 17:8; 12:7; 15:7), that all the nations on earth would be blessed on account of his descendants (Gen 22:18; 12:3; 17:6). This refers to how the Messiah would be a descendant of Abraham.

Ur of the Chaldeans

Abraham's native city is commonly thought to be located in southern Babylonia. Modern excavations of the site of Ur revealed that the city had achieved a high level of civilization 500 years before Abraham. The Chaldeans came into southern Babylonia after 1000 B.C. There are detailed descriptions of the worship of the city god of Ur, the moon god Nannar and his consort Ningal. Many buildings were erected to the gods. Ur was a great and prosperous city with an estimated 360,000 inhabitants living in the city and its suburbs.

Hospitality

In biblical times, it was believed to be a sacred duty to receive, feed, lodge and protect any traveler who might stop at one's door. The stranger was treated as a guest, and men who had thus eaten together were bound to each other by the strongest ties of friendship, which descended to their heirs and was confirmed by mutual presents. Hospitality was required in the Law of Moses (Lev 19:33-34). As inns were provided, hospitality was still practiced. The Old Testament gives illustrations of it (Gen 18:1-8; 19:1-3; 24:25, 31-33; etc.) In Job 31:32, it says, "But no sojourner had to lodge in the street, for I have opened my doors to the traveler." In showing hospitality, protocol required that the meal served to the guest exceed what was first offered. Thus the simple offer Abraham made turned out to be freshly baked bread, a calf and a mixture of milk and yogurt. What is particularly generous here was the fresh meat, an item not usually found in their daily diet. The three measures of flour used to make bread were also reflective of Abraham's generosity to his guests. Curds and milk are served along with the meal as customary side dishes and normal byproducts of the herd.

W A R M U P



Read the following inscription of a poem that was written on a wall in a concentration camp.

I believe in the sun
Even when it is not shining
I believe in love
Even when I feel it not
I believe in God
Even when He is silent

What is your definition of faith? How does the poem illustrate the true meaning of faith?

B I B L E S T U D Y



Part 1

Faith

The Bible opens with four great events: the creation, the fall, the flood and the scattering of nations after the confusion of languages. Following these events, God focused on one man and his descendants. The man is Abraham, father of the Jewish people and recipient of three great promises from God. What really sets Abraham apart is his extraordinary faith in God. Abraham is most commonly known as the "Father of Faith." His original name Abram, which means "Father of High", was later changed by God to Abraham, which means "Father of a Multitude of Nations" (Gen 17:5-6).

But what is faith? In the Old Testament (KJV), the word faith occurs only twice (Deut 32:20; Hab 2:4), and the word believe appears less than thirty times. In the New Testament, faith and believe occur almost 500 times. Faith is a word with various meanings:

1. Faith may refer to the body of truth which constitutes the whole of the Christian message (Jude 3).
2. Faith can mean a belief in the Lord Jesus and His redemptive plan.

3. Faith encompasses complete confidence and trust in God.
4. Faith is believing every single word and promise that is written in the Bible about who God is, what He has done, is doing and will do for His saints. This belief culminates in obedience to His will.

Faith like Abraham's did not suddenly appear at the wave of a wand. It is a seed that has to be planted, nurtured and pruned. As we trace the Genesis accounts of Abraham's life, this is exactly what happened. The events in his life provided Abraham with opportunities to trust God more and to grow in faith. Sometimes he responded well; sometimes he failed. Nevertheless, Abraham is known as the "Father of Faith," because he fully believed in the impossible and the unattainable. His faith was completely grounded in God and His promises. And because of this, he was considered righteous in God's eyes. Let us look at how Abraham manifested faith in his life.

Abraham's Calling

In the Book of Acts 7:2-4 it tells us that God first appeared to Abraham in the land of the Chaldeans and said, "Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you." Abraham thus departed from Ur with Sarah his wife, his father Terah and his nephew Lot and settled in Haran, where later his father died (Gen 11:31, 32). At the age of 75 God once again appeared to Abraham and asked him to leave his homeland to a land that God was to show him. From this incident, how did Abraham manifest his faith in God?

a. He departed from Ur not knowing where he was to go

When God appeared to Abraham and told him to depart from his homeland, God did not specify where he was to go (Gen 12:1). Abraham was virtually traveling into the unknown. The Bible however, states simply that "Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him" (Gen 12:4). How remarkable Abraham's faith was! Abraham willingly gave up the familiar for the unknown and he wholeheartedly trusted God for his future. We too face many unknowns in our lives, and uncertainty and the unknown are things we often fear most. We don't know what our future will hold and so we worry about this and that. God tells us that we should not be anxious about tomorrow but to simply take God at His word (Mt 6:25-34).

b. He had to travel a long distance

Genesis 11:31-12:5 records how Abraham departed from Ur to go to the land of Canaan. Abraham and his family would have had to cross the River

Euphrates and trek for more than a thousand miles over rough terrain to get to Canaan. Factors, such as lack of water, the harsh desert, and sheer exhaustion could have weakened Abraham's resolve, but his faith carried him through the rough circumstances (Cf. Ac 27:21-25). Similarly our journey to heaven is a long and arduous one. Difficulties and temptations threaten to weaken our resolve to go on. 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, however, reminds us that, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

c. He had to leave his country, kindred and father's house

In order to receive the blessings of God, Abraham had to leave his country, kindred and father's house.

i. Leave his country

For the first 75 years of his life, Abraham lived in Ur. From archaeological excavations Ur was found to be a prosperous place with a strong cult of the moon god (Josh 24:2). Yet, despite all its faults, Ur was home. Leaving his country meant leaving his roots. It meant having to leave a long tradition of worship of foreign gods for the God who had spoken to him, for whom he did not yet really know. It meant leaving the culture and people he had grown to know and love, to be with people and customs foreign to him. What does leaving one's country mean to us today? The beginning of Abraham's pilgrimage represents the beginning of each man's pilgrimage into Christ. To obtain blessings and inherit eternal life, we have to leave behind our old worldly values, habits and nature. We have to depart from the things that are valuable to us to obtain things that are valuable to God.

ii. Leave his kindred and father's house

Human beings are social creatures. We establish bonds and ties with one another to provide support and companionship. In most societies, the family is the basic unit and in countries such as Israel, the individual is counted for nothing in comparison with the family. Thus when God asked Abraham to depart from his kindred and father's house, God wanted him to forsake what was most dear to him. In Matthew 10:37 the Lord Jesus says, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." The Lord does not mean for us to break off all family ties, but He understood how familial affection can hinder us from putting God as top priority. When our beloved ones and God come into competition, Abraham

sets us a good example of putting God above everything and everyone else.

d. He departed from Ur not having yet received the promised land

When God first appeared to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldeans, God had not yet spoken of the promises He was to give Abraham (Ac 7:3,4). Yet Abraham had the faith to leave his homeland purely based on God's calling. Although in the course of time, God promised to make Abraham into a great nation (Gen 12:2-3) and promised him the land of Canaan (Gen 12:7), yet throughout his entire life Abraham was not able to witness the fulfillment of these promises. It was only 600 years later that his descendants possessed the land of Canaan. Abraham's faith in God's promise is worthy of our imitation. Although he had not yet received any promise, Abraham simply obeyed. Because of his obedience God showered His blessings upon him. Sometimes we pray for blessings but receive nothing. If we first obey God and carry out His will blessings will surely follow.

Reflection:

1. Why do you think God asked Abraham to do such a difficult thing as to leave his loved ones?
2. When it comes down to a choice between following God's will and going against the wishes of someone you love, what would you choose to do?
3. Uncertainty, difficult circumstances, lack of assurance and giving up things that are precious did not hinder Abraham from responding to God's calling. Of these things, which ones might prevent you from doing the same?

 **B • God Promises Abraham a Son**

When God appeared to Abraham and promised him great blessings, Abraham said to God, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" God then told him that "the one who will come from your own body shall be your heir" and that his descendants will be as innumerable as the stars in the night sky. Even though Abraham had no child at the time, he believed in the power of God and God credited it to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6).

This is what true faith is. Faith faces the facts. Abraham had no illusions that he and Sarah were "as good as dead", physically speaking. Yet Abraham believed in God's promise against all hope. Abraham knew God could make something out of nothing (Heb 11:3). In the Book of Romans, the apostle Paul emphasizes the

great trust this act of faith required (Rom 4:19-21). Nowadays, many people do not believe in the Holy Bible, the Creation, or the virgin birth - simply because it is too incredible. These people have yet to grasp a true understanding of God's power and almightiness. King David understood the greatness of God. In his 139th Psalm, David wrote, "For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them" (Ps 139:7-8,13-16).

 **C • Abraham Offers Up His Only Son**

Read Genesis 22:1-2. How did Abraham demonstrate his faith in this incident?

a. He obeyed immediately

When God told Abraham to offer his son, He did not give Abraham a time frame. But the Bible tells us an amazing thing—Abraham rose early the next morning to offer his son. Many of us would have waited for a week, a month or even longer to avoid the inevitable. Abraham, on the other hand, obeyed immediately. Our actions give evidence of the reality of our trust and faith in God. When the Lord Jesus asked Peter and Andrew to follow Him, they "immediately" left their nets and followed Him (Mt 4:20; Mt 4:18-22). Let us be like the Psalmist who wrote, "I made haste, and did not delay to keep Your commandments" (Ps 119:60). If we eagerly obey God we will experience God eagerly loving us and experience His abundant blessings (Lk 11:27-28).

b. He obeyed totally

Abraham did exactly as the Lord commanded him. In our pursuit of spiritual perfection obedience is one of the hardest lessons to learn. Oftentimes our obedience is partial, selective and conditional. But God's commandments are not suggestions. We need to obey them with faith regardless of how we feel (1 Sam 15:22; Jas 2:21-23,26). At times we find it difficult to obey God's word because we are afraid of suffering, cannot put down our own will, have lack faith in God or don't understand the truth or the will of God. We should therefore ask God to increase our faith and understanding of Him, to give us a humble spirit so that we can submit to His will.

c. He obeyed even when it didn't make sense

When Abraham heard God's command to offer up the child he had waited 25 years for, it must have seemed as if God was playing some cruel joke. Yet, regardless of how senseless it seemed, Abraham obeyed. There may be times when we are asked to do things that appear illogical or unreasonable. For example, commanding Peter to cast his net on the right side of the boat after an entire night of fishing seemed senseless. The little boy's offering of five loaves of bread and the two fish to feed a multitude of five thousand was absurd to the disciples (Jn 6:8-9). However, if we obey only when it makes sense then our faith and obedience is limited to our narrow understanding. We are walking by sight and not by faith. In Isaiah 55:8 God reminds us that "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor 1:25).

d. He believed that God would resurrect his son

Although this was the hardest trial that Abraham would encounter, Abraham obeyed because he believed deeply in God's promise and power (Heb 11:18). He believed that God would not go back on His word to make him into a great nation. And even if Isaac were to die, Abraham believed that God had the power to resurrect him from the dead. Abraham trusted in God against all odds. His faith carried him through great trials, and enabled him to remain steadfast and sober.

Reflection:

1. Define true obedience.
2. To you, what are the hardest and the easiest things to give to God?
3. Were you ever asked to do something that didn't make sense? How did you respond?



Part 2

Abraham's Love



Abraham's Love For Lot

a. He gave Lot first choice

Read Genesis 13:8-13. When Abraham left the land of Ur he took with him his nephew Lot, whose father had died (Gen 11:27-28). Abraham loved and cared for Lot. As their possessions increased and the land could not support both of them living together, strife arose between Abraham and Lot's herdsmen. Abraham decided that to maintain peace and harmony between them, they should separate from each other and so he gave Lot first choice of the land. Abraham's love and long-suffering did not go unnoticed by God. After Lot departed from him, God appeared to Abraham to bestow great blessings upon him (Gen 13:14-17).

b. He rescued Lot

Read Genesis 14:14-17. In Abraham's time most cities had their own kings. A conquered city had to pay tribute to the victorious king. This meant that the five cities which included Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Zoar, had to pay taxes to King Chedorlaomer of Elam for 12 years. The five cities formed an alliance and rebelled by withholding tribute. Chedorlaomer reacted swiftly and called upon three other countries, namely Shinar, Ellasar and Goiim to fight against the five rebel cities. The four kings conquered the five cities and when they had defeated Sodom, Lot, his family and his possessions were also captured. What can we learn about Abraham from this incident?

i. He overlooked other's wrongs

In Genesis 13 Lot had ungraciously taken the best of the land and settled in the city of Sodom. In chapter 14, Abraham learned that Lot had been captured. Upon hearing the news, Abraham did not begrudge Lot of his loss; instead he went straight to the rescue (1 Cor 13:5-8; Rom 13:8).

ii. He risked his life to save Lot

Abraham was a herdsman by profession and unskilled in warfare. But when he learned that Lot had been captured, he took his 318 trained men and went in pursuit of the four kings. Abraham did not stop to consider what 318 trained men were compared to the armies of the four kings skilled in warfare. With God's help and his love for Lot, Abraham was spurred on to risk his life to rescue his kinsmen. Have we given of ourselves

to save those brothers and sisters who are weak and have fallen into sin and temptation (Gal 6:1; Jas 5:19-20)?

iii. He sacrificed his all

Abraham was living by the oaks of Mamre during this time, but when he heard the news, he quickly gathered his small forces and pursued as far as Dan. He later divided his forces and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. Mamre is about 2 miles north of Hebron which lies west of the Dead Sea. From Mamre to Dan and then to Hobah (north of Damascus), involved a journey that spanned the entire length of the country of Israel, which was approximately 300 km (about 187.5 miles). After he had defeated the kings, Abraham brought Lot and all his possessions back again to the Valley of Shaveh, which was one-fourth of a mile east of Jerusalem. This meant a return journey of another 300 km. Abraham teaches us that to show love or kindness to others, we need to sacrifice our time, effort, money and convenience.

Reflection:

1. We often show kindness and concern for others only when it is convenient for us or when we feel like it. What does Abraham's actions teach us about true love?
2. With what kind of attitude do we help others?

 **B Abraham Welcomes the Three Visitors**

Read Genesis 18:1b-8. In biblical times, showing hospitality was a common practice. It was believed to be a sacred duty to receive, feed, lodge and protect any traveler who might stop at one's door. Hospitality was also required in the Law of Moses (Lev 19:34). However, Abraham went far beyond the law's requirement.

Let's pay close attention to Abraham's actions as he sees the three men approaching: "In the heat of the day, Abraham ran from the tent door to meet them." Keep in mind that Abraham was not a young man at the time – he was 99 years old. "Then he bowed himself to the ground hurried into the tent ran to the herd then he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate." What does Abraham's actions teach us?

1. Abraham did not take the easy way out. He took it upon himself to prepare for his guests. This is not an easy task considering his age and the warm climate.

2. Abraham offered his best to his guests. He did not offer leftovers. According to historians, the three measures of flour (c. 20 quarts) that was used to bake the bread reflected Abraham's generosity to his guests. The calf was tender and good and not one that he wanted to get rid of. Actually, meat was not an item customarily offered to guests and eaten as part of the daily diet. This too was reflective of Abraham's love and generosity.
3. Abraham did not realize that these men were in fact God and two heavenly angels (Heb 13:2). Abraham simply served the travelers wholeheartedly. Many times we show partiality in our treatment of others. We tend to reserve the best for our friends and people we know. But Abraham's love for all people is reflected in his warm welcome to the strangers.

Reflection:

1. Compare your attitude with that of Abraham's when asked to entertain strangers. What differences or similarities do you notice?
2. Why is showing hospitality to others important?
3. Share a testimony where people were blessed on account of welcoming others.

 **C Abraham Prays for Sodom and Gomorrah**

When the sins and wickedness of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were no longer bearable, God decided to destroy the cities. Realizing God's plans, Abraham began to plead to God on behalf of the people in those cities (Gen 19:16-33). Abraham's attitude in praying for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah is worthy of our imitation.

a. He prayed with love

Abraham prayed to God to spare the city for the sake of the righteous people. At first Abraham pleaded to God spare the city on account of 50 righteous people. God agreed. When 50 righteous people could not be found, Abraham continued to pray reducing the number of righteous people from 50-45-40-30-20-10. We can sense that Abraham was trying not to overstep the line, yet love for the people moved him to plead over and over again for those pitiful souls that were to be destroyed. Without love, our prayers are short-lived. Do our hearts burn like Abraham for the souls who are not yet saved? Have we mentioned the names of those who have not yet received the gospel, or those who are backsliding, in our daily prayers (1 Tim 2:1-5; Is 59:16)? Let us "pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit,

being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints" (Eph 6:18; Is 59:16; 1 Tim 2:1-5; Col 4:2-4).

b. He understood God's righteousness and mercy

Abraham understood that God was a righteous God. Job 37:23 says, "The Almighty—we cannot find Him; He is great in power and justice, and abundant righteousness He will not violate" (RSV). The Lord will reward each for his deeds and He will not let the evildoers go unpunished. Abraham understood God's will full well but he took God at His mercy no matter how far-fetched his petitions seemed to be (Eph 2:4). Genesis 19:29 mentions that God remembered Abraham and his petitions and especially sent two angels to save Lot and his family from the destruction. When we pray for others, we need to take God at His mercy. For "who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?" (Jon 3:9) Joel 2:13 reminds us of the kind of God we worship: "For He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm."

Reflection:

1. Share an experience where God responded to your prayers for others.
2. In God's dealings with Abraham, Lot and Sodom, what did you learn about God's character and purposes? About judgment and mercy for wayward people?

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



Due to the nature of this lesson, the Check For Understanding questions can be found after each Bible Study section under the heading "Reflection".

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



My Journey of Faith From Ur to Canaan

Each person's faith is built up from a plethora of life experiences such as births or deaths among family and friends, receiving the Holy Spirit, having a prayer answered, being involved in an accident, disappointments, relationships and so on. Through the ordinary and extraordinary events in

life, our faith, trust and knowledge of God deepen. Each event is a stepping stone to higher planes so that we progress from a dependent faith to one that is mature and independent.

In this exercise, we are going to map out the experiences that enabled us to know God a little better. Abraham's first contact with God was in Ur when God called him. Our first realization of God or "God's calling in Ur" may have been during RE classes when we were young. We can plot these various "contacts" with God on the map. We can also plot the times when we were disobedient to God (like when Abraham went down to Egypt to escape the famine) and the lessons we learned from those experiences. These maps will give us an idea of how God has used these experiences to deepen our knowledge of Him in our journey from Ur to Canaan.

Suggested Reading:

"The grace which God has manifested in my family," *Manna* Issue 1

Teaching Tips

In preparation for Lesson 3, make copies of the printed survey from the Student's Workbook. Students should pass the surveys out to each local church member and ask him or her to fill out the forms. The students also need to be responsible for collecting the completed surveys from those members. You may wish to divide the members into manageable groups. You may also want to inform the church council members of this activity. During the next Sabbath, an announcement can be made to the entire congregation regarding the survey. Members should be encouraged to fill in and return the surveys at a certain date. Allow 2-3 weeks to administer the survey and more time for a larger church congregation.

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



Through one man's obedience, the history of the world was affected. With one single step of faith out of the land of Ur, Abraham set into motion the salvation plan of God. Our journey to the promised land also requires us to take these steps of faith. May God increase our faith!

Zacchaeus, the Tax Collector

Listed Scriptures

Lk 19:1-10

Lesson Aim

- 1) To imitate Zacchaeus' desire and pursuit of God.
- 2) To learn that true repentance involves a change in values and behavior.

Memory Verse

"Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ." (Phil 3:8)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Isaiah 6-10

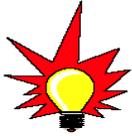
B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



The Romans gathered funds for their government by farming out the collection privilege. Tax collectors earned their own living by adding a sizable sum—whatever they could get away with—to the total and keeping this money for themselves. The Jews opposed these taxes because they supported a secular government and its pagan gods. But unless the people revolted and risked Roman retaliation, they had to pay whatever was demanded. Some of their own countrymen became tax collectors, lured by the wealth such a position promised. Obviously, the people hated the tax collectors who were notorious for their dishonesty and greed. Some were also ready to betray their own countrymen for cold cash. The Gospel of Luke presents stories of several tax collectors and their dealings with Jesus Christ (see Lk 3:12; 5:27-30; 7:29; 15:1; and a parable in 18:10-13). As the chief tax collector Zacchaeus was in charge over others. Matthew had been a tax collector, but Zacchaeus was chief of his region. Matthew had been well off but Zacchaeus was

very wealthy. Yet, God accepts even these men. God desires to pour out mercy on those who confess and gives strength to live changed lives.

W A R M U P



Have you ever pursued for something so meaningful that you were willing to exchange everything for it?

Was there something in your childhood/teenage years that you treasured a lot?

What is its meaning to you now?

Why has its meaning changed or remained the same for you?

B I B L E S T U D Y



Part 1

Zacchaeus' Search For the Lord

The conversion of Zacchaeus demonstrates how the good news is for everyone. It shows that the Lord Jesus came to the world to save all sinners; regardless of sex, race, age or worldly status (Lk 5:31-32; 7:22-23). The Son of Man came to save the lost. Zacchaeus was the son of Abraham but he had lost his way and departed from God. This compelling story tells how the Lord came to seek him out. Through Zacchaeus' example we also learn of the kind of response and attitude that we should have when responding to God's calling.



A • He Grabbed Hold of the Opportunity

While the Lord was preaching on earth, news of Him and His mighty works spread throughout the land. When the people heard that He was to pass through Jericho, a large crowd flocked to see Him. Most came out of sheer curiosity. Zacchaeus, however, came with an inner desire and thirst. Throughout our lives we are given opportunities by God to do certain things such as study, honor our parents, get married, and even believe in God (Eccl 9:11). Like Zacchaeus, we should take hold of the opportunity because

opportunities may pass us by and we may never get a second chance. Some truthseekers seek the truth for decades and delay getting baptized. Suddenly they may fall sick and pass away. By then it is too late. They have missed a precious opportunity to receive salvation. Isaiah 55:6 reminds us to "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near."



B • He Pursued the Lord

Zacchaeus means "pure or justified", but how conflicting the meaning of his name was with his daily actions. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector which meant that other publicans were officers under him. We hear of publicans coming to Christ (Mt 9:9-10; Lk 18:10-13) but here was the chief, a man of authority. Zacchaeus possessed what other's sought—riches, power and status. But these could not satisfy his inner emptiness nor buy him joy and acceptance. Zacchaeus' desire to see the Lord stemmed from an awareness of his sinful past and hope to receive the Lord's forgiveness and salvation.



C • He Had An Earnest Desire

Although Zacchaeus longed to see the Lord, he could not because of the multitude and his short stature. His physical stature and the huge crowds were realities that Zacchaeus could not change. However, Zacchaeus' earnest desire to see the Lord Jesus propelled him to overcome these barriers. "He sought to see who Jesus was ... he ran ahead he climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him" (Lk 19:3-4). Such actions show how Zacchaeus sought the Lord with great persistence and urgency. It is no wonder that the Lord Jesus beckoned to him and chose him. The Lord loves and blesses those who are poor in spirit and who seek Him eagerly (Jer 29:13; Mt 7:7-8; Ps 42:1; Ps 119:20).



D • He Faced Problems Courageously

Zacchaeus was hated and despised by the multitude that had gathered to see the Lord Jesus. Seeing Zacchaeus amongst them might have spurred them to take revenge upon him or to sneer at him. But Zacchaeus did not fear this. He entered into the crowd and faced his obstacles head on. Because of his short stature, Zacchaeus clambered up a sycamore tree where he could get a good view. Although the Bible does not mention Zacchaeus' age, we can imagine the effort needed for a man his size to climb the tree. Zacchaeus did not worry about whether such actions were appropriate for a person his age and position. In his desire to

see the Lord, Zacchaeus was able to overcome his various difficulties with courage and wisdom.

Oftentimes when we choose to draw closer to God and seek after Him, obstacles and temptations will arise. Our flesh and Satan will hinder us. When we find that we are one of the few who have yet to receive the Holy Spirit, we are too embarrassed to go up to the front of the chapel to pray. When we make a resolve to read the Bible and pray more, our schedule becomes so packed that it seems we cannot afford the time. Such obstacles and difficulties can cause us to doubt, lose hope and eventually give up. But we need to imitate Zacchaeus who faced his problems with courage and wisdom. He identified the problems, thought of possible solutions and used what was around him to help him draw closer to the Lord. What things are preventing us from drawing close to the Lord? How can we remove these obstacles? What things around us can we use to help us? These could come in the form of a trusted RE teacher, a brother and sister in church, or our parents. Courage and wisdom are given by the Lord. It is up to us to utilize them in our pursuit of God.

Reflection:

1. How can we have an intense desire for God?
2. Zacchaeus was not afraid of losing decorum for the sake of Christ. Have you ever faced a similar situation? How did you feel?
3. What obstacles prevent you from seeing Christ? Have you overcome them? If so, how?
4. Do you know of anyone who lost a precious opportunity to believe in the Lord? Do you know of anyone who grabbed hold of the opportunity to believe and be baptized just in the nick of time?



Part 2

Zacchaeus' Repentance



A He Received the Lord With Gladness

Passing by the sycamore tree, the Lord looked up and called out, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for today I must stay at your house" (Lk 19:5). Notice how Zacchaeus responded to the Lord—"he made haste and came down, and he received the Lord joyfully" (19:6). Zacchaeus sets us a very good example in how we should respond to God's words. His actions (sought to see, ran, climbed, made

haste, received the Lord joyfully) demonstrate an eager and active response to God's words. How have we responded to God's words? Have we responded to God's calling and commandments in a positive and joyous way? Or are we like the rich young man who went away full of sorrow when told to go and sell all his possessions (Mt 19:16-22)?



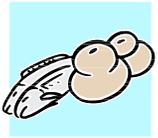
B He Repented

Upon hearing the people's complaints that the Lord had gone to be a guest of a man who was a sinner, Zacchaeus responded immediately. Like the man who found treasures hidden in a field and sold all he had to buy that field (Mt 13:44-45), Zacchaeus willingly gave up all he possessed to obtain Christ. First, he gave away half of his possessions. This meant forsaking his wealth, comforts and old way of life to follow Jesus Christ. With the rest of his wealth, Zacchaeus promised to give back to anyone whom he had defrauded. The Old Testament law for restitution required returning the amount plus one-fifth (see Lev 5:16; Num 5:7). Zacchaeus went far beyond the law's requirements. His action demonstrates how much he wanted to repay the love of God. When we reimburse what we owe to others that is our duty. But when we give back more than what we owe it is because of Christ's love.

Zacchaeus demonstrated what true repentance is. "Repent" in Greek is metanoia, which means "a change of heart and life, a change of life direction." A person who repents turns from his old ways to wholeheartedly commit himself to doing the will of God. We need to repent of our past sins, transgressions in daily life, disbelief, and belief in false doctrines or religions. To show our repentance we need to be determined to change our ways and follow God's direction and commandments. Zacchaeus did not just check out the Lord, and then go on his way; he changed completely. Repentance to Zacchaeus meant a rejection of the old values on which his life had been based and a commitment to the values of Jesus Christ (Lk 3:8). He gave up what was important to him in exchange for what was important to the Lord (Phil 3:8).

Reflection:

1. What does repentance mean to you?
2. How did Zacchaeus demonstrate the meaning of true repentance?
3. What changes do you need to make in your life?



Part 3

Zacchaeus Was Chosen By the Lord

Out of the great multitude that had gathered that day, the Lord chose to be a guest only at Zacchaeus' house. What an honor and blessing this was! John 15:16 says, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain" (Eph 1:4; Tit 3:5). Like Zacchaeus, we were once lost in sin and in the pleasures of the world, but Christ handpicked us and despite our unworthiness came to be a guest at our house. The Lord has come in to eat with us and we with Him (Rev 3:20). Today when we hear the calling of Jesus Christ we need to respond and invite Him into our hearts so that we can have fellowship with Him and be partakers of the salvation of God.

Reflection:

1. Have you welcomed the Lord into your heart?
2. What did it take for you to welcome Him?
3. What changes did you experience in your life afterwards?

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING



Due to the nature of this lesson, the Check For Understanding questions can be found after each Bible Study section under the heading "Reflection".

LIFE APPLICATION



Opportunity Knocks

Today, we learned that besides God's choosing, another reason why Zacchaeus was able to receive salvation was because he knew how to take hold of the opportunity. In life we may have ample opportunities to do different things, but it is the Lord who provides us with these chances and gives us success in them (Gen 27:20). Ecclesiastes 9:11 says, "I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all." In the following exercise list some of the different kinds of opportunities in life and provide examples from the Bible.

Opportunity to learn (Eccl 9:10)

1. Moses had an opportunity to be instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians (Ac 7:19-22).
2. Paul was educated in the greatest academic centers and under the greatest teachers (Ac 22:3).
3. Daniel and his three friends learned the letters and the language of the Chaldeans (Dan 1:4, 17).
4. Peter was an uneducated, common fisherman but learned under the guidance of Christ (Ac 4:13).

Opportunity to marry (Gen 2:22)

1. Isaac met with a good opportunity from the Lord (Gen 24:12).
2. God gave Ruth an opportunity to meet Boaz (Ruth 2:1-6).

Opportunity to serve (Jn 9:4)

1. Mary seized the moment to prepare for Jesus Christ's burial (Jn 12:1-7).
2. The people offered for the building of the tabernacle (Ex 35:20-29).
3. A group of woman came to the Lord's tomb to anoint His body, but the Lord had already resurrected (Mk 16:1-6).
4. David wanted to build a temple, but had no opportunity (1 Chron 22:6-8).

Opportunity to believe in the Lord (Is 55:6)

1. The Ethiopian eunuch grabbed the chance to be baptized (Ac 8:27-36).
2. The criminal who was crucified along with the Lord Jesus believed (Lk 23:39-43).

Opportunity to do good (Prov 3:28; Gal 6:10)

1. The Good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-37).
2. The Shunammite woman showed kindness to Elisha the prophet (2 Kgs 4:8-10).
3. Nabal refused to provide for King David (1 Sam 25:9-11).

Opportunity to listen to God's words (Eccl 5:1; Is 51:4)

1. Mary sat at the feet of the Lord to listen to His teachings (Lk 10:38-42).
2. Eutychus did not use the opportunity to listen to God's word attentively (Ac 20:9).

Opportunity to repent (2 Pet 3:9)

1. David repented immediately (2 Sam 12:1).
2. Although Jesus Christ gave Judah repeated opportunities to repent, he ignored

them all (Jn 13:10-11).

3. The rich man who had no pity on Lazarus while on earth repented too late (Lk 16:19-25).

Opportunity to preach the gospel (2 Tim 4:2)

1. Priscilla and Aquila took the opportunity to preach to Apollos (Ac 18:24-26).
2. Paul seized every opportunity to preach the gospel (Ac 25:23ff; 16:25-34; 17:16ff).
3. Jonah at first refused to preach to the city of Nineveh (Jonah 1:1; 3:1-4).

Opportunity to be successful (Deut 8:17-18)

1. Isaac obeyed God's command by not going down to Egypt. God blessed him and made him a very rich man (Gen 26:12).
2. Peter had fished for an entire night and caught nothing. But upon casting his net on his right at the command of the Lord, he caught many fish (Jn 21:3-11).

Discussion Questions:

1. What is an opportunity?
2. Are there right or wrong opportunities?
3. Have you ever missed an opportunity?
4. What were your thoughts and what lessons did you learn from it?
5. Do you feel you have utilized the opportunities God has given to you?



Matthew 10:4 says, Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Zacchaeus was such a person. With his endearing child-like faith and his intense earnestness to seek the Lord Jesus, he was welcomed into the arms of the Lord. If the Lord were to pass your way, what would you do?

Teaching Tips

First have students brainstorm on the different categories of opportunities that we have in life. You may wish to divide them into groups. Students can try to come up with examples of people who took hold of the opportunity as well as those who missed chances. Have students come together again for sharing and discussion.

Note to Teachers:

Before next week's lesson, make sure that students have collected all the completed surveys that should have been previously passed out to the church congregation. A more complete and accurate picture of the church situation can be obtained only when all the surveys are collected.

Cornelius the Centurion

Listed Scriptures

Ac 10-11; Rom 11; Ps 4:3, 115:13

Lesson Aim

- 1) To imitate Cornelius' love for God and men.
- 2) To be impartial in our treatment of others.
- 3) To preach the gospel to people of all nations.

Memory Verse

"But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him." (Ac 10:35)

Bible Reading For This Week *(for students and teachers)*

Isaiah 11-15

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



Caesarea

This Caesarea sometimes called Palestinian Caesarea, was located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, thirty-two miles north of Joppa. The largest and most important port city in Palestine, Caesarea was the capital of the Roman province of Judea. Because of frequent outbreaks of violence, Roman soldiers had to be stationed there to keep peace throughout Israel. This was the first city to have gentile Christians and a non-Jewish church.

Centurion of the Italian Cohort

Cornelius was a centurion. Centurions commanded units of about 80-100 men. His century was part of a "regiment" or "cohort", which was made up of 600 men. Five cohorts were stationed in Caesarea and one in Jerusalem.

W A R M U P



1. On meeting a person for the first time, what do you usually observe first?
2. What are some principles or beliefs you have held that have limited your ability to reach out to people “different” from you?
3. Are there certain groups of people that you feel prejudiced towards? Why?

B I B L E S T U D Y



Part 1

Cornelius, the Man

Before His ascension, the Lord Jesus commissioned His apostles to be witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Ac 1:8). In the first nine chapters of Acts, the work of God’s Spirit was mostly confined to the Jews and centered in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. The believers held onto the belief that the salvation of God was given only to the Jews. However, suddenly in Acts 10, we read about the Spirit’s sovereign activity in a gentile army officer stationed on the Mediterranean coast. The conversion of Cornelius and his family was an epoch-changing moment. It not only served to break down age-old Jewish traditions and beliefs, it also marked a new phase in the development of the church. The one true God – the God of the Hebrews – was about to unveil His eternal plan, hidden through the ages. “There is no longer Jew or Gentile ... you are all Christians ... one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). The door of the gospel was now swinging wide open to the world.



A A Charitable and Devout Man

Cornelius was a centurion of the Italian Cohort in Caesarea. Caesarea was the largest and most important port city in Palestine. However, due to frequent outbreaks of violence, Roman soldiers had to be stationed there to keep peace throughout Israel. Although Cornelius was a Roman army officer, he was not aggressive or oppressive towards the Jews. Rather, he was a devout and God-

fearing man who generously helped those around him (Gal 6:9-10). Thus Cornelius was well spoken of throughout the Jewish nation.

Reflection:

1. What does fearing God mean? (1.To have respect and reverence for God; 2.To recognize Him for who He is and be in awe of His majesty and power; 3.To keep His commands. Proverbs 8:13 says, “The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil.” Because we know that God is just and merciful, and detests all evil, we need to keep ourselves holy by abiding in His laws.)
2. How can we learn to fear God?
3. How does fearing God correlate with our actions?



B A Man of Prayer

The Bible not only describes Cornelius as a devout man with good deeds, but also as a man who prayed constantly. His prayers and his alms were consequently remembered by God. This reminds us that our prayers affect our behavior just as our behavior affects our prayers. The effectiveness of our prayers comes as a result of changing ourselves to meet God’s will. Aside from asking God to grant our requests, we must be determined to live by God’s principles. If we are friends with the world (Jas 4:4), if we possess sin (Ps 66:18), or have incorrect motives—all these will affect our prayers. The Bible tells us that the prayer of one who does not heed God’s law is an abomination in His eyes (Jer 6:19-20; Prov 28:9, 15:8; 1 Sam 15:22). Through prayer, we can be transformed to be more like Christ and fruitful in good deeds.

Reflection:

1. What relationship does the effectiveness of prayers have with our daily conduct?
2. Reflect on how effective our prayers have been– is there some sin or obstacle that hinders our prayers from reaching God?



C A Man of Humility

Cornelius was a centurion, a man of power and means. Men like Cornelius are used to giving orders rather than taking them. But Cornelius was unlike other men – he was very humble. When the angel appeared to him and told him to send for Peter, Cornelius obeyed immediately. When Peter arrived, he treated Peter with the utmost respect: he fell down and worshiped him (Ac 10:25). Although Peter was

not a Jewish leader, but a mere fisherman, Cornelius did not allow worldly differences and prejudices to prevent him from recognizing the truth.

In God's household there is no rank or file. We have to treat others with the same love and respect regardless of our worldly status. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:27). God shows no partiality (Rom 2:11) and if we show partiality we commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors (Jas 2:9). Let us therefore "Clothe ourselves with humility toward one another for God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Ac 10:25; 33; Mt 5:3).

Reflection:

1. Why is treating others with partiality a sin?
2. How was humility a key factor for Cornelius in accepting the truth?
3. Reflect on the way we treat others in church— are we prone to remain within a certain circle of friends, excluding others? What is our reaction to someone who comes to church dressed in rags, and someone smartly dressed?
4. How can we remove partiality?



Part 2

Cornelius' Conversion

The picture of Acts 10 is of God orchestrating events in individual lives to bring about His eternal purposes. Through His Spirit and the cooperation of His workers God leads people to Him through many wonderful and marvelous ways.



a. The revelation to Cornelius

One day an angel appeared before Cornelius in a vision telling him that his prayers and his alms had reached God. The angel instructed Cornelius to send men to Joppa to ask for a man named Peter to come. Angels are responsible for sending the messages of God, and guiding people to salvation. They are ministering spirits and labor for those who are to receive salvation (Heb 1:14; Mt 18:10; Ac 12: 7, 15). We too need to be a messenger of the gospel, leading others to know God.

b. The revelation to Peter

Cornelius' reception of the truth depended not only on God's choosing but on the movement of the Holy Spirit and the cooperation of the workers. From the passage recorded in Acts 10:9ff, God not only showed a vision to Cornelius, God appeared to Peter too. Without proof from the Lord, it would have been almost impossible for Peter who had been brought up in the Jewish traditions and ways to accept Cornelius' invitation (Ac 10:9-22). God showed Peter the vision for a purpose (Job 33:14-18; Cf Ac 16:6-10). He understood that the salvation of Cornelius would be startling not only to Peter's Jewish mind but also to the believers in Jerusalem because it called for a radical reorientation of their concept of God and of themselves as the chosen people. The Jews prided themselves as God's chosen race and in their minds, everyone outside the Jewish race was considered unclean. According to the teachings of the Rabbis, Jews were permitted to do business with gentiles or converse with them, but no pious Jew would ever enter a gentile's home or invite them to their own house and dine with them (Jn 18:28; Ac 11:3). He would be contaminated if he did, unable to worship God until he had been ceremonially cleaned. Furthermore, the Jews had certain dietary laws that allowed them to eat only of things that were considered clean (Lev 11).

In order to fulfill His purposes, God prepared Peter for the work he was to do. Peter had to first get rid of his own preconceptions. When doing God's work we should put aside our own thoughts, customs, habits and will. If Peter had not cooperated, the will of God would have been hindered. After the incident, Peter understood God's will when he said, "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him" (Ac 10:34-35; Rom 1:16; Eph 6:9). This teaches us that when we preach to others, we should not prejudice or avoid certain groups of people because we personally dislike them. It is important that we welcome everyone into Christ. God's pure love is unconditional and to Him every soul is worth more than the whole world.

Reflection:

1. Peter's mindset was changed through the movement of the Holy Spirit. Has there been a time when your viewpoint was changed completely by God? Share your experience.
2. Have you ever avoided preaching to certain people because you felt s/he just didn't seem to be the type to believe in God?
3. Share an incident where someone who seemed unlikely to receive the gospel embraced the truth.



B • The Apostles' Testimony

When Peter arrived at Cornelius' house, the kinsmen and close friends of Cornelius were already waiting to hear Peter's testimony. On hearing the truth, Cornelius and all those who had gathered believed in the Lord and were baptized (Ac 10:34-43). Cornelius had a magnanimous heart. He wanted to share the good news with those around him. Sadly we often lack Cornelius' earnestness in preaching to others. The following testimony illustrates the necessity to share the faith to others.

"Earlier, the fact that the gospel had not reached other Christians and ethnic groups in our communities did not bother me too much. Then a vision appeared to me during a prayer one Friday evening. I was lifted above the earth in a flying motion and everything was dark below me. I could see row upon row of trenches filled with people, trying to get out but not being able to. I asked the Lord, 'Who are these people in the trenches?' The answer came, 'They are the ones who are not saved'. My next two questions were, 'Did You not come to save them? Why are there still so many people not saved?' There was silence! Then out of the vast expanse of darkness I saw a tiny speck of light in the distance. As I advanced towards it I could see four beams radiating out like a cross. I was reminded of two past events in my life. When I was one year old the Lord healed me of a life-threatening disease. When I was ten years old I nearly drowned. The Lord saved my life then, too. The radiant cross brought me back to the Lord's atoning death. He had already completed His work of salvation for mankind when He said, 'It is finished.' That answered my first question. The Lord spoke to me, 'The reason why there are still so many people not saved is because there are too many Christians like you doing nothing about it'. After hearing that I felt the same way Peter must have felt after he denied Christ. I was a sinner before my Lord, my Lord who had done everything for me, and I had done nothing for Him. I broke down and cried. Through this vision, I learned again how urgent the work of salvation is."



C • The Down-Pouring of the Holy Spirit

Cornelius is an example that God "rewards those who diligently seek Him" (Heb 11:6). Cornelius was religious, devoted, generous, respected and sincere (10:1-2) and yet, he was spiritually separated from God. In order to be in right standing with God, God sent Peter to present to him the truth about salvation. While they were listening to Peter, God poured down His Spirit upon them to confirm that the truth was being preached (Mk 16:15-18). Let us not fall into the trap in equat-

ing good character and good deeds with salvation. Being a good person is not enough. The Bible reminds us that we have all sinned (Rom 3:23) and we are saved not by works of righteousness but through God's mercy. Only through baptism of the water and Spirit can we be brought into right standing with God (Jn 3:5; Tit 3:5).

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



Due to the nature of this lesson, the Check For Understanding questions can be found after each Bible Study section under the heading "Reflection".

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



One in Christ

Have you ever been in a setting where you were the only person different from everyone else in the room? You notice the way they look; the color of their hair, eyes and skin differ. The language they speak and the way they express themselves, their culture and their background are all different from the way you were brought up. What were your feelings? How did you respond? Did you try to mingle or did you just sit in the corner feeling totally left out? Worse still, did you end up walking out?

Such a culture shock was probably not far from what Peter felt when God told him to meet Cornelius who was a gentile. Even today, there may be some truthseekers or even believers who face this kind of culture shock when they come to church. Some truthseekers continue to study the truth but they never quite feel as if they belong while for some, they never come back again. Some believers stay out on the perimeters because they never feel a part of the group. Since the Lord Jesus has commanded us to go and make disciples of all nations, how can we make the church more welcoming to those who are different from us? How can we address their needs?

Read the following article, which illustrates what one church did to incorporate people of all races in the church, and then complete the activity and discussion section.

“A Multiethnic Church: Is It Really Possible?”

(Manna, issue 31 April-June 2000)

Jesus Christ gave His disciples two great commissions before ascending into heaven; to care for His church and to preach the gospel to all nations (Mt 28:19; Lk 24:47). This was a command to the first Christians, and similarly it is a command to us today. Because it is a command, we have assurance that we can succeed in this mission. The unity of cultures corresponds to the Lord's will (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11; Is 11:6-9) and should not pose an obstacle for the church today. Harmony between members despite differences of culture shows that we are united by the power of the Holy Spirit, the one faith, and the will of God. We should try our best to carry out this mission so that all people can see our union of love, peace and joy.

Addressing Multicultural Issues

Many problems arose when the church in Jerusalem, which comprised primarily of Jewish members, began to include Gentiles. There were theological problems (i.e. should Gentiles be circumcised?), cultural differences (i.e. should women be veiled?) and no doubt communication issues (i.e. which language should sermons be delivered in or translated into?) Today some people think that the solution to multicultural issues in the church is to separate the cultures, but that would be a serious mistake. First, this is not the example set by the apostolic church. Second, the multiethnic church is proof that unity comes from our faith and from the Holy Spirit. If the other churches fail, we the True Jesus Church can succeed because we are the only church united by the one true faith and the Holy Spirit. Although it is the will of God for all nations to be unified in His church, the task is not necessarily an easy one. It requires a good understanding of God's will and a lot of effort from the believers.

The Apostolic church and the True Jesus Church

When the Holy Spirit first descended on the Jewish believers in Jerusalem during the apostolic period, they began spreading the good news. Their mission was to preach the message of salvation to all corners of the earth— which in their minds stopped at Spain!

Members of the early church in Jerusalem were in no hurry to preach the gospel “in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” They were too busy managing the daily growth of the church. The believers were rejoicing under the blessing of the Lord and led abundant Christian lives full of sincerity, joy and harmony. It was only when persecution arose that the church started to expand.

In the same way, the Holy Spirit descended at the beginning of this century as the latter rain, fulfilling Old Testament prophecies. Jesus Christ has chosen the True Jesus Church, which originated from China, to spread the true and complete plan of salvation to all nations.

Like the early church, the True Jesus Church is heavily involved in caring for local churches. The majority of preachers spend their time and energy pastoring members rather than spreading the Word. Like the early Jewish Christians who preached to their fellow Jews, the majority of the Chinese members preach to other Chinese simply because it is easier and more natural.

Hope of the New Generation

Despite this situation, the gospel has begun to spread to all continents due to immigration and occasionally to missionary work. Unfortunately though, most of the churches comprised of Asian immigrants have been unable to “open up” to all cultures— particularly to the local population. Generally, the True Jesus Church has spread to different countries without really integrating with the local people or accepting the local customs. It is therefore difficult for the only church of God, chosen by His spirit, to accomplish the plan of salvation for all nations.

Today, we are at the beginning of a new phase. The second-generation immigrants have integrated with the local culture and speak the native language. Perhaps God will work with the second-generation immigrants to bring new believers from all nations into the church. Furthermore, overseas missionary training programs are now in progress to complete the mission that the Lord has entrusted to us. Most churches established by immigrants face similar problems— they are involved in pioneer work without the benefit of prior experience that other local churches enjoy. But due to God's grace and members' efforts, the church has successfully begun to open up to non-Asians, thereby concretely carrying out God's mission.

The Paris Church – An Example of a Multiethnic Church Today

The True Jesus Church in Paris is one of the churches whose multiethnic congregation enjoys unity through our faith and through the Holy Spirit. The Paris church has a congregation of about sixty members who attend services regularly. These believers are from Cambodia, France, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Korea, Laos, Reunion Island, Taiwan and Vietnam.

Though the majority are Asians, they neither speak the same language nor

share the same culture. About 20% of the Paris members are Caucasian—the highest percentage of any local True Jesus Church. By the grace of the Lord, none of the native French members have left the church.

Background of France

France is traditionally a Catholic country. However, the majority of the French do not read the Bible and do not believe that it is the Word of the living God. Generally, people go to church for baptisms, marriages, and funerals; some attend midnight mass on December 24th. In French history, the church was responsible for much bloodshed. Unable to overlook the past, most French reject Christianity and consequently reject Jesus.

French philosophers like Descartes spread the humanistic view that people are intelligent enough to detect God's presence; and since they cannot prove it, therefore God does not exist. This concept led most French to become atheists. There are also some French who, having been disappointed by Christianity and rationalism, have turned to Buddhism. These confused circumstances make it difficult for the True Jesus Church to preach the gospel in France, but if we keep our eyes on our almighty God, we need not be discouraged.

A Church For All People

When the Paris church was first established, members were conscious of the difficulties of preaching in the Western Hemisphere and were prepared to integrate. They wanted others to know that this is the Church of God—not a “Chinese Church”. Some of our church buildings in western countries display the name “True Jesus Church” only in Chinese. This reinforces the popular notion that the Chinese tend to congregate and to recreate their native environment wherever they go. The non-Asians who pass by take no notice at all because they think it is a Chinese church—not a place where they belong. Although in Paris the majority of the members are Chinese, the name of the church is displayed in French. This shows nonmembers that this is a church for all people, not just for the Chinese community.

Bridging the Gap

When you come to the Paris church, you often feel touched by the love and kindness of the members who approach you with slightly broken French, trying their best to make you feel at ease. You also hear everybody singing hymns in French, except on rare occasion when there are visitors from abroad.

Realizing that it is hard for people to be touched by hymns in a foreign lan-

guage, the Paris church worked hard to produce a French hymnbook. The members learned to sing in French in order to evangelize to the native population. The Chinese members put aside their Chinese hymn books to sing in a language they barely understand, practicing each hymn and learning the meaning of the words. For the native French members, this was a tremendous blessing. It showed the members' spiritual growth and their love for those who have not heard the truth. These acts, which reach out to people of other cultures, are a kind of holy work that should not be overlooked. Today, the Asian members have improved their French through sermon translations (from Mandarin to French) and by communicating with the native French believers.

Celebration of Brotherly Love

Last year, the Paris church made further progress by holding the annual new year's meal on the French new year rather than the Chinese (lunar) new year. During this celebration, one Chinese mother cooked a French dish for the members who preferred French cuisine, and a French mother cooked a Chinese dish for her Asian brothers and sisters! The food is not the issue here; it is that these acts of thoughtfulness show brotherly love and kindness. Through the grace of God, this is the spirit of the Paris church today. We still have a long way to go, but for the majority of the Paris members, there is no such thing as “Chinese” or “French” because we are all one in Christ Jesus!

Unity – Everyone's Responsibility

In the True Jesus Church it is possible for all cultures to come together in Jesus, and this quality shows the world that we are the only church of the last days. But this is only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit, which is manifested by a concrete willingness to love God and to love men. Paul said that he was free from all men, but he became a servant to all so that he would not be an obstacle for the spread of the gospel. He became all things to all men so that he might by all means save some (1 Cor 9:19ff). Of course, Paul did so within the bounds of the gospel. Paul's attitude reminds us to try our utmost to become Kenyan in Kenya, a Canadian in Canada, a German in Germany, and a Cambodian in Cambodia—out of love, out of duty, and to have a part in the blessing of the gospel (1 Cor 9:23).

The Paris church still needs to improve in many areas, and it should not be seen as the ideal church. Through its example, however, we can see that cultural unity requires everyone's effort. Although it is the will and command of God, there are many things we must do to achieve it. May God help us as we encourage one another to accomplish His will and to preach to all nations. Amen!

Activity:

(For this activity make sure that students have collected all the completed surveys that were passed out to the church congregation a couple of weeks ago. A more complete and accurate picture of the church situation can be obtained only when all the surveys are collected).

With the completed surveys, draw up the demographics of your local church. Count the total number of completed surveys returned and tally up the total responses for each question. Consider the make-up of your church (ethnically, socially and age-wise).

Church Life

One of the unique characteristics of the True Jesus Church is that people of different ages, race and backgrounds can come together in the Lord. As part of the J2 curriculum, the students will be examining the demographics of their local church. To do this, we would like to ask each member of the church congregation to take a little time to fill out the following survey and to return the completed forms. Besides the stated objective, the survey will remain anonymous and will not be used for any other purpose. Thank you for your kind cooperation.

1. What is your sex?
 - Male
 - Female

2. What is your race?
 - White
 - Black, African-American
 - Native American
 - Latino
 - Chinese
 - Japanese
 - Korean
 - Vietnamese
 - Other (please specify) _____

3. Which country were you born in?
 - United States
 - Outside the United States. Please specify: _____

4. How old are you?
 - 0-10
 - 11-20
 - 21-30
 - 31-40
 - 41-50
 - 51-60
 - 61-70
 - 71 and above

5. What is your marital status?
 - Single
 - Married
 - Widowed
 - Other

6. What is the highest level of education you have received?
 - Elementary
 - High School
 - College Graduate
 - Post Graduate degree

7. What language(s)/dialect(s) do you speak?
 - English
 - Mandarin
 - Taiwanese
 - Spanish
 - Others (please specify) _____

8. What language do you feel most comfortable speaking? _____

9. I am
 - A student
 - Currently working
 - A housewife
 - Retired
 - Other

10. How many in your immediate family are believers?
 - I am the only believer

- My entire family are believers
- Not all of my family members are believers

11. I was

- Baptized since I was an infant
- Introduced to the church

12. How large is your church congregation?

- 50-100
- 100-150
- 150-200
- 200 and above

13. The congregation consists mainly of (check the ones that apply)

- Children (0-17 years of age)
- Youths (18-39 years of age)
- Middle aged (40 – 55 years of age)
- Elderly (56 years of age and above)
- A good balance of all age groups

14. The main culture in the church is as my own

- The same
- Different
- Somewhat similar

15. The most common language(s) spoken around the church is

- English
- Chinese/Taiwanese
- Others (please specify) _____

16. What language(s) is/are used during worship services?

- English only
- Chinese only
- Chinese with English interpretation
- English with Chinese interpretation
- Others (please specify) _____

17. Do you stay for lunch at the church? If no, what are your reasons? _____

- Yes
- No

- Sometimes

18. The kind of food served during lunch consists of:

- Mainly Chinese food
- Mainly Western food
- A variety of foods
- Others (please specify) _____

19. I am in the activities and work of the church.

- Very involved
- Fairly involved
- Not involved

20. Do you have a sense of belonging in the church?

- Generally yes
- Sometimes
- Rarely

20b. If you have answered sometimes or rarely, what are some of the reasons for this? _____

21. My close circle of friends consists

- Mainly of church members
- Mainly of non-believers
- Of both believers and non-believers

22. How well do you know the members of your church?

- I can interact well with most members
- I have only a superficial knowledge of them
- I mingle with just a select few
- I rarely speak to anyone

23. What are some of the reasons that have prevented you from getting to know the other members more? (Check those that apply)

- Lack of time
- Lack of opportunity
- Lack of interest
- Lack of communication
- Shyness

- Language barrier
- Cultural differences
- Previous misunderstandings
- Others (please specify) _____

24. Do you feel that the brothers and sisters are sensitive to and understand your needs?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

25. What would you suggest to promote better understanding and fellowship between the members of the church? _____

Discussion:

1. From the survey responses, do you think the needs of the different ethnic groups in your church are met?
2. What forms or practices contribute to this?
3. What kind of ambience does our church generate, i.e. do we give people the impression that we are a “Chinese church” or do others see the church as one that welcomes all races?
4. What things can we do to be sensitive to the needs of those different from us?
5. From the article, how did the brothers and sisters of Paris church deal with some of their cultural differences?
6. What guiding principles does the author suggest to promote harmony and unity between members of diverse cultural backgrounds?

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



Living in a multicultural society, we will encounter people of all walks of life. As the church stands in the 21st century, we need to learn how to reach out to people of backgrounds very different from our own. "Therefore welcome one another, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." (Rom 15:7)

Lesson 4

Naaman and Gehazi

Listed Scriptures

2 Kgs 4:12-36, 5:1-27, 8:4,5

Lesson Aim

- 1) To realize the importance of inner transformation after believing in the Lord Jesus.
- 2) To know the importance of resisting temptation.

Memory Verse

"For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end."
(Heb 3:14)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Isaiah 16-20

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



Syria

Syria was Israel's neighbor to the northeast. Its boundaries varied over the centuries but generally included areas south of Taurus Mountains, north of Galilee and Bashan, west of Arabian Desert, and east of the Mediterranean. Its chief cities included Damascus, Antioch, Carchemish and others. Syria and Israel were rarely on friendly terms. Under King David, Syria paid tribute to Israel (2 Sam 10:6-19). It became independent under King Solomon. In Elisha's day, Syria was growing in power and she frequently conducted raids on Israel. Israelite captives were often taken back to Syria after successful raids (2 Kgs 6:8-33).

Leprosy

Leprosy was one of the most feared diseases of Bible times. The word leprosy in Hebrew is sara'at, which is a term of uncertain origin and meaning but includes a variety of skin diseases as well as other molds and fungi. The leprosy found on

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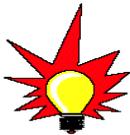
Leprosy

Leprosy was one of the most feared diseases of Bible times. The word leprosy in Hebrew is sara'at, which is a term of uncertain origin and meaning but includes a variety of skin diseases as well as other molds and fungi. The leprosy found on

clothing or house walls was more like a mold, fungus, or bacteria. Like mildew, this fungus could spread rapidly and promote disease. Only one of these was the disease we call leprosy today. Some were contagious. The worst type of leprosy slowly ruined the body. In most cases there was no cure for it. The afflictions could be marked by swellings under the skin, pink spots or reddish areas of skin. If the priests discovered white hairs on the lesion and evidence that its head penetrated the skin, the person was quarantined for two weeks as a suspected leper. After that, if the lesion exhibited “raw flesh” such as skin ulcers or bright pink patches of skin that was obviously spreading, the sufferer was diagnosed as a leper and prohibited from living in the community.

In all cases of suspected leprosy, the priests were consulted and Leviticus 13 provided them with detailed diagnostic directions. Since priests were responsible for the health and sanitation of the camp, it was also their duty to expel leprous people. Those who had leprosy were separated from family and friends and confined outside the camp. A person with leprosy had to wear torn clothes, let the hair of his head hang loose, cover his upper lip and cry, “Unclean, unclean” (Lev 13:45,46). This was to protect others from coming too near. If someone’s leprosy appeared to go away, he had to show himself to the priest who then decided if he was truly cured. Leprosy is often used in the Bible as an illustration of sin because sin is contagious and destructive and leads to separation from God.

W A R M U P



1. What is most important—a good beginning or a good ending?
2. Are you the type of person who starts something but leaves things unfinished, or do you see things through to the end?



Part 1

The Healing of Naaman

The healing of Naaman is a beautiful story about a sinner coming to grace. Naaman, whose name means pleasantness, was transformed from being a proud and arrogant man to a contrite and God-fearing person. Naaman's journey of faith is a representation of the journey that non-believers tried in their search for the truth. Naaman also typifies those in the world today.



A • He Had Worldly Success

At this point in history, King Jehoram was king of Israel. He did not fear God and did what was evil in God’s sight. As a result God allowed Syria to be a constant threat to Israel. Syria was a very powerful country and Naaman was the commander in chief of the army of Syria. Naaman was no ordinary person. He was above the masses and a man of high status, authority, power and wealth. Naaman contributed greatly to his country for “by him the Lord had given victory to Syria.”

Amidst all the prestige and honor, Naaman suffered from one defect—he was afflicted with leprosy. Although Naaman commanded the army, he was not able to control his sickness. Each day, leprosy brought him closer to death. Naaman’s suffering symbolizes mankind’s common suffering. Regardless of rank, gender, age, success, and wealth, we all face sufferings and problems which stem from sin. Before knowing Christ, each of us is afflicted with “leprosy,” which is sin. Just as leprosy, if left untreated, may eventually cause death, sin, if not dealt with, will lead to spiritual death. Thus we all need God and His healing.



B • He Turned to God Upon Reaching An Impasse

Due to his sickness, Naaman began his search for healing. He would have certainly sought healing from the best physicians throughout Syria, but to no avail. It was at this juncture that God beckoned to him. In 2 Kings 5:8, the prophet Elisha said, “Let him come now to me.” This is the calling of the Lord to all sinners who have tried every other way but are at a loss. Oftentimes, God reaches out to men only when they have admitted defeat. Sometimes because of sickness, death, and emptiness man turns to God as their last thread of hope. For Naaman, this angel of hope came in direct contrast to his character—a weak and humble maidservant captured from Israel. If we humble ourselves and turn to Him in our time of need, God will heal us (Mt 11:28).

Reflection:

1. Was there a time where you found help through someone or something that you least expected? How did you respond?
2. “When God closes a door, He opens a window.” How has this proven true in your life?



C He Relied on His Wealth and Abilities

To see the prophet Elisha, Naaman brought with him an exorbitant amount of gifts of silver and gold and expensive garments. The Bible tells us that Naaman took with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. Ten talents equal thirty thousand shekels which is about seven hundred and fifty pounds of silver. The six thousand shekels of gold equal about one hundred and fifty pounds (one gold shekel equaled fifteen silver shekels). Converted to today's buying power, this would have been in the vicinity of three-quarters of a billion dollars. We can get an idea of the proportions by understanding that a typical wage would have been ten silver shekels per year, and a talent of silver, three hundred years of wages. Armed with his gifts, Naaman came seeking for help using power, status and wealth. He did not realize that God's grace and blessings cannot be bought (Eph 2:8; Ac 8:17-24). After Naaman was healed, he begged Elisha three times to accept the gifts, but Elisha refused because he wanted Naaman to understand that all the money in the world cannot buy God's grace. God's gift is given freely to whomever He pleases.

Reflection:

1. Naaman boasted of his wealth, power and ability. What things are we proud of?



D He Was Filled With Pride

After the long trek to Israel, Naaman arrived at Elisha's house where he was greeted not by the prophet, but by a messenger. As if seeking for help from his enemies was not humiliating enough, being greeted by a mere messenger was too much of an insult. Naaman however was to learn that God's ways are not man's ways. What may be honored and revered among men may not be in the kingdom of God. Power, status and wealth cannot be exchanged for God's grace. God used this opportunity to strip Naaman of his pride and arrogance. As sinners we need to come before the Lord with a humble and repentant heart in order to experience the true power of God.



E He Had Preconceived Ideas

The messenger informed Naaman what he had to do to be healed. He was to "go and wash in the Jordan seven times." This was not what Naaman expected. Naaman was expecting the prophet to come out, call on the name of God, wave his hand over the place and cure him of leprosy. Then to add insult to injury, the

prophet told him to wash in the Jordan river. In his estimation, Abana and Pharpar, the rivers in his own country were far better than the waters of Israel. These preconceived ideas and expectations caused Naaman to turn around and leave.

Many people today possess Naaman's attitude. They want to use their own method to be saved; methods that seem more logical or convenient. The Bible describes such people as "being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness" (Rom 10:3). In actuality, God has a standard which is the truth. The truth is not according to human rationale or reason, but is the pattern that God has laid out since the beginning of time for salvation (Gal 1:8; 2 Tim 1:13). To receive the grace of God, we need to abandon our own expectations and former beliefs and submit to God's commands.



F He Completely Obeyed

When Naaman heard the words of the prophet he stomped away in total disbelief. He needed some concrete evidence before he could have faith in the prophet. The only thing that the prophet gave to Naaman, however, was the promise that if he bathed seven times in the River Jordan he would be healed. Bathing seven times in the River Jordan was God's way of testing his faith and obedience. Similarly, God trains each person that comes before Him. The number seven in the Bible implies completeness. A sinner needs to have complete faith and obedience in God's word to be saved. Only through faith can we submit to God's word even when we don't understand why. For example, the Bible tells us to offer tithes. There are some believers who have difficulty giving tithes because they do not have the faith to see that God will bless and reward them. God commands that we observe the Sabbath. Some truth seekers have turned away from the church because they lack the faith to see the true meaning of Sabbath. Every promise in the Bible stands, but it depends on whether we have the faith to trust and obey.

Reflection:

1. What aspects of Naaman's behavior are typical of those who are seeking the truth?
2. What examples can you give of people who use their own righteousness to be saved?



G Thanksgiving

After experiencing God's miraculous healing, Naaman was filled with immense gratitude and thanksgiving. He openly and publicly testified about God's grace.

Naaman also expressed his gratitude by resolving to lead a God-fearing life. He offered two mules to be used as a burnt sacrifice and resolved henceforth, to worship and sacrifice to no other god but the Lord. After we have received the salvation of God, besides feeling thankful, we need to tell others. God's grace is not only for us to enjoy, but it is a means by which He may be glorified and others may get to know the Lord (Ps 105:1-2).



Part 2

Gehazi, the Servant of Elisha

Gehazi's name means valley of vision. He was the servant of Elisha, the man of God (2 Kgs 2:9-15). Gehazi was the kind of servant that Elisha was before he succeeded Elijah as prophet. Elisha performed such tasks as pouring water on the hands of his master and assisted Elijah (2 Kgs 3:11). Gehazi too assisted Elisha in his work and showed many fine characteristics. For example, when the Shumannite woman beseeched Elisha to save her son, Elisha told Gehazi to take his staff and place it on the face of the dead child. Gehazi obeyed (1 Kgs 4:29-31). When considering how to repay the Schumannite woman for her kindness, Gehazi demonstrated a keen sense of observation. Despite all this however, Gehazi had a tragic ending. Due to greed, Gehazi fell into temptation and lost his divine calling and blessings.



A • He Was Not Content

To be a servant of the prophet was an honorable and privileged status. Gehazi had a full view of the storehouses of God's blessings. He saw the raising of the dead; the healing of Naaman the leper and many other miracles (2 Kgs 4:16-17, 38-44). Sadly, Gehazi did not treasure what he had or recognize its value. Just as how Demas left Paul because of his love for the world (2 Tim 4:10). Gehazi was dissatisfied with his current status. Today many of us have grown up under the abundant blessings and providence of God (Eph 1:1-14). But many times, like Gehazi, we turn our attention to the luster and splendor of the things of the world. We believe that "the grass is greener on the other side" and as a result, we easily forsake what God has given us. In 1 Peter, it tells us that we are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Pet 2:9). May God help us

see beyond the present things of the world and to know how great and immeasurable His choosing is.

Reflection:

1. How did Gehazi show his discontent with his current situation?
2. Are you content with what God has given you?
3. How do you demonstrate your appreciation?



B • He Did Not Care for God's Glory

Throughout this entire event, Elisha's ultimate goal was to bring glory to God. Elisha wanted Naaman to understand that the God of Israel was the one true God and He offers His grace freely to men. God did not desire Naaman's gifts but his humble and repentant heart. Gehazi on the other hand forgot all about giving glory to God the moment he laid eyes on the gifts. He failed to recognize that his ultimate purpose in life was to glorify God and not to seek his own pleasure. Therefore, "whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31). Naaman's gifts were a temptation to both Elisha and Gehazi but Elisha used the occasion to bring glory to God and benefit men.



C • He Listened to His Heart

Man is born with natural desires which enable us to survive. God has given us sensations of hunger and thirst so that we know when to eat and drink to sustain our bodies. God has also given us sexual desires so that we can marry and procreate. However, when these desires are given free reign, we exceed the boundary of God's laws and commit sin. Gehazi's desire was not wrong. What caused his downfall was when he allowed his desire for greater wealth get out of control. He craved these things to the point that he could no longer hear God's words and devised a scheme to satisfy his greed (1 Tim 6:10). We have to be extremely careful to keep our desires in check and guard our hearts with the word and Spirit of God (Prov 4:23; Eph 6:10-18).

Reflection:

1. How did Gehazi sin in this incident?
2. Do you put boundaries on your desires, or do you tend to go after everything you see or desire?
3. If someone asked, "How do we know what things are ours and what things are not if we do not pursue after them?" how would you respond?

Do He Lost Discernment

Before falling into temptation, Gehazi could discern clearly what was right and wrong. However, the moment he succumbed to temptation his inner judgment became blurred and confused. Blinded by the luster of the things of the world, Gehazi misused the name of God. As a result disaster came upon him and his descendants. Swearing means to vow before God and to invoke God's help. We should therefore not use God's name in vain. Let us be cautious that we do not allow sin to deceive our minds and harden our hearts (Heb 3:13).

Reflection:

1. How does temptation cause us to lose discernment?
2. In what ways can we overcome temptation?

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



Due to the nature of this lesson, the Check For Understanding questions can be found after each Bible Study section under the heading "Reflection".

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



A Never Changing Faith

In any contest, the start is important, but the finish is even more crucial. Often a frontrunner will lose strength and fade into the middle of the pack. And there is the tragedy of the brilliant beginner who sets the pace for a time, but does not even finish. He quits the race, burned out, exhausted or injured. Today's lesson about Naaman and Gehazi reminds us that on our spiritual journey, it is imperative for us to sustain our faith right up to our last breath. Hebrews 10:23 exhorts us to hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for a crown of righteousness will be awarded only to those who remain steadfast.

Discussion:

1. How can we hold fast to our faith until the end? (guard our heart, spiritual cultivation, encourage one another to do good works, keep and practice the word, ask God to increase faith)

2. What is spiritual cultivation?
3. Why is spiritual cultivation so important?
4. What are our goals in spiritual cultivation?
5. What symptoms will occur when we do not spiritually cultivate daily?
6. How much time do you spend in spiritual cultivation each day?
7. What are some of your difficulties or challenges in spiritual cultivation?

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



Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us. (Heb 12:1)

Goals

After conversion a long and rugged journey lies in front of us before we reach our final destination, the heavenly kingdom. This journey involves making endless choices. Some choices are harder to make when under conflict, pressures and temptations in life. But each choice will determine the outcome of our faith. In this unit our students will study characters such as Daniel and his three friends and Isaac, who all faced many choices in life yet remained uncompromising in their faith. In every aspect of their lives, God was their first priority. Lot too faced many choices. But his decisions were based on his heart's desires rather than on God and as a result he strayed further and further away. Our students will realize that we should not sell our soul for a moment of pleasure but to be like Simeon and Anna who were content to lead reverent and hope-filled lives, with faith that stood the test of time.

unit 2

Teacher Devotional

We may never experience what Stephen, Paul, Peter, John or any of the other disciples did when they laid down their lives for Christ. But that doesn't mean that God requires any less of us. To walk in purity, to obey, to be sincere, to make godly choices in an ungodly world, to love our enemies are some of the ways in which God wants us to lay down our lives. But to do all these takes faith. Faith enables us to move from the things that are important to us to the things that are important to God. It enables us to look beyond the values of the world to the values of God. With every act of obedience and through every trial and temptation, our faith grows little by little, until ultimately we too can overcome the world.

Faith is the Victory

*"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith."
(1 Jn 5:4)*

Lesson 5

Daniel and His Three Friends

Listed Scriptures

Dan 1-6; Heb 11:29-34

Lesson Aim

- 1) Imitate the faith, love, conduct and wisdom of Daniel and his three friends
- 2) Strive to speak and live the truth in a godless world

Memory Verse

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Rom 12:2)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Isaiah 21-25

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



Babylon

One of the ancient world's greatest empires, the Babylonian empire extended from the east to India, west to Asia Minor and southeastern Europe, south to Egypt and North Africa, Syria, Edom, Judah and Persia. The great city of Babylon, which lies some 50 miles south of modern Baghdad is situated on the east bank of the River Euphrates. The city walls measured 96 km in perimeter. The height of the wall measured 100 meters, and its thickness measured 27 meters. There were 100 city gates with 250 watch towers built atop the city walls. Canals that drew water from the River Euphrates surrounded the city. The canals also acted as a deterrent to any enemy approaching the city wall. The streets were wide, the palace was magnificent and resplendent with many gardens. The hanging garden was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It was built of gold, silver, and all sorts of jewels.

Nebuchadnezzar was the son of the founder of the neo-Babylonian empire. The empire of Babylon was established in 625 B.C. and destroyed in 536 B.C. He personally led the armies of Babylon in a series of wars against Egypt that crushed that ancient power and established Babylonian mastery of the Middle East. Because the Israelites committed idolatry, violated the Sabbath and despised the prophet's warnings, God handed the country into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar who destroyed the city of Jerusalem and Solomon's magnificent temple. His established policy was to resettle people, and so Nebuchadnezzar ordered the exile of the people of Judah. During the first year of his reign in 606 B.C., the third year of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar took the first captives back to Babylon, among whom were Daniel and his three friends (Dan 1:1-2; 2 Kgs 24:1-7). In the 8th year of his reign in 597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar took the second group of captives, among whom was Ezekiel the prophet. The third group of captives was taken in the 17th year of his reign in 589 B.C., among whom was Jeremiah the prophet.

The Book of Daniel

The Book of Daniel is one of the four major books of prophecies in the Old Testament. It is also called the Revelation of the Old Testament.

Author:

The question of whether Daniel is the author of the Book of Daniel is controversial. According to records in the New Testament, the Lord Jesus believes that it is the work of Daniel (Mt 24:15; Dan 11:31; 8:11). Daniel wrote this book in the first person (Dan 7:2, 4, 6, 28; 8:1, 15; 9:2; 12:5-8). Facts and events of Daniel mentioned in Hebrews 11:33-34 are also quoted in Daniel chapters 3 and 6.

About the book:

The Book of Daniel contains the personal history and visions of the future of Daniel, a Jew who was deported to Babylon as a teenager in the year 606 B.C. Daniel was trained with young people from other conquered nations, to become administrators in the empire of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel was still in Babylon in the third year of Cyrus the Persian king in 534 B.C. He was in Babylon for a total of 73 years. The book is divided into two natural parts. The first section, from chapter 1 through 6 speaks of Daniel's life and works. The second section from chapter 7 to 12 contains the prophetic visions of Daniel during the reigns of Belshazzar, Darius of the Medes and Cyrus king of Persia. These dreams dramatically outline God's future plans, beginning with Babylon and continuing to the end of the age. They demonstrate God's sovereignty and control of history and the destinies of men.



The Emperor's Seed

Once there was an emperor in the Far East who was growing old and knew the time was coming to choose his successor. Instead of choosing one of his assistants or one of his own children, he decided to do something different. He called all the young people in the kingdom together one day. He said, "It has come time for me to step down and to choose the next emperor. I have decided to choose one of you." The kids were shocked! But the emperor continued. "I am going to give each one of you a seed today. One seed. It is a very special seed. I want you to go home, plant the seed, water it, and come back here one year from today with what you have grown from this one seed. I will then judge the plants that you bring to me, and the one I choose will be the next emperor of the kingdom!"

There was one boy named Ling who was there that day and he, like the others, received a seed. He went home and excitedly told his mother the whole story. She helped him get a pot and some planting soil, and he planted the seed and watered it carefully. Every day he would water it and watch to see if it had grown.

After about three weeks, some of the other youths began to talk about their seeds and the plants that were beginning to grow. Ling kept going home and checking his seed, but nothing ever grew. Three weeks, four weeks, five weeks went by. Still nothing. By now others were talking about their plants but Ling didn't have a plant and he felt like a failure. Six months went by, still nothing in Ling's pot. He just knew he had killed his seed. Everyone else had trees and small plants, but he had nothing. Ling didn't say anything to his friends, however. He just kept waiting for his seed to grow.

A year finally went by and all the youths of the kingdom brought their plants to the emperor for inspection. Ling told his mother that he wasn't going to take an empty pot. But she encouraged him to go, and to take his pot, and to be honest about what happened. Ling felt sick to his stomach, but he knew his mother was right. He took his empty pot to the palace. When Ling arrived, he was amazed at the variety of plants grown by all the other youths. They were beautiful, in all



shapes and sizes. Ling put his empty pot on the floor and many of the kids laughed at him. A few felt sorry for him and just said, "Hey, nice try."

When the emperor arrived, he surveyed the room and greeted the young people. Ling just tried to hide in the back. "My, what great plants, trees and flowers you have grown," said the emperor. "Today, one of you will be appointed the next emperor!"

All of a sudden, the emperor spotted Ling at the back of the room with his empty pot. He ordered his guards to bring him to the front. Ling was terrified. "The emperor knows I'm a failure! Maybe he will have me killed!"

When Ling got to the front, the emperor asked his name. "My name is Ling," he replied. All the kids were laughing and making fun of him. The emperor asked everyone to quiet down.

He looked at Ling, and then announced to the crowd, "Behold your new emperor! His name is Ling!" Ling couldn't believe it. Ling couldn't even grow his seed. How could he be the new emperor? Then the emperor said, "One year ago today, I gave everyone here a seed. I told you to take the seed, plant it, water it, and bring it back to me today. But I gave you all boiled seeds which would not grow. All of you, except Ling, have brought me trees and plants and flowers. When you found that the seed would not grow, you substituted another seed for the one I gave you. Ling was the only one with the courage and honesty to bring me a pot with my seed in it. Therefore, he is the one who will be the new emperor!"

Discussion:

- What did you learn from this story?
- What kind of person was Ling?
- What kind of people were his peers?
- How would you have responded if you were Ling?

Today, we will look at Daniel and his three friends who did just what Ling did— stand up for their principles against all odds.



Daniel and His Friends

In the third year of King Jehoiachin's reign, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon besieged Jerusalem (c. 606 B.C.). Jerusalem was taken captive and the vessels of the temple, along with nobility and youths were taken to Babylon. Amongst those was Daniel, an Israelite of noble descent. Nothing is known of the ancestry and early life of Daniel. He was not a priest like Jeremiah or Ezekiel, but like Isaiah he was from the line of Judah and of noble descent (Dan 1:3-6).

Daniel's name means "God is my judge." He was also known as Belteshazzar, meaning, "his life is protected" (Dan 4:8). Daniel was about 16 years old when he was taken captive. He was in Babylon for about 73 years and he lived to about 90 years as an exile in Babylon. During this period from 606 B.C. to about 536 B.C., Daniel served three empires: Babylon (under Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar his son), Medes (under Darius) and Persia (under Cyrus). This coincided with the reigns of kings Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah of Judah.

The story of Daniel is about a godly teenager who was taken from his country as a captive to a world where beliefs and the way of life were very foreign to him. To be a godly teenager in a pagan world is a tough assignment. But Daniel was able to rise to a position of high honor without compromising the truth, which makes it that much harder. Let's look further at Daniel's example of standing against the tide.



A Daniel Separated Himself

Read Daniel 1:1-16. This passage records how the captured youths were treated extremely well. They were taught the letters and language of the Chaldeans, employed in the king's palace and ate and drank of the king's food and wine. Not only this, but the king gave Daniel and his three friends Babylonian names. Daniel, which means "God is the Judge" in Hebrew was changed to Belteshazzar, which means "the protector of life." Bel was the name of a Babylonian god. Hananiah, which in Hebrew means "God is the giver of grace," was changed to Shadrach, which means "the servant of Aku," the moon god worshiped by the Babylonians. Mishael, which means "he who is comparable to God" was changed to Meshach,

meaning “he who is comparable to Merdoch,” a Babylonian god. And Azariah, which means “help from the Lord” in Hebrew, was changed to Abed-Nego, which means “the servant of Nego,” a Babylonian god.

Why was Nebuchadnezzar being so nice? The youths were, after all, slaves from enemy territory. Superficially, Nebuchadnezzar’s deeds can be seen as acts of kindness and compassion. On a spiritual level however, his kindness was a way to assimilate the youths of Judah into a pagan culture. All this good treatment was in actuality a threat to their faith. By giving them different names, the king was making the youths forsake their former identity, their God and their nation. Fortunately, Daniel and his three friends saw through the king’s schemes and resisted assimilation. What steps did Daniel and his three friends take to retain their faith and identity?

1. They remained watchful

Although Daniel and his three friends were well treated, they remained alert. They recognized that Babylon was a gentile land with practices that were in violation of their faith. The food and wine would have been offered to the Babylonian gods and idols; the food would not have been in accordance with Jewish dietary laws (Cf. Lev 11); and Jewish custom prevented them from eating with gentiles. The youths knew clearly who they were, where they came from and why they were there. Besides knowing themselves, they were aware of their environment and of the things that could jeopardize their faith. May the Lord grant us the faith to know ourselves and to see the world for what it truly is.

2. They made strong resolutions

Daniel and his three friends understood that their purpose in Babylon was not to strive for a good future, enjoy themselves or learn about a new culture. Their purpose was to live a godly life and bring glory to God. To do this, they had to resolve in advance to refrain from the king’s rich food and wine. Because of their strong resolutions and commitment to God, they were greatly blessed. Today, temptations dance into our lives constantly. To overcome them, we need to have decided in advance what our direction and purpose in life are. Many people succumb to sin and evil, not because they do not know that it is wrong, but because they never made strong resolutions beforehand. It is at those very times when we are undecided that we can be easily pressured into doing something that we may live to regret.

3. They were ready to sacrifice themselves

Daniel and his three friends were able to overcome their environment because they were willing to deny themselves of the things of the world for the sake of obeying God. If we are not willing to give up what is important to us, or have the courage to be different from everyone else then it is very difficult to overcome the temptations of the world. But if we keep God’s commands, He will not cause us to lose out.

Reflection:

1. What are the foods that we must abstain from taking today, both materially and spiritually?
2. How do you decline someone’s offer to do something that is in fact sin, when the offer is made out of goodwill?
3. What resolutions have you made to preserve your spiritual identity?
4. What often keeps you from taking a stand for God?



B Daniel Was Humble

In the Babylonian kingdom, youths without blemish, handsome and skillful in all wisdom were chosen to serve the king. Out of all the youths Daniel and his three friends were better in appearance (Dan 1:15) and possessed wisdom and understanding found to be ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters (Dan 1:20). Furthermore, God bestowed upon Daniel a special gift of interpreting visions and dreams (Dan 1:17). Despite all these outstanding qualities, Daniel remained a very humble person. From what aspects can this be seen?

1. Daniel gave glory to God

Daniel 1-6 records three incidences involving revelations from God (Dan 2, 4, 5). In all of these events, no one but Daniel could interpret the dreams. Despite this, Daniel attributed all wisdom, power, and glory to God (Ps 115:1; Is 48:11). He realized that he was a mere instrument of God to enable the king and his people to know about the God of Israel. 1 Corinthians 2:11 says: “For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.”

2. Daniel remembered his friends

Daniel’s humility shone through when he acknowledged his three friends before the king. When God revealed the interpretation to Daniel, he acknowl-

edged that it was the result of all their prayers. Daniel says, “You have now made known to me what “we” asked of You” (Dan 2:17–24). Later, when Daniel was rewarded, he requested that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be promoted too. Unlike the people of the world Daniel did not hoard all the attention or take all the credit. He did not try to elevate himself while suppressing others. The society that we live in encourages individualism and self-accomplishment. People use different means to get to the top even if it means taking the credit for someone else’s work. In God’s kingdom, it is different. As members of the body of Christ, we need to work together and use our gifts to bring glory to God.

Reflection:

1. How can we promote team spirit?
2. Are there times when you have taken credit for something instead of giving glory to God?
3. How can we maintain a humble spirit even though we are in fact better at some things than others?

 **C • The Friends Were Faithful Unto Death**

Read Daniel 3. One of the greatest trials for Daniel’s three friends was when King Nebuchadnezzar built a golden statue to be worshiped by all. The height of the statue was about 2,640 cm tall and 264 cm wide (1 cubit being equivalent to 44 cm). Everyone did obeisance to the statue, except Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, Daniel’s three friends. The three men faced this difficult trial with extraordinary faith. In fact they could have come up with these reasons to save their lives:

1. We will bow down but not actually worship the idol.
2. We will ask God for forgiveness after this one time.
3. The king has absolute power and we must obey him, God will understand.
4. This is a foreign land so God will excuse us for following the customs of the land.
5. If we get ourselves killed and some heathens take our high positions, they won’t help our people in exile.

Although these excuses sound sensible at first, they are in fact very dangerous. They knew that bowing down to the idol violated God’s command recorded in Exodus 20:3,4 which says, “You shall have no other gods before me.... You shall not bow down to them or serve them” and that God’s commands cannot be com-

promised under any circumstances. These three men possessed such faith because they understood God. They knew that they worshiped the true and living God and they can entrust their lives to Him (2 Tim 1:12; Eph 1:17). They also understood that the value of their faith surpassed everything, even their own lives (Lk 9:23-25). Lastly, they were determined to maintain a sincere and pure devotion to Christ (2 Cor 11:3).

Reflection:

1. What are the spiritual teachings with respect to the worship of the golden image (cf. Col 3:5; Mt 6:24)?
2. Have you ever given yourself excuses for not obeying God? Share your experience.
3. Have you faced a situation in life where you were led to the “fiery furnace”? Share your experience.

 **D • Daniel Was A Man of Excellent Spirit**

Throughout his life, people could observe that Daniel was different. King Nebuchadnezzar described Daniel as one who had the spirit of the holy gods (Dan 4:8-9). Belshazzar’s wife commended Daniel as having an excellent spirit (Dan 5:10-12, 6:3). King Darius wanted to set Daniel over his whole kingdom because he could perceive Daniel’s fine spiritual virtues. Even the presidents and satraps who sought to find grounds for complaint found no error or fault in him (Dan 6:1–5). In Ezekiel 14:14, Ezekiel, a contemporary prophet of Daniel, compared him to Noah and Job, two other righteous men. How did Daniel maintain a good spirituality?

1. He feared God

What does fearing God mean? The verb to fear in this context does not refer to terror, but deep respect and reverence of God. In order to respect and be in awe of God, we have to understand who God is and who we are. Deuteronomy 10:17 describes God as “God is the God of gods, and Lord of lords, He is the great, the mighty and the terrible God.” He is the Creator of the universe; holy, almighty, righteous, pure, all-knowing, all-powerful, all-present and full of mercy (Josh 2:1; Deut 7:21; Ps 116:5). When we understand who God is, we will develop a fear of Him and will listen attentively to His words and apply them to our daily lives. Our goal is to please Him and we will remain within the boundaries set by God. Daniel understood who God was. In his daily life, he made a conscious effort to observe God’s commandments (Dan 6:22).

2. He prayed incessantly

Throughout his life, Daniel prayed earnestly three times a day (Ps 55:17). Even when he was over 80 years old, he continued to fast and pray (Dan 9:1-4; 10:12; Deut 9:18-20; Lk 2:36,37). This daily spiritual cultivation enabled Daniel to be close to God and understand the things of God. Furthermore, Daniel did not allow any obstacle or difficulty to take time away from his daily prayers. Oftentimes we allow daily things to distract us from our time with God. Daniel never gave himself any excuse even though he was the prime minister of Babylon. No matter how busy he was or what trials he encountered, he prayed and gave thanks to God always.

Reflection:

1. What is your understanding of fearing God?
2. How can we improve upon our daily prayers?
3. What are some of the things that distract us from our daily Bible reading and prayers?
4. Why did Daniel risk his life to pray to God as usual?



Do Daniel Showed Loyalty to God and Man

1. Daniel was loyal to his king and country

During his life, Daniel not only served under four different monarchies but he held top positions in the various empires. One of the reasons for Daniel's success was that he did not serve for personal or selfish gain. For example, when King Belshazzar promised Daniel gifts, honor and position for interpreting the dream, Daniel replied, "Let your gifts be for yourself and give your rewards to another" (Dan 5:17). Later King Darius made Daniel one of the three presidents because he knew that he could "trust Daniel to ensure that he suffered no loss" (Dan 6:2). As Christians, we must be faithful in our responsibilities. When we work, it is not to fatten our own pockets, or get paid for the least amount of work done. We need to work with the goal of pleasing our employers and with the welfare of the company in mind. Through our diligence and loyalty we can bring glory to God and allow others to know God through us.

2. Daniel was loyal to God

Daniel was a loyal and faithful prophet of God in a gentile country. When King Nebuchadnezzar dreamt of the tree, Daniel was not afraid to reveal the true meaning of the dream even though he had to speak words of doom (Dan 4:27). Also in Daniel 5:17ff, he was not afraid to rebuke King Belshazzar for

his sins. Daniel did not beat around the bush, or try to soften the truth (Dan 5:22-23). He simply spoke whatever the Lord wanted him to convey even if it meant risking his life. In prophet Jeremiah's time there were certain false prophets who preached what the people wanted to hear even though they were untruths (Jer 28). They preached according to their imagination, hoping to gain favor from the people. On the other hand, Jeremiah, (a true prophet of God) spoke the truth even though it was unpopular and he was punished because of it. Sometimes, we are afraid of certain consequences and so we shade the truth or keep quiet. But to be faithful workers of God, we should imitate the courage of Daniel in knowing how to stand up for God and speak the truth directly and tactfully (Dan 4:19).

Reflection:

1. How was Daniel faithful to his king and country?
2. How was Daniel faithful to God?
3. Has there been a time where you had to stand up for your principles? How did you react?

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING



Due to the nature of this lesson, the Check For Understanding questions can be found after each Bible Study section under the heading "Reflection".

LIFE APPLICATION



Dear Solomon

The youth group in your local church publishes a monthly newsletter. One of the features is Dear Solomon, where readers are invited to write in their questions or concerns regarding faith and everyday life. As the editor of this section, read the following letters and write a response to your readers.

Case 1

Dear Solomon,

I have a good friend at school called Pete. He also happens to be a homosexual.

Aside from his sexual orientation, Pete is a warm, sensitive and funny guy. I know from passages in the Bible such as Romans 1:26-27 and Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 that homosexuality is wrong and an abomination in God's sight. Pete has come to church once, but he doesn't like the attitudes that other people in church have when they find out about his sexual orientation. I believe that God is an all-loving God who accepts us just as we are despite our sins and weaknesses. I'm annoyed at the narrow and judgmental attitude that our believers have. The church needs to open up and embrace all peoples and be tolerant of differences.

Signed,
Angry and Hurt

Dear Angry and Hurt,

While it is correct that we should not show partiality and to accept all who wish to come before the Lord, tolerance of sin is wrong. Our society today is increasingly tolerant of sin. Many Christians today compromise their faith with the wider social belief that every way of life is legitimate and acceptable, as long as everyone is happy and that no one should pass judgment on others. They see those upholding the absolute truth and keeping the word of God as being narrow-minded and arrogant. When the word of God has less prominence in our lives, relativism and individualism creeps in. When this occurs, we tend to shift our focus away from God and His church, toward our non-believing friends and their attitudes. It is imperative therefore, to root ourselves in the word of God. Your angry feelings are understandable but friendship and the truth are two separate issues. Homosexuality is not a difference. It is a sin - a violation of God's command. But if Pete has a genuine and sincere heart to repent, turns to God and forsakes his former ways, God will welcome him with open arms.

Case 2

Dear Solomon,

Maybe you can help sort out something my mom and I have been constantly bickering over— what I wear. She's always complaining that my clothes are too short, too tight, too revealing. I tell her that's what's on the racks these days and that it's a matter of individual taste. Besides, what we wear has nothing to do with salvation. God looks the heart and not at our outward appearance. Don't you agree?

Signed,
Fashion Conscious

Dear Fashion Conscious,

Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:23 says, "All things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial." Yes, what we wear does not concern salvation, and we do have

rights to individual tastes. But have you ever questioned why your mother is on your case so often? Then ask yourself, "Why do I dress the way I do? What is controlling my choice of clothes?"

How we dress conveys a certain message. The fashion of the world is a reflection of the values of the world. What society values are beauty, sexuality, intelligence and money. Fashion is designed with these values in mind. People dress to enhance their beauty and have greater sex appeal. Clothes are tighter, more revealing, and shorter to show off the body. This does not mean that as Christians we have to resort to wearing a burka. But, we do need to take a closer look at ourselves and examine what it is that's really influencing our choices. If we compare the way we dress with our friends or the pop stars in magazines, would we see a resemblance? Sometimes, unknowingly, we have allowed television and our friends to have a subtle but powerful influence over our dress sense, attitudes and morality. Most importantly, pray about this matter. If you are walking with God, the Holy Spirit will let you know if something is good or bad for you.

Case 3

Dear Solomon,

Each Christmas the staff at the place where I work has this tradition where we get a secret Santa. For the entire week we buy small gifts or do a good deed for each other while maintaining our anonymity. At a Christmas luncheon at the end of the week, each person tries to guess who their secret Santa is. Knowing our church stance on Christmas, I did not participate in all of this. I sat there during lunch watching everybody laughing and opening gifts. I prayed I would go unnoticed. Tough luck! Someone noticed that I did not have any gift and asked me why. In front of everyone I had to explain that I did not celebrate Christmas. I returned home that night thinking that next year I'm going to take part in the festivities. Would it be wrong to join in the festivities without believing in it?

Signed,
Embarrassed and Left Out.

Dear Embarrassed and Left Out,

Firstly, give yourself a pat on the back for your courage in standing up to your beliefs. Who said it would be easy?! We may not face persecutions like Daniel. However, professing a belief in Jesus does involve risks. As followers of Christ we are different and we need to be mentally ready to stand alone. God wants us to be set apart from other nations, which means that in our beliefs, our characters, and our lifestyles we need to be different from that of the world. In this way we can shine the light in an unbelieving world.

Case 4

Dear Solomon,

My best friend is Jake who is not yet a Christian. As for me, I was invited to the True Jesus Church by Kyle. Not long after attending services there, I received the Holy Spirit. I later got baptized and changed many of my former bad habits. The problem however is Jake. He's upset that I can't hang out with him on Saturdays like I used to. He's asking me how come I'm all holy now and why we never go to the places we used to, to check out the girls. He wants our friendship to go back to the way it was. Last month, he asked me to go to a dance party at this friend's house. I declined and this infuriated him so much that he didn't talk to me. Eventually, I agreed and have started going back to the places we used to go to. I feel like I've betrayed God by going back to those places and doing the things I used to before I knew Him. At the same time, I feel I can't disappoint Jake because that hurts our friendship. What do you suggest?

Signed,
Pressured

Dear Pressured,

Friendship is one of God's finest gifts. It seems that you and Jake go back a long way and the friendship means a lot to you. But since you found God you must think over your values and priorities. The conflict you are experiencing is because you and Jake now have different outlooks in life. Your values such as how you spend your money and time, and how you treat the opposite sex is different from the past (Phil 3:8). The Bible tells us that when we are baptized we put on Christ and so we need to imitate Him in all that we do. This means that we need to place God above all other things, even relationships that are dear to us (Jas 4:4). Your friend may be important to you, but there are times when you need to say "No" especially when you are asked to overstep the boundaries of the Bible. We need to hold onto our principles. Explain to Jake why things cannot be as they were in the past. If he is indeed a good friend, he will respect you and who knows whether he will come to believe in the Lord. However, if he doesn't listen, we have to be careful that we are not lured back into our past sins. 1 Corinthians 15:33-34 says, "Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits.' Awake to righteousness, and do not sin" May God grant you the discernment to do what is right (Phil 4:9, 10).

Suggested Reading:

"A Day On Campus," *Manna* Issue 34, Jan-Mar 2001

"Keeping Your Identity," *Manna* Issue 37, Oct-Dec 2001

REFLECTION & PRAYER



From the history of the chosen people, it is clear that God desired His people to be a blessed and holy nation. The messages of the prophets, the teachings of our Lord, and the epistles of the disciples all express the same desire of the Lord: Leave! Separate yourselves from them! And yet throughout history, the chosen ones did not separate themselves from the world. When the Israelites asked Samuel for a king, they simply wanted to be like all the nations (1 Sam 8:5). Today God too cries out to us, Come out of her, my people! What will you choose to do?

Simeon and Anna

Listed Scriptures

Lk 2:25-38; Is 40:31; Lam 3:25-26

Lesson Aim

- 1) To learn the importance of waiting for the Lord.
- 2) To learn about leading a quiet and reverent life.
- 3) To imitate Simeon and Anna's life-long devotion to God.

Memory Verse

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined."

(Isaiah 9:2)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Isaiah 26-30

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



The Promise of the Messiah

Luke 2:25 describes Simeon as waiting for the "Consolation of Israel." In Luke 2:38, Anna's prophecy describes it as those waiting for the "redemption of Jerusalem." "The consolation of Israel" or "redemption of Jerusalem." are the different ways of referring to the Messiah. "Consolation" refers to the restoration of Israel as a nation; the word comes from Isaiah 40:1; 49:13; 51:3; 57:18; 66:10-11. For centuries, the Jews had been waiting for the Messiah ("the anointed one") who had been foretold by the prophets of the Old Testament. They believed that the Messiah would rescue them from their Roman oppressors and establish a new kingdom and rule the world with justice. What the Jews did not comprehend was that the king would come as a suffering servant who healed the sick, preached about the kingdom of God and died for the sins of mankind.

Jewish rites

Jewish families went through several ceremonies soon after a baby's birth:

1. Circumcision—every Jewish boy was circumcised and named on the eighth day after birth (Lev 12:3; Lk 1:31,59-60). Circumcision symbolized the Jews' separation from gentiles and their unique relationship with God.
2. Redemption of the firstborn - a firstborn son was presented to God one month after birth (Ex 13:2, 11-16; Num 18:15-16). The ceremony included buying back—"redeeming"—the child from God through an offering. Through this, the parent would acknowledge that the child belonged to God, who alone has the power to give life.
3. Purification of the mother— for forty days after the birth of a son and eighty days after the birth of a daughter, the mother was ceremonially unclean and could not enter the temple. So when the time came for Mary's purification, the family went to the temple to present Jesus to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law. Mary and Joseph were to bring an offering— a lamb for a burnt offering and a dove or pigeon for a sin offering. The priest would sacrifice these animals and declare the woman to be clean. If a lamb were too expensive, the parents could bring a second dove or pigeon instead. This is what Mary and Joseph did.

Prophet/prophetess

Prophets not only predicted the future, but their primary function was to call the people to obedience and dependence on God. Prophesying was not restricted to males. Examples of female prophets include Miriam (Ex 15:20), Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14), Deborah (Judg 4:4), Isaiah's wife (Is 8:3) and the four daughters of Phillip in the New Testament (Ac 21:8-9).

W A R M U P



What is hope? Name something in your life that you have hoped for a long time. How did you wait for it? Was your hope realized?

B I B L E S T U D Y



Part 1

Simeon

The Bible devotes just thirteen verses to depict Simeon and Anna. They are not prominent characters in the Bible and there is no mention of any of their great heroic acts. The Bible introduces them not in their prime but in their later years. Despite this, their presence in the Bible is significant. Both Simeon and Anna were people who in their very plain and ordinary lives were able to cultivate extraordinary faiths. They both possessed a faith that withstood the test of time. A successful person is not defined by his/her glorious achievements, but by the steadfast faith and hope that people such as Anna and Simeon possessed. Throughout their lives they waited for the coming of the promised Messiah and only at the sunset of their lives did they see this hope realized. Their quiet, reverent and hope-filled lives are models for us today.



As He Understood God's Will

Before the coming of the Lord Jesus, the Jews were under the control and oppression of the Roman government. They eagerly longed for the coming of the Messiah whom the ancient prophets had spoken of long ago. Simeon, whose name means "one who hears and obeys," was a righteous and devout man. His hopes rested on the coming of the Messiah and not on the things of the world. Through reading and examining the Scriptures, Simeon gained spiritual insight. As a consequence of his deep communion with God and his desire for God's salvation, the Holy Spirit revealed to him that before his death, Simeon would see the Messiah.

Today we need to imitate Simeon's thirst and desire to know the things of God. Ephesians 5:15-17 remind us to "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is." Our purpose in reading and studying the scriptures is not just to gain knowledge. Through the Bible, we learn how to live a righteous life according to God's will. The key to understanding His will lies in spiritual renewal in Jesus Christ. Those who conform to the world cannot understand the will of God (Rom 12:2); only those who renew themselves in

the image of Christ understand the matters of God.

Reflection:

1. How can we find out God's will in our lives?
2. Was there a time when you were confused about God's will? How did you deal with it?



B • He waited For God's Deliverance and Fulfillment of Hope

We all have dreams and hopes. Some dreams become reality within a short period of time, while others take a little longer. Simeon's desire was to see the coming of the Messiah, but he had to wait for a long time. His wish only came true in his old age. Throughout this time, Simeon was willing to endure all things because he recognized the importance of the Messiah. Waiting involves a psychological, emotional and physical strain so the things we desire need to be worth the wait. Simeon waited for the Lord. What things are we waiting for?

Reflection:

1. What things should we wait for?
(The second coming of Christ (2 Pet 3:12-13)
The fulfillment of God's promises and blessings (Jer 29:10; 33:14)
The down pouring of the Holy Spirit (Ac 1:4-5)
God's deliverance (Is 33:2; Is 40:31)
Justice (Prov 20:22)
Salvation (Gen 49:18; Mk 13:13; Jer 3:25-26)
Marriage (Ruth 3:18)
For God to fulfill our plans and petitions (Ps 20:4)
For Christ to form in us (Gal 14:19; Ps 25:5))
2. What things will prevent us from waiting to the end?
(Can't see the solution to the problem
Focus on the environment
Peer pressure
Lack of faith in God)
3. What are some of the common behaviors of those who need to wait?
4. Share an experience where you had to wait. What lessons did you gain from it?



C • He Had Complete Joy in God's Salvation

When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus Christ into the temple to be dedicated, Simeon was moved by the Holy Spirit to recognize the Lord. On seeing the Lord with his own eyes, Simeon proclaimed, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." To see Jesus Christ is to see God's salvation and deliverance. For Simeon that was enough. Habakkuk 3:17-18 reads, "Though the fig tree do not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." Would we be happy and content with Jesus Christ only? Like Simeon, apostle Paul recognized the value of knowing the Lord. Although Paul gave up everything for the Lord, yet of his life he says, "As having nothing, and yet possessing everything" (2 Cor 6:9-10). Indeed, when we have the Lord we have eternal life and the source of all blessings.

Reflection:

1. How important is salvation to you?
2. What things would cause you to exchange your salvation?



Part 2

Anna, the Prophetess



A • She Overcame Her Circumstances

Anna's name means "grace." She was the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. The tribe of Asher does not stand out in Old Testament history, and is one of the so-called "lost tribes" (Cf. Gen 30:12-13; 35:26). The Bible continues to say that Anna had been married for seven years and was widowed until she was eighty-four years of age. This meant that Anna had spent about 77 years of her life as a widow. To a young woman the death of a husband is a tragic loss. Anna could have reacted in several ways to her plight: she could have succumbed to sorrow, lived a life without hope or she could have remarried (Deut 25:5-6; Ruth 4:1-10; Mt 22:23-30). Anna's life however took a completely different turn. While we know nothing of Simeon's occupation, we are told that Anna was a prophetess. Instead of murmuring or dwelling in the past, she spent her years in the temple, occupying herself with God's work and turning to God for consolation and hope. How have

we dealt with death, sickness or other tragedies of life? We can react to these circumstances in two ways: we may choose to complain to God about our fate, become discouraged and lose faith. Or, like Anna we may use these circumstances as a means to draw closer to God and give thanks in all things (Rom 8:28; Jer 29:11).



B She Led a God-Centered Life

- a. She did not depart from God's temple
After the death of her husband, Anna turned her hope and trust in God. She devoted herself to worshipping God in His temple day and night. Anna knew the sentiments of the Psalmist when he said, "One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple." (Ps 27:4). In Solomon's dedication prayer, he prayed that God would listen to the people's prayer when they came before Him in His temple. God's temple was thus a place in which the people could call on His name and the place where God could be found. Today, there is a myriad of different dominations and churches in this world. But we have to go to the place that God has designated, the church that He has chosen, because only there can we find Him. Consequently, many brothers and sisters who live far from church willingly travel long distances each week to attend services at the nearest True Jesus Church. One such example is of an elderly couple from Buffalo N.Y who had to make a 2.5 hour drive each week across the U.S-Canadian border to attend services at Toronto church in Canada. On their first trip, they were stopped by customs at the US-Canadian border and asked the reason for their trip to Canada. Upon hearing that they were going to attend service at the True Jesus Church, the customs officer asked why they couldn't simply go to their neighborhood church. The couple explained that they only worship in the True Jesus Church, the church that God has chosen and where His Spirit dwells.

Reflection:

1. Do you believe that the True Jesus Church is the church that God has designated to be His church?
 2. What makes the True Jesus Church unique among all the other churches?
 3. Have you made a commitment to yourself to always remain in God's church?
- b. She led a life of fasting and praying
1 Timothy 5:5 says, "She who is a real widow, and is left all alone, has set

her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day" (1 Tim 5:5). By reducing her physical and earthly pleasures and needs to a minimum, Anna was able to focus on God. Fasting in the Bible means to go without food and drink for a period of time (Est 4:16). Although fasting is not mandatory in the New Testament, there are occasions where it becomes necessary and very effective. Fasting can be for various purposes:

To seek scriptural understanding

Daniel fasted in order to understand the vision given to him. During the time of fasting he prayed to God for enlightenment. After three weeks, God sent His messenger saying, "Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your mind to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words" (Dan 10:1-3, 12). If we desire to comprehend the deep mysteries of God, we may, in addition to research, fast and pray to ask God for spiritual understanding.

To propagate the gospel

In the church at Antioch, many prophets and teachers fasted and prayed for the growth of the church. When we ask God to open a door of grace to the gentiles, we must pray with fasting as well (Col 4:3; Ac 14:27).

To increase in spiritual strength

There are times when we are spiritually low and our prayers become ineffective. Under such circumstances, we ought to fast and pray for power and strength from above (Mt 17:20; Mt 4:1,2; Ac 13:1-3).

To confess, repent and request the forgiveness of sins

We should especially fast when we need to seek the forgiveness of God for sins that we have committed. This manifests our contrite heart and desire for God's mercy (Jonah 3:5-10; 1 Sam 7:3-6; Neh 9:1-4).



C She Was a Thankful Person

Upon witnessing the salvation and redemption of Israel, Anna gave thanks to God. Despite her unfortunate circumstances, she was able to give thanks because of Christ. Apostle Paul says, "Give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thess 5:18). It is not easy to give thanks, particularly when things are not going well for us. But by giving thanks, we set aside our own problems and complaints in order to celebrate God's generosity, love and mercy. We have to adopt the attitude of gratitude know-

ing that whatever comes our way, it is permitted by God and everything is in God's almighty hands. We will find that when we focus on the positive things in life and give thanks, our load seems lighter.

Reflection:

1. List several reasons why thankful people are usually happier people.
2. How do you think it makes God feel when we are thankful and when we complain?



Do *She Was a Grateful Person*

When Simeon saw the Savior, his deepest desire had been fulfilled, and he was willing to die. Anna on the other hand began to tell others of Christ. She not only gave thanks to God, she went out to proclaim the glad tidings that the Messiah had come. Some news is so good it simply must be shared. This was how Anna felt about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The advent of Christ was good news which concerned all people (Lk 2:10) and she knew how important it was for people to know this. Have we spoken of Christ to our friends and family? Are we eager to share the good news of the gospel?

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



Due to the nature of this lesson, the Check For Understanding questions can be found after each Bible Study section under the heading "Reflection".

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



Waiting For God

We live in a world where speed counts - fast food, fast cars, and fast service. We have grown used to things being done quickly and promptly, that even when we pray to God, we demand an immediate or swift answer. The art of waiting has become lost to this generation. To be able to wait is vital. There are characters in the Bible such as Joseph and Isaac who were able to perfect the skill of waiting for God's time. Because of this, God richly blessed them. However, there are also characters like Jacob and Saul who could not wait for God and suffered as a consequence. Read the following scenarios and identify some of

the common errors we commit while waiting. Then look up the Bible verse(s) to find out the correct attitude we should have and the things that we should do while we wait.

Scenario 1

Last week, Penny had a misunderstanding with Lily over some minor issue. No matter how much Penny tried to explain her intentions, Lily refused to listen. Penny was very hurt. She prayed to God to help her resolve the conflict. In her prayers she could sense that God understood. As Penny waited for God to clear the misunderstanding, she shared the incident with another sister in church. Then that evening, she poured her heart out again to someone else who inquired about the incident.

Discuss with students:

Read Psalm 62:1. Here it tells us that we should wait in silence for the Lord. Some people may wait, but in the process, they constantly complain and share their grievances with others. Waiting in silence stills our heart and shows our faith and hope in God.

Scenario 2

Helen is thirty-two years old and she has been praying to God about her marriage. She hopes to find a partner with the same beliefs. Meanwhile, Helen has turned down a friend outside the church who is interested in her. As time goes by, however, Helen knows she's not getting any younger and her friend is still waiting for her. She understands the Bible teachings regarding marrying non-believers, and although she continues to pray, her prayers remain unanswered. Helen decides to take the plunge with her friend.

Discuss with students:

Read Revelation 14:12 and Psalm 37:34. While waiting for God's answer, it is important to keep His commands. God promised Abraham a son, but this promise was only fulfilled 25 years later. During the interim, Abraham and Sarah began to take things into their own hands which resulted in many family conflicts. If we disobey God's commands while we wait for an answer, our waiting becomes futile. Not only will our prayers be unanswered, we will lose out on many blessings and promises. We may also suffer loss and incur God's wrath instead.

Scenario 3

Jim is a fervent youth in the church. He is responsible for hymnal leading and cleaning the chapel. He feels he has potential to do more for the Lord. However, he hasn't been assigned to do "important" responsibilities such as being an RE teacher or

leading the Bible study. He prays and asks God to open up opportunities for him to serve. What should Jim do in the meantime?

Discuss with students:

In Matthew 25:1-13, the Lord Jesus speaks of the parable of the ten virgins. As the ten virgins were waiting for the Bridegroom to come, the five wise virgins prepared enough oil for themselves. They did not sit around doing nothing. They utilized their time wisely to make preparations. While Jim is waiting, he needs to equip himself. When David was called to play the harp for King Saul in his palace, Saul obviously did not know that David had been secretly anointed. But David used the opportunity to serve in the palace to gain firsthand information about running a nation. Sometimes our plans have been put on hold indefinitely. Like David, we can use this waiting time profitably. We need to absorb all kinds of spiritual knowledge, be filled with the Holy Spirit and gain experience in doing holy work.

Scenario 4

Richard earnestly desires to receive the Holy Spirit. He has been praying for almost 20 years. Everyone he knows has already received the Holy Spirit, even children younger than himself. This makes him a little embarrassed. During prayer sessions before services, he mentions it to God each time he prays, but he only prays for a short while before getting up to do something else. He feels God already knows what he wants so he doesn't need to repeat himself too much. As Richard waits for the promised Holy Spirit, what things should he take note of?

Discuss with students:

Read Galatians 5:5. As we are waiting for God, it is important to pray. If we wait without praying, we will grow weak in faith and lose our sense of direction. When a farmer waits for the seeds to grow, he needs to water them daily. Prayers are likened to water that fortifies our faith and hope so that we can endure till that time.

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



Anna and Simeon both led quiet and peaceable lives, godly and respectable in every way (1 Tim 2:2). To men, their uneventful lives were nothing noteworthy. But in the eyes of God, their extraordinary faiths were to be remembered till eternity.

Lesson 7

Isaac

Listed Scriptures

Gen 24; 25:19-26; 26-27; 35:27-29; Heb 5; Phil 2:1-18

Lesson Aim

- 1) To learn from Isaac's faith, meekness and obedience
- 2) To learn about conflict management
- 3) To learn to live in peace and harmony with others

Memory Verse

"Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand." (Phil 4:5)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Isaiah 31-35

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



The Well

The well was the people's chief source of water and was usually found outside town along the main road. Many people had to walk a mile or more for their water. The wells were generally dug and protected by villages. Some wells were probably more than 200 feet deep. There was a lot of labor involved in digging a well so disputes often arose between villages and/or herdsmen who also wished to claim and use the wells. If someone dug a well, he was staking a claim to the land. Some wells had locks to keep thieves from stealing the water. To plug up someone's well was seen as an act of war and was one of the most serious crimes in the land. When the Philistines ruined and took over Isaac's wells, he had every right to fight back, but he chose not to.

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Gerar

Gerar was a Philistine city in the Negev. The area of Gerar was a desolate place on the edge of the wilderness which made water as precious as gold. Both Abraham and Isaac lived here and faced similar experiences with their wives and Abimelech of Gerar (Gen 20:1,2; 26:1-33).

W A R M U P



Let Go

One day, a little child playing with a valuable vase put his hand into it and found it stuck inside. His father too, tried his best, but all in vain. They were thinking of breaking the vase when the father said, "Now my son, make one more try. Open your hand and hold your fingers straight as you see me doing, and then pull." To his astonishment, the little fellow said, "Oh no, father. I couldn't put my fingers out like that, because if I did I would drop my penny."

This may seem like a charming story, but many of us are like this little boy who holds onto his penny no matter what. As believers however, God wants us to surrender and let go, so that we can experience liberation. Today, we will look at a man who did just that.

B I B L E S T U D Y



Isaac

The name Isaac derives from the verb *shq* "laughs" or "will laugh". Isaac's name, "laughs" commemorates the two laughing incidents that occurred. In Genesis 17:17 when God told Abraham how Sarah was to give birth to a son, Abraham fell upon his face and laughed at the absurdity of having a child at such an old age. Then, in Genesis 18:12-15 Sarah laughs when she hears God promise them a son. But God is a faithful God. Isaac became the miracle child born to Sarah at 90 years of age and to Abraham at 100. Isaac is truly a child of the covenant. Isaac's life serves as a role model for believers on how to lead a quiet life based on God's will.



In Genesis 22, it records the incident where God asked Abraham to offer up his son Isaac as a burnt offering. From the events that transpired we see that Isaac had inherited his father's strong faith. Having grown up watching his father offer sacrifices, Isaac knew what materials were required and how things were done. Yet, when Abraham began to bind Isaac up and lay him on the altar upon the wood, Isaac neither struggled nor fled. He did not question his father's sanity or utter a single word. Like a lamb being led to the slaughter, Isaac silently obeyed his father.

We do not like uncertainties. We like to feel in control. Faith, however, is in direct contrast. It means giving up the reins to God, and relying on Him. It means trusting and obeying God even if the purpose cannot be seen. At the time, Abraham could not imagine why God asked him to do such a difficult thing. Similarly, Isaac did not understand why his father was binding him up and offering him as a sacrifice. But they both had the faith that God will provide (Gen 22:14). There are many examples where man needs to simply obey. Hosea the prophet was asked to take a woman of harlotry as his wife. Namaan was asked to bathe in the river Jordan seven times to be cured of his leprosy. Elijah was asked to go to a poor widow's house rather than to someone of better means. Although these people did not fully comprehend God's purpose, they obeyed. Let us learn from the faith of Isaac who quietly obeyed even though he did not understand. In time, God's will and plan will be revealed to us.

Reflection:

1. From this incident, how is Isaac's faith manifested?
2. On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your faith?
3. How would you react when asked to do something illogical or incomprehensible? Why?



a. Obedient to his father

Read Genesis Chapter 24. As Isaac grew older Abraham became concerned for his son's marriage. He instructed his servant to go back to his homeland to find a wife for Isaac. God paved the way for Abraham's servant so that he was able to find a good match. Isaac thus took Rebekah as his wife and loved her.

All this sounds like a fantasy, far-removed from the way society works today. Our first thoughts might be, "Why was Isaac able to marry Rebekah, a woman he does not know at all? How could he entrust such an important matter into the hands of his father and worse still, to the judgments of an old servant? Matchmaking is just too outdated." Nowadays the norm is to date so that both parties can see whether they are compatible. If we examine the attitudes of the people of the world with that of Isaac's we will notice one essential difference: obedience to God. People of this world choose a partner based on their own criteria and preferences. S/he has to be good looking, educated, financially stable, have the same interests, compatible personalities and the list goes on. In contrast, Isaac's decision was not based on what he liked or disliked, but whether it was God's will. Throughout this entire incident Isaac was not informed of the discussion between Abraham and the old servant. He was not called in for his opinion. But what enabled Isaac to submit was in knowing that all this came about with God's guidance. In Genesis 24:7, Abraham knew that "God will send his angel before you (servant)." Abraham did not entrust the matter into his servant's hand but into the Lord's. So when the servant told Isaac all the things that had transpired, Isaac completely submitted. In marriage as in many aspects of his life, Isaac did not seek his own way but fully obeyed God. As a result a beautiful, hard-working and loving woman was given to Isaac in marriage and he was comforted after his mother's death (24:67).

b. Obedient to God

Genesis 26:1-13 records how a great famine came upon the land of Israel. In an effort to escape the famine, Isaac first went to Gerar. Later, God appeared to him and told him not to go down to Egypt. God wanted to see what Isaac's choice was; to obey God and stay in a famine torn Promised Land, or disobey God and travel to Egypt, a gentile land of plenty. It would have been understandable for Isaac to move down to Egypt. There was no food in the land and he had to feed his family. To stay in Israel was an illogical and unreasonable demand from God. But Isaac had faith in God's words. He knew that if he remained in Israel God would take care of his needs.

God tests us too to see how far we will go for Him. We should obey God not only in times when everything is going well but also in times of trials and difficulties. Although there may be famine in the Promised Land, we need to follow God even if it means we have to suffer. If we leave the land of Israel, i.e. the church, we will be spiritually endangered even though we may have material gain. As a result of Isaac's obedience, God performed a miracle—while

the people around him suffered from the famine, Isaac prospered and reaped a hundred fold.

Reflection:

1. Does obedience come easily for you? Why or why not?
2. What can we do to be more obedient?
3. When reflecting upon our own faith, are we fair-weathered Christians, or do we follow God come rain or shine?



a. Isaac was a peacemaker

Read Genesis 26:17-22. When the people of the land saw Isaac's prosperity, they became jealous of him and wanted to drive him away. Time and time again they came to take over the wells that Isaac had just dug. To a herdsman a well was a vital necessity for the survival of his family members, crops and animals. If someone dug a well, he was staking a claim to the land so to take over someone's well was a serious violation and signaled an act of war. Although Isaac had the means to fight with them, he refused. In Genesis 14:1-16, it records how Abraham his father took his 318 trained men to rescue Lot and his family from the hands of the four kings (Gen 14:1-16). These men would have been part of the inheritance that Isaac received from his father. How easy it would have been for Isaac to give his men the command. But Isaac did not resort to aggression or violence. He took the harder route by using kindness and gentleness to win them over (Rom 12:19-21).

b. Isaac understood that God will avenge

Isaac refused to fight his enemies because he understood that God will take revenge for him (Rom 12:19). Although by being meek and mild he lost his wells, Isaac knew that God was in control and that "the Lord searches the mind and tries the heart and gives to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings" (Jer 17:10). During the conflict, God did not appear to Isaac to comfort him. Nor did God warn his enemies in a dream. It is only in Genesis 26:24 that God appeared to Isaac by night to comfort and bless him. Similarly, God may allow us to face injustice to see how much we entrust to the Lord. If we are willing to abide by God's words even to the point where we suffer because of it, we will be richly blessed.

c. Isaac gave up his rights

Isaac was able to give up the wells because he did not place emphasis on his

rights or material gain. In God's sight it is far better to give up our will, our benefits, and our wealth, (which may seem rightfully ours) for the sake of preserving peace and obeying God. Sometimes we maintain a death grip on the things we do not want to lose. However, we have to learn to relax and understand that if it is ours, God will arrange for us to have it. If it is not meant to be ours, no matter how hard we try to hold on, it will slip through our hands.

Reflection:

1. How do you normally react when faced with injustice or conflict?
2. Why was Isaac able to be meek and gentle even in the face of injustice?



D. Quiet and Meditative

Although there are many biblical references concerning Isaac, there are not many passages where Isaac speaks. We know him through his actions rather than through his words. In Genesis 24:62-63, the Bible paints a serene picture of a quiet and thoughtful man who knew the benefits of removing himself from the noise and the bustle of life to be alone with God. Why is it important to lead a quiet life, with time to reflect and meditate? After the prophet Elijah came down from Mount Carmel where he had single-handedly challenged the false prophets of Baal, he came to the entrance of Jezreel. In Israel, the city gate was the center of activity. It was a meeting place for city officials and merchants to carry out their business. No one could enter or leave the city without traveling through the gate. It was here that Elijah began to lose his focus in God and become discouraged by Jezebel's threats (1 Kgs 18:46). When we are constantly surrounded by people, our hearts and minds focus more on them and our environment than on God. Consequently, we lose our sense of direction, become frustrated and are prone to making mistakes. Therefore, let us take time each day to meditate upon God's words and reflect upon our actions, deeds and speech.

Reflection:

1. What are the benefits of daily meditation?
2. In the next week allocate some time each day to think and reflect - it could be as short as 15 minutes a day. Be sure to remove ourselves to a quiet place where we can be alone. Think about what we did during the day and examine what things we can improve upon. Meditate upon a verse or passage in the Bible or God's presence in our lives. As we develop this habit, notice the change that begins to take place.

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING



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LIFE APPLICATION

Turning the Other Cheek



In my last column I introduced the Six Habits, a collection of handwritten advice that my Dad scrawled on an 8.5x11-inch sheet of type-writer paper. While my title is a shameless rip-off of a business bestseller, the tips are uniquely Dad's. They're nuggets of wisdom from a man who had a highly successful thirty-year career, and yet who at the same time took care of his family with love and spent much time in the service of God.

The first tip was about getting along with others: "one enemy would be too many. Be appreciative and congenial." But there are times, even when you're doing good and being the best person you can be, that people will still wrong you. What do you do then? Well, Dad covered this situation with the second tip on his list:

2) Never get mad. If someone is not nice to you, have a lot of patience. This is the time to practice being a good Christian.

The moment you start doing work that involves dealing with other people, you'll have many wonderful opportunities to start making enemies. All of us have different backgrounds, different values, and different things that drive us. And when we aren't in complete agreement with others, discord usually sets in. Sometimes we handle it well, but inevitably we'll face situations where we have enemies. And before you say that a Christian shouldn't have enemies, consider that nearly every good person in the Bible, including Christ, had them.

Human Strategies vs. Godly Solutions

I took a project-management class at my company once, and one of the topics was "Conflict Management." These classes have it down to the science; to deal with conflict, you "Compete, Avoid, Accommodate, Collaborate, or Compromise." You need to choose a conflict-management strategy based on the particular situation you're in, although there are positives and negatives to each approach. Every indi-

vidual has patterns of motivation that cause him or her to interact with others: some combination of “altruistic-nurturing”, “assertive-directing,” or “analytical-autonomizing.” These classes typically have a lot of catchy mnemonics and use lots of fancy, made-up words like “autonomizing” and “synergy.”

And yet after classes, even though you can usually recognize the unhealthy interactions and behaviors that go on around the office, you still can’t do anything about them. That’s because, try as you might, human processes and strategies sometimes can’t solve spiritual issues.

Paul gave this advice:

Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” No, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:17-21).

One of the key phrases in this passage is, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you.” You can’t control what other people do, but you can control yourself. Keep a clear conscience.

Why? Read 1 Peter 3:16-17: “....So that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.” One of the best ways to defeat an enemy is to do good to him after he’s gone to great lengths to make your life difficult. In reality, it’s nearly impossible for someone who doesn’t believe in God to do this. In a world where God doesn’t exist, the rule is survival of the fittest. If someone hurts you, you hurt that person back, taking special care to make sure that you hurt him more than he hurt you. If you don’t exact revenge, others will perceive you as weak, and you’ll lose credibility and power.

Someone with God in his or her heart, though, has a different perspective.

Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. He will bring forth your vindication as the light, and your right as the noonday. Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over him who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!

Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. For the wicked shall be cut off; but those who wait for the LORD shall possess the land.

Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look well at his place, he will not be there. But the meek shall possess the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity. (Ps 37:5-11)

Dad’s Tip – Put to the Test

Strangely enough, only a few months into my job, I had the opportunity to put Dad’s second tip into action. Being an eager new employee, I went out of my way to help the company. I did my job to the fullest. On top of that, another project was under a deadline to be delivered, and since I had some expertise in that area, I stepped in and voluntarily gave up my own time to help do some work on that project.

There were rumors that the upper management was very impressed with my work. One day, one of the higher-uppers came in to our location, but I happened to be in a class that day. When I got out of the class, I found out that the colleague of mine who sat in the desk across from me was given—and accepted—the credit for the work I had done. And in all his discussions with the manager, my name was never even mentioned.

He was given a promotion, a nice job and his own office. To add insult to injury, the job he got was pretty much my dream job, one that I was uniquely qualified to do! And in the meantime, my own job became more and more tedious and thankless.

So I had a choice. I had every right to publicly accuse this person of taking credit for my work. I could have stormed into the boss’ office and made a scene, and I would’ve been justified. Most of my colleagues knew full well what really happened, so I could have rounded them up as witnesses to accuse the one who took credit for my work. But I didn’t.

Now, I didn’t just sit back and just take it either. I wrote an e-mail to the manager who had promoted my colleague. It wasn’t a scathing letter, nor did I accuse or complain. But, in a very Christian way, I told her objectively and professionally my feelings about what had transpired. And through it all, I took great pains to show respect—for this manager, for my colleague, and also for myself. Before I did that, of course, I prayed that God would give me the wisdom to be genuine.

As is my custom with this type of e-mail, I waited twenty-four hours, read it over again, and then sent it off. But I heard nothing back for months. It hurt. Bad. In my mind I tried to comfort myself by repeating over and over again the story of Isaac

and the wells, which I've heard at so many Student Spiritual Convocations.

But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of springing water, the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." So he called the name of the well Esek, because they contended with him. Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that also; so he called its name Sitnah. And he moved from there and dug another well, and over that they did not quarrel; so he called its name Rehoboth, saying, "For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land" (Gen 26:19-22).

"Isaac was a chump," I'd grumble. Well, if you read on in that passage, you'll find that Isaac went up to Beersheba that night, where the Lord appeared to him and reminded him of the blessing He had spoken to Abraham. The same blessing applies to us: "Do not be afraid, for I am with you."

Of course I'm no Isaac, but a funny thing happened. A few months later, that manager was about to leave her job. But she did one last thing before she left; she gave me a call to tell me that my coworker wasn't working out in his new job. He was struggling and she regretted the decision to promote him. She asked if I would like the position, and I accepted. A little while later, the coworker gave me a call. He acknowledged that I was the right person for the job. I ended up doing that job for a few years and doing it well. If I had ranted and raved back when the offense took place, I would have lost the respect of everyone. But the fact that I kept quiet, when everyone knew I had every right to rant and rave, showed character.

When the Pharisee came up to Jesus and tried to goad Him into saying something rash or losing His temper, He invariably replied with a soft answer. He had every right to shout and scream. He was accused of doing miracles through Beelzebub. He was accused of cavorting with "tax collectors and sinners." He was accused of brazenly breaking the traditions of the elders and the Law. But each time, He chose to reply with patience and without resentment. And each time, the Pharisees were left speechless and frustrated.

In my few years at my company, this sort of thing happened to me several times. Each time, I responded with meekness. And each time, the person who wronged me ultimately ended up with egg on his face. Or, to use the Bible's term, "burning coals." Meekness is not the same as weakness. Mr. Webster defines meekness as "enduring injury with patience and without resentment." It's a choice—one that arises not out of a lack of one's own power, but from an abundance of God's power and complete trust that God is there and knows what He's doing.

Paul's advice in Romans 12:20, which he quotes from Proverbs 25:21-22 sums up what all the fancy corporate training courses could not; how to truly resolve a conflict. The next time you encounter a situation where you are slandered, misrepresented, or plain taken advantage of, try putting Dad's advice to the test. Repay evil with love. Then sit back, and let the Lord do His work.

"Six Habits of Really Effective Christians (Part 2)," *Manna* Issue 32 July–Sep 2000, p 49.

Discussion:

1. "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth" (Mt 5:5). How can we marry society's view of "standing up for yourself" with the biblical view? Where do we draw the line?
2. How can we cultivate this virtue in our daily lives? (believe in the power of God, be willing to sacrifice, don't regard material goods too highly, think of the positives, be more far-sighted in thought)
3. Which of these areas are you most likely to face conflicts— in the family, at school, with friends or the general public?
4. Think of a situation where you were in conflict with others. How did you respond? What did you learn from the experience?

REFLECTION & PRAYER



Our Lord Jesus is a paragon of true meekness and submission. He said, Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart (Mt 11:29). Indeed, even when the greatest injustice was laid upon Him, when He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth (Is 53:7). Because of His obedience and meekness the Lord not only gained the hearts of the people then, but He continues to win the hearts of people today. Strive, therefore, for meekness and to be at peace with all men.

Lot of Sodom

Listed Scriptures

Gen 11:27,31; 12:4; 13-14; 18:20-33; 19; 1 Jn 2:15-17; 5:1-4; 1 Pet 2:11-12

Lesson Aim

- 1) To know the importance of guarding our faith and resisting temptation
- 2) To have correct biblical values.

Memory Verse

"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (1 Jn 2:15)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Isaiah 36-40

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



Sodom and Gomorrah

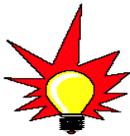
Sodom and Gomorrah were cities of the patriarchal age located in the plain or "valley of the Jordan" (Gen 13:11-12). Their other sister cities were Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar. The Bible states that the district of the Jordan where these cities were located was exceedingly fertile and well populated (c.2065 B.C.). Scholars have now generally agreed that these cities were situated in "the valley of Siddim" (Gen 14:3). Sometime around the twenty-first century B.C. this region with its cities was overwhelmed by a great fire due to its great wickedness and moral depravity (Gen 19:23-28; Rom 9:29; Rev 11:8). In the New Testament the Lord Jesus also refers to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Mt 10:15).

Herding needs and lifestyle

The primary requirements for a successful herding group were pasturage and water

sources. The hot dry months from April through September required movement of herds to higher elevations where grass remained and streams and springs could be found. In the colder, wet months of October through March, the animals were brought back to the plains for grazing. This seasonal movement necessitated long separations of herders from their villages or the establishments of an unconnected, semi-nomadic lifestyle in which the whole families travel with the herds. Disputes over grazing land and water rights would have been the most frequent cause of quarrels among herdsmen.

W A R M U P



- Does making choices come easily for you?
- Have you ever had to make a difficult choice?
- Why was it so difficult?
- Are you generally happy with your choices?
- What is one of the most regrettable choices that you made? Why?

B I B L E S T U D Y



Part 1

Lot Follows Abraham

Lot is a character that is often associated with Abraham. Lot's name means "envelope" or "covering." He was the son of Haran, Abraham's younger brother. Although it is not explicitly recorded in the Bible, it is believed that Lot lost his father at a young age, therefore, when God called Abraham out of the land of Ur, Lot departed with his uncle Abraham for the Promised Land. Later when famine arose, Lot also moved down to Egypt with Abraham. Living with Abraham, Lot observed and learned from Abraham's many virtues. He saw how Abraham feared and worshiped God (Gen 12:7,8) and how God protected those who feared Him (Gen 12:10-20). Lot further learned about showing hospitality and taking the initiative to greet strangers (Gen 19:1-3).

Despite having a good environment and role model, Lot failed towards the latter part of his life. Lot's faith is similar to that of many Christians today. We start off with great zeal and fervency but unfortunately our faith fizzles out towards the end. Lot did not commit any great sin throughout his life. In fact 2 Peter even

describes Lot as being a righteous man. However, what led to his final downfall was his gradual lack of vigilance. As youths we need to observe closely and learn from the faith and merits of the older generation (Ps 37:37). We need to learn from their experiences, observe how God has worked in their lives and imitate their steadfast faith.



Part 2

Lot Departs from Abraham and Settles in Sodom



A • He Sought Comfort and Luxury

Read Genesis 13:10-12. As Abraham's and Lot's possessions and herds increased, the land could not support them dwelling together and there was strife between the herdsman of Abraham and the herdsman of Lot. Tensions often became worse in the dry season when grazing land became minimal and water sources few. Their tension may have been compounded by the presence of Canaanite and Perrizite flocks in the same general area (Gen 13:7). To preserve the peace and harmony between them, Abraham asked Lot to select first from the land. Lot chose the more prosperous and populated valley areas; Abraham was left with the less-populated hill country. Slowly Lot moved his tent closer and closer to Sodom (Gen 13:10-13). From this incident we see that Lot's choice and behavior exemplifies the characteristics of the people of the world:

When Lot saw that the Jordan valley was well-watered like the garden of the Lord, his heart was set on it. In the Bible, the valley symbolizes the comfort, prosperity and pleasures of the world. The mountains, on the other hand represents spiritual matters and close communion with God. Lot's choice demonstrated how his priorities were based on the physical life rather than the spiritual. Genesis 11:11-12 mentions that Lot pitched his tent slowly towards Sodom until he finally settled there. Even in the face of disaster, Lot was reluctant to leave. The tent represents our hearts or intentions. When Lot departed from Abraham he was able initially to maintain the faith and virtues that were instilled in him. He probably recognized the dangers of the world, and dared not move immediately to Sodom. As time passed, however, Lot began to let down his guard and allowed his heart to gradually incline towards the world.

Are our hearts drawn to the world? In our decision making do we think of ourselves and our own enjoyment above God (2 Tim 3:2)? What would we have chosen if

we were Lot? Abraham, on the other hand, had his sights on things above; therefore he placed God in the center of his decisions. Let us examine ourselves to see if our tent is facing God or Sodom. A simple way to gauge our hearts is to reflect on how much time we spend on the things of the world, and how much time we spend on God.

B. He Sought Success and Power

Genesis 19:1 records that Lot was sitting at the gates of Sodom. The gate was the place for city officials and men of importance to gather and talk, conduct business, and settle disputes. It was the focus of city life and a place of authority and status where you could see and be seen. Evidently Lot held an important position. He had made it. Over time, power, status and wealth entangled Lot and made him stay on in Sodom despite the sins in the city. Jesus Christ once said, "Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful" (Mt 13:22). Here the Lord depicts those who rejoice at the word of God, but eventually become choked up by the success and things of the world. Are we allowing the achievements and things of the world to draw us away from God? Sometimes, this occurs in small and subtle ways. We skip a Sabbath to finish up an important assignment due the following Monday. The school body has elected us as president but this means activities and engagements on Saturdays. While we know it's important to observe Sabbath, we feel drawn to it because it's too great an opportunity to miss and it will look good on our resume. Let us be watchful that we are not distracted by the world and become unfruitful.

C. He Compromised With the World

Living in Sodom, Lot's faith became weak and he began to lose spiritual discernment. Many of his actions reflect the state of his faith:

1. In Genesis 19:7, Lot addressed the wicked and violent men of Sodom as "my brothers." He had befriended the world (Jc 4:4).
2. Lot failed in bringing up his family in the Lord.
3. Lot was willing to betroth his daughters to the wicked men of Sodom.
4. Lot had lost his credibility as a witness of God. When he warned his sons-in-law of the imminent disaster, they simply laughed at him.

Over time, Lot had compromised his principles. He had allowed his environment to shape him. Instead of removing himself from wickedness, he drew closer to it and adapted to that way of life. There may be times where we have foolishly cho-

sen to remain in certain situations or environments that cause us to fall into temptation or compromise our principles. We often deceive ourselves thinking that our faith is strong enough to resist temptation. Revelation 18:4 however, cautions us to depart from the Great Babylon, which is the world. We need to "Come out of her, lest we share in her sins and lest we receive of her plagues."

D. Unrest and Strife

Genesis 14 records how the five kings of cities including Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Zoar, formed an alliance and rebelled against Chedorlaomer. After paying 12 years of taxes, these kings refused to pay any more. Chedorlaomer reacted swiftly and called upon three other cities (Shinar, Ellasar and Goiim) to fight against the five rebel cities. The four kings re-conquered the five cities and captured all the people and possessions within them (Gen 14:1-10). When it was told to Abraham that his kinsmen had been taken captive, he and his 318 mighty men chased Chedorlaomer's army and with God's help rescued Lot and all that he had.

This incident teaches us that if we indulge in the flesh and the things of the world, we will be easily captured by Satan. While living in Sodom, Lot had gotten used to the comforts of life and had lost vigilance. Through this experience, God wanted Lot to examine his life and faith. Similarly, God may use the environment, and the people around us to get us back on track. Sadly, Lot did not learn from the experience and instead of returning with Abraham or moving out of Sodom, he returned to that very city to continue to pursue his dreams.

E. He Neglected the Family's Spiritual Upbringing

Lot's pursuit of pleasures brought a tragic end to his family. His love of the world caused him to neglect his family's spiritual welfare and resulted in individuals who did not know God. Living amidst all the corruption in Sodom, his daughters became desensitized to sin and did not think twice about committing incest with their father. Consequently, they gave birth to Moab and Benammi, the fathers of two of Israel's greatest enemies. Meanwhile, his wife, unwilling to leave the pleasures of the world was changed to a pillar of salt. His sons-in-law were destroyed with the city because they did not take Lot seriously.

Malachi 2:15 tells us that what the Lord wants from us is to produce godly offspring. God does not want us to focus on making a name for ourselves in this world, but to train up godly children to glorify Him. Deuteronomy also speaks of

the importance of impressing the word of God upon our children (Deut 6:6-7). Sadly, many parents have strayed from this principle. Rather than bringing up their children's faith, they have focused on their own careers or on the worldly education and achievements of their children. Such children grow up with a shallow faith and with very little knowledge and fear of God.



Part 3

Lot Flees From Sodom

Read Genesis Chapter 19. The sins and wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah had reached such proportions that God resolved to destroy them. The inhabitants did not believe in God (19:14), they were filled with violence (19:4-9; Is 1:10-15) and committed all kinds of immorality (19:5-8; Jude 7; 2 Pet 2:6-8). And so God rained down brimstone and wiped out the entire valley and everything in the cities save Lot and his two daughters. The plain of Sodom and Gomorrah that once looked like the garden of God, was now reduced to ashes. The very things that Lot desired and spent much of his life pursuing were destroyed. He was left with nothing. 1 John says, "Do not love the world or the things of the world ... the world is passing away and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 Jn 2:15-17). Since we know that one day this world will be overthrown by fire (2 Pet 3:10), we need to use our time wisely. If we spend our time pursuing after fleeting pleasures, we will be left empty handed on the day of disaster. Let us therefore pursue the things that are imperishable and lead to eternal life (2 Pet 3:11-14).

Reflection:

1. Compare Lot's and Abraham's outlook on life and how it reflects their choices.
2. How are Lot's choices reflective of the people of this world?
3. Reflect on your own life and think how effective a witness you are.
4. Knowing that the Last Day is near, how should we live our lives?
5. Would it be difficult for you to remove yourself from company or environments that are not beneficial to your faith? Why?

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING



Due to the nature of this lesson, the Check For Understanding questions can be found after each Bible Study section under the heading "Reflection".

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



Our Values

Ask your students the following questions:

Why am I living?

For what purpose or goal am I here in this world?

What is meaningful to me in this world?

What is it that I'm seeking for?

What is it that makes me happy?

What is the most memorable experience I have had?

All the above questions are related to our values. What does one's value system mean? Basically our value system consists of all the things that we think is "right" or "wrong." Through the course of time and varying experiences, whatever we believe is right, necessary, or important becomes part of our value system. Once our values are established, they will affect our decisions and actions. It will reflect on how we live our lives, spend our money, use our time (including spare time) and our energy. It will also determine what thoughts and memories we hold on to and cherish. Let's examine our own value system to see how it compares with the Bible's value system.

1. From the list below, circle five things that you feel to be of value:
 - a. Money
 - b. Acceptance from peers
 - c. High school diploma
 - d. Health
 - e. Faith
 - f. Friends
 - g. Love
 - h. Freedom
 - i. Life
 - j. Equality
 - k. Safety
 - l. Self-conviction
 - m. Wisdom
 - n. Leadership qualities
 - o. Doing holy work
 - p. Independence

2. Which of the following things would you invest most of your time and energy on? (Please check one)
 - a. Clubs and organizations
 - b. Field trips
 - c. Youth fellowship in church
 - d. Homework
 - e. Exercise
 - f. Arts classes

3. If you had a lot of money how would you spend it? (List according to 1,2,3 preference)
 - a. A car
 - b. Food
 - c. Clothes/ make-up
 - d. In helping the church and others
 - e. Entertainment such as books, magazines, videos, games
 - f. Music
 - g. Going on vacations
 - h. Others (please specify)

4. Life consists of many aspects. Below is just a selection. Where would you place most of your time, money and energy? (List according to 1,2,3 preference)
 - a. Entertainment
 - b. Faith
 - c. Education
 - d. Family
 - e. Friendships
 - f. Love
 - g. Career

5. If you were choosing a marriage partner, which criteria would be most important to you? (List according to 1,2,3 preference)
 - a. Faith
 - b. Appearance
 - c. Job
 - d. Education
 - e. Character/personality
 - f. Interests
 - g. Life goals

6. In selecting a college major, what things will influence your decision most?
 - a. It's something I am interested in.
 - b. I am guaranteed a good job and good pay in future.
 - c. It's something that I can use to serve God and utilize the gifts that God has given me.
 - d. It gives me the opportunity to be most creative.
 - e. It's what my parents want me to do.
 - f. Others (please specify)

7. In shopping for clothes, what things would you look for? (List according to 1,2,3 preference)
 - a. The brand name
 - b. Good quality
 - c. In fashion
 - d. Practicality
 - e. Within my budget
 - f. Style

Discussion:

In many instances, the Bible does not give us specific details concerning how we should live our lives and the choices we should make. However, the Bible does provide us with the principles and values a follower of Christ should adhere to. Look up the following Bible verses to learn how a true disciple of Christ should live his life.

- a. Philippians 3:7-8
- b. Acts 20:24
- c. Hebrews 11:25-26
- d. 1 Peter 1:7
- e. Matthew 6:19-21
- f. 2 Corinthians 6:14; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4
- g. 1 Peter 3:3-4

Suggested Reading: "Making Choices," *Manna* Issue 32, July-Sept 2000



The apostle Paul in Romans 14:8 says, If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. Our time and energy are limited. With these limited factors, we can choose to invest them in the things of the world, or the things of God. Yet, the result of our investment will be drastically different; one will leave us empty-handed while the other leads to eternal life and blessings. The choice is ours.

Goals

A mature Christian knows how to repay the love of God through acts of service. In this unit, students will study several great workers in the Bible. Lydia, like most of us, led a very busy life. Yet in spite of all her secular obligations, she was able to balance out her spiritual, family and career life.

Our students will further learn of characters such as Apollos and Ezra who both demonstrated how a person's willingness to know and practice God's word have a direct effect on how God uses their life and how effective their service is. Our students will learn that while it is important to serve God, it is more crucial to have daily spiritual cultivation. Otherwise, we will suffer the same consequences as Eli who failed to examine the condition of his heart and after many years of service was rejected by God.

unit
3**Teacher Devotional**

Food is something we eat in order to stay healthy and alive. It is also something we enjoy and find satisfaction in. But the Lord Jesus shows us how doing the will of the Father and accomplishing His work can provide us with the satisfaction and enjoyment that food gives to our body. As a Christian, prayer and the word of God nourish our soul. However, our spirituality grows even more when we strive to obey God's commandments and work for Him. We will experience an indescribable joy and satisfaction while serving the Lord. As we mature in faith we will be concerned with not only receiving, but giving and sacrificing ourselves for others.

Labor For Jesus

"Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.'" (Jn 4:34)

Lesson 9

Apollos of Alexandria

Listed Scriptures

Acts 18-19:12; 1 Cor 1:10-17; 3:1-4:13; 16:12; Tit 3:13

Lesson Aim

- 1) To imitate Apollos' zeal and diligence in preaching the word of God.
- 2) To stand up for the truth.
- 3) To have a correct attitude in serving God.

Memory Verse

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Tim 2:15)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Isaiah 41-45

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

**Aquila and Priscilla**

Aquila was a Jew, a native of Pontus and by occupation a tentmaker. Fleeing from Rome because of an order of Claudius commanding all Jews to leave that city, Aquila went to Corinth, where he was living when Paul found him. Paul and Aquila were of the same craft. The Bible does not mention how and when Aquila and his wife Priscilla were converted to Christianity. But the Bible mentions how this couple worked tirelessly and actively for the ministry of God. They made tents and ministered with Paul, helped Apollos know the complete gospel, opened up their home as a church wherever they went and assisted the young Timothy.

Tentmaker

Jewish boys were expected to learn trades from which they could earn their living. Paul and Aquila were "tentmakers," a term which was also applied to leather-

working in general. From an early age, they were trained to cut and sew leather into tents and other leather goods. Tents were in high demand because they were used throughout the Empire to house soldiers. Tentmakers regarded themselves as artisans who were proud of their work despite the long hours. Artisans were higher than peasants in status and income, but higher classes, who thought labor with one's hands was degrading, despised them. Furthermore, in those days people in the same trade formed cooperative trade guilds. In the ancient economy, people of the same trade did not compete with one another as they do today. Their trade guilds normally adopted a patron deity, and they ate sacrificial food at their regular banquets together. This cultic orientation of trade guilds would exclude practicing Jews from the fellowship, making Jews delighted to find other Jews of their own trade.

W A R M U P



The Pew

Once upon a pew I sat
And heard the preacher ask,
"We need someone to teach a class,
Now who will take this task?"

Then God sat down beside me there
And said, "Son, that's for you."
But, Lord, to stand before a class
is one thing I can't do.

Now Brother Forbes would be the man to call,
There's nothing he won't do.
I'd rather hear the lesson taught
From here upon my pew.

Once upon a pew I sat
And heard the preacher ask,
"We need someone to lead the songs,
Now who will take this task?"

Then God sat down beside me there
And said, "Son, that's for you."
But Lord, to sing before a crowd
Is one thing I can't do.

Now Sister Jenkins will do the job,
There's nothing she won't do.
I'd rather hear the music played
From here upon my pew.

Once upon a pew I sat
And heard the preacher ask,
"I need someone to keep the door,
Now who will take the task?"

Then God sat down beside me there
And said, "Son, that's for you."
Saying things to strangers, Lord,
Is one thing I can't do.

Now Brother Neal can talk to people, Lord,
There's nothing he won't do
I'd rather someone come to me
And greet me on the pew.

As years just seemed to pass me by,
I heard that voice no more.
Until one night I closed my eyes
And woke on heaven's shore.

There were four of us together there
To face eternity.
God said, "I need just three of you
To do a job for me."

"O Lord," I cried, "I'll do the job,
There's nothing I won't do."
But Jesus said, "I'm sorry, Friend,
In heaven there is no pew."



Apollo

Apollo was a Jew, a native of Alexandria which was a large seaport in northern Egypt and the second most influential city in the Roman Empire. It was one of the three cultural centers; the others being Tarsus and Athens. The population consisted of many Jews: one out of five were Jews. Research into Scriptures was popular and the Septuagint was completed in Alexandria. Apollo grew up in this kind of environment. Although mentioned only a few times in the Bible, Apollo was an important worker in the early church. In his epistles, Paul spoke of Apollo as a fellow-worker (cf 1 Cor 6:12; Tit 3:13). Besides his eloquence and special gifts in pastoring the church, Apollo is noted for his meekness, willingness to accept correction, zeal and spirit of service.



A Apollo Was Zealous for the Word

The Bible introduces Apollo as being fervent for the word (Ac 18:26, 28). How did Apollo demonstrate his zeal for the truth?

a. He preached the word

Apollo's zeal for the word was demonstrated through his eagerness to preach about the Lord Jesus. He went about the synagogues speaking and teaching about the Lord Jesus, although at the time he only knew of the baptism of John (Acts 18:25b). He came to a complete knowledge of the truth only after Aquila and Priscilla expounded the truth to him. Apollo's zeal in preaching the word is a good example for us. While it is important to equip ourselves with the truth in order to lead others fully to the Lord (Col 1:28), it is our duty to preach and share with others the complete gospel and God's wonders in our lives (Mk 16:15; Phil 2:22; Phil 1:5, 12-13).

b. He defended the truth

If you've ever been to a flea market you will notice many imitation products. Sometimes they resemble the true and genuine version so closely that it's easy

to be deceived. This applies to the truth also. After about 60 A.D., the truth that was given by the Lord became twisted and confused. Many believers were lured into believing heresies. In various letters of the Bible, the apostles such as Peter, Paul and Jude encouraged the believers to confute, contend, and restore the truth (Acts 20: 28-31; 2 Thess 2:1-12; 2 Pet 3:1-18; Jude 3, 17-19). While on earth, the Lord Jesus also warned that in the end time "false Christs and false prophets will arise and show signs and wonders to lead astray, if possible, the elect" (Mk 13:22).

In 1 Timothy, the apostle Paul gave instructions to the young Timothy on dealing with false teachers who had infiltrated the church (1 Tim 4:1-4). Paul mentions that there are people who are very fervent for God, but they are false teachers. These false teachers gave rules forbidding marriage and demanded abstinence from certain foods. Such teachings became part of what is known as Gnosticism— a belief that the spirit is good, but the physical world is evil. Thus anything done for the body's pleasure or to fulfill its needs (such as marriage relationships or eating) was evil. They advocated that to be "good" and to achieve a higher spiritual state, a person must deny all evil, including natural physical desires. However, God had never forbidden marriage or prohibited certain foods besides what was decided by the Holy Spirit and apostles in Acts 15. Such rules violated God's principles and disturbed God's patterns for relationships and diet. Today, there are denominations that forbid marriage. This appears to be a godly and noble thing but it is not in accordance to biblical teachings.

How can we fight such heresies? The Bible mentions that Apollo was well versed in the Scriptures and he was able to powerfully confute the Jews through the Scriptures. Unless we are grounded in the word, we will be susceptible to false teachings and be "blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming" (Eph 4:14). This can happen when individuals read passages out of context, read into Scripture their own interpretations, or twist the words of the Bible for his or her own purpose. When the True Jesus Church was established its mission was to rectify erroneous teachings or beliefs and to spread the gospel. We need to equip ourselves in order to confront and eradicate false teachings and teachers when they arise.

c. He obeyed the truth

We can find many people like Apollo in other denominations and religions. They serve God fervently, love God deeply, and are very zealous for their

beliefs. They even sacrifice their own comforts to bring the gospel to the remote parts of the world. Despite such efforts and sincerity, they have an incomplete understanding of the true gospel. Romans 10:2 speaks of such people as having “a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.” When Priscilla and Aquila expounded the truth to Apollos, he humbly accepted and obeyed the truth. The Lord tells us that salvation is only for those who believe and obey the word of God. There are Christian denominations today who believe that the sacraments of Baptism, Holy Communion and Foot-Washing are not necessary for salvation. Unlike Apollos, such people refuse to submit and obey the truth.

Reflection:

1. How did Apollos demonstrate his zeal for God’s word?
2. In the last days false teachers will arise even in the true church. How can we identify who they are?
3. Why is it important to contend for the truth?



B. The Learned With Humility

In Acts 18:3 we learn that Aquila and Priscilla were tentmakers and were not of high standing. Apollos on the other hand was a highly educated and eloquent man. Nevertheless, Apollos’ education and social standing did not prevent him from accepting the correction and instruction from the lowly tentmakers. When he realized his inadequacies, Apollos immediately became obedient to the truth. Consequently, he became an even more powerful and effective worker of God.

Worldly wisdom and knowledge can often become obstacles to receiving the truth. Apollos did not allow his pride to hinder his acceptance of the truth. Similarly, we cannot reject instruction or correction based on how we feel about a certain person, their educational background or status. We should weigh everything with sound judgment and the word of God.

Reflection:

1. If you were Apollos, how would you have responded if you were corrected by people who were inferior to you in age, learning and social standing?



C. Apollos Was Ferocious in Spirit

From the Bible, Apollos comes through as a very active and dynamic worker who was constantly improving and changing himself. After he understood the complete truth, Apollos crossed over to Achaia to help the brothers and sisters there. Apollos did not wait to be asked. He took the initiative to offer his help to the believers. Such proactiveness is inspired from a fervent faith. Romans 12:11 exhorts us to “Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord.” Are there times when our faith flags to the point where like Elijah we have fallen asleep? Does prayer, reading the Bible and holy work no longer appeal to us? When Elijah ate of the bread and drank of the water that God had provided, his strength revived and he ran on the strength of that food for forty days and forty nights (1 Kgs 19:1-8). Today, in order to rekindle our love and zeal for God, we have to eat God’s word and drink the spiritual water, which is the Holy Spirit (Ps 19:7a).

Reflection:

1. Throughout our lives, we go through spiritual peaks and valleys. What do you do when you are at a spiritual low?
2. Share an experience when the Spirit of God fired you up.
3. Suggest ways we maintain a fervent faith.



D. Apollos Utilized His Gifts

Although Apollos was a well-educated and eloquent man (Ac 18:24), he did not live in an ivory tower, far removed from the common masses. Apollos used what he had learned to teach and help his people. Being educated and possessing great abilities are not ends in themselves. What is most important is how we utilize those gifts. When Apollos arrived at Achaia, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed (Ac 18:27). Apollos was good at watering, i.e. pastoring, so when he came to the Corinthian church in Achaia, he was able to contribute to the holy work immensely (Job 4:4; Eph 4:29; Rom 15:1-2; 14:19).

Talents are natural gifts and skills that God has given each of us. He bestows His gifts on us not out of favoritism but so that we can build up the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:17-19). God doesn’t love the pastor more than the cook, or the teacher more than the gardener— He loves them equally because they are all a part of Him. We all have a skill that can be used for the benefit of the Lord.

In Japan, there once lived a very poor family. They were so poor that they could

no longer support their young son. With a great deal of effort, they managed to send their 4-year-old son into the General's family. Because the boy was so young, the steward of the house allocated him one simple job. The boy had to take care of the General's shoes. Every night, the steward would tell the boy where the General was going the next day and what shoes he had to wear. The boy would then prepare and polish the shoes for the General. When morning came, the boy quickly placed the shoes before the great General and assisted him in putting them on. This he did each day.

One morning after a great snowstorm had brewed the previous night, the General opened his door to find that the boy was not there. "The snow is so deep, and the child is so young, let him sleep" the General thought to himself. A little while later, the little boy came running to the General's house. Feeling embarrassed over his tardiness, his words tumbled out as he tried to explain himself. "When I rose this morning and saw the snow, I was worried that you would catch a cold, and so I put your shoes inside my robe to keep them warm. Somehow I dozed off again and ..." Before he had finished his explanation, the boy pulled out the General's shoes from inside his robe. The General was very moved and told the boy that he need not have gone through so much trouble. The boy then replied, "My father said that no matter what we do, we have to do it to the best of our ability. Although all I can do is care for the General's shoes, I want to be the best shoe caretaker in the whole of Japan". As the years flew by, this little boy grew up and became a great general of the Japanese army.

Reflection:

1. How have we utilized the gifts we have received to serve God?
2. What are our reasons for receiving an education?

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



Due to the nature of this lesson, the Check For Understanding questions can be found after each Bible Study section under the heading "Reflection".

A Life of Service



While it is important to serve God, correct attitudes and motives are essential to determine whether God will accept our service. How pitiful it would be to dedicate our life to service yet have none of our works remembered by God. To God, the condition of the heart is most important. Read the following case studies and identify some of the common misconceptions and faults that we have while serving God.

Case 1

Annie had brought two of her friends from college to attend the Friday night service. After service while the pastor was talking to her friends, Annie went to get some refreshments. Seeing that Annie's hands were full, Sarah took the initiative to help. Annie however, replied curtly, "I will take care of them myself" and took the drinks from Sarah's hands. Sarah was stunned by Annie's reaction. Identify Annie's weakness and suggest how we can prevent this from happening in our service to God.

For teacher reference:

After being involved in church work for a period of time, it is easy for us to develop wrong attitudes such as pride and self-righteousness. We get used to the sense of power and refuse to accept suggestions or advice from others. We may also find it difficult to work alongside others. Such symptoms occur when we serve God but do not spiritually cultivate. In this instance Annie has the misconception that the truthseekers belong to her. She needs to understand that God leads His sheep to the fold through us who are His mere instruments. The faith of the truthseekers needs to be established on God. If we introduce our friends to other members, they can learn more of God's grace. Annie also needs to learn the importance of teamwork.

Case 2

Linda has recently moved to the area and is excited about getting to know the brothers and sisters in the church. Shortly she begins to take notice of Tom who is an active and outstanding brother in the church. She joins the Bible studies and youth activities as a means to know Tom better. Some of the youths in the group have begun to notice this and are unsure of whether speak to her about it. Why is Linda's motive for doing church work wrong? What are some of the wrong motives that we may have for doing church work? What should we do when we find that our motives are wrong?

For teacher reference:

When we engage in holy work, it is important to constantly check our motives. One of the main reasons why we participate in divine work is to repay the love of God. Some people, however, have served with wrong motives. They have used holy work as an opportunity to pursue the opposite sex, power, recognition, self-satisfaction or other personal benefits. In the Old Testament, priests had to first cleanse and wash themselves before they went about their service. Similarly, we need to prepare and cleanse ourselves when doing holy work. We need to constantly examine ourselves and remove fleshly passions through the word of God and prayer. Those who serve with wrong motives cannot serve for long and they will cause discontent and disharmony among the members. Only those who are sincere and pure in heart can stand before the Lord and serve Him (Ps 24:3-4).

Case 3

Vera was asked to lead Bible study. Each time, Vera had refused because she felt incapable. Vera feels she would not be able to match up to the standards of the other Bible study leaders. How can we help Vera have the correct concept? Have we declined to do holy work for this reason before?

For teacher reference:

God has given each of us certain responsibilities based upon our abilities. There are times however, when we are given responsibilities which are beyond our capabilities and in which we have no experience. However, just as God gave Peter, an uneducated fisherman, spiritual wisdom, power, grace and eloquence to preach the gospel and perform many miracles, God will also supply us with the necessary gifts to accomplish His work. Gifts come in various ways: 1. We are born with certain gifts and talents. 2. We pray and request for gifts to benefit the church. 3. We acquire and refine a skill after much training and effort. Instead of comparing her abilities with others, Vera needs to realize that so long as she has the faith and willingness, God can use the little that she has to benefit her fellow brothers and sisters (Jn 6:1-14). At the beginning she may find there's plenty room for improvement, but as with all skills, practice makes perfect.

Case 4

Rob was the head teacher for the Junior 1 class. During lunchtime, he reminded Sam, a fellow teacher, that he was teaching that afternoon. Sam shook his head and said it was not his turn. Rob asked if he had checked the schedule that he had given to Sam a while back. Sam said that he had lost it. This was not the first time Sam had lost the schedule. Rob is frustrated and annoyed at Sam's attitude. Now Rob has to go and teach the class instead. Sam on the other hand feels com-

elled to teach because there are not enough teachers but he feels he doesn't work well with kids. Have you experienced similar conflicting feelings as Sam? How did you deal with it?

For teacher reference:

To be able to serve God is an honor and a privilege. Not everyone is given such opportunities. When we are called upon to undertake a responsibility, we should do so faithfully and diligently. Sam has conflicting feelings. He feels obliged to help out, but his heart is not there. Rob needs to help him realize the reasons why he serves and provide encouragement and support. If Sam continues to be non-committal then Rob may need to find a replacement instead. Meanwhile Sam could try to look into other areas of church work where he has more interest and talent in.

Case 5

Mandy has been a member of the choir for some time. She sings in the alto section. One thing she's noticed however is that whenever solo parts come up, it's always given to the same people. She feels that if given the chance she could do just as well. In fact, she's noticed that the things she is assigned to do in church are menial tasks. As the youth counselor, help Mandy solve her problem and suggest ways to help her.

For teacher reference:

A church is an organization with many different areas of work such as cooking, hymnal leading, teaching RE classes, and so on. Despite the variety of tasks, there is not one type of duty that is better than the other. Each type of holy work is just as necessary and important to build up the body of Christ. We would not lose out on our reward if our duty is to clean the bathrooms as opposed to someone who sang solo in choir, so long as we do it with a willing and sincere heart. We should not look down on what we do in church even though the tasks are "behind the scenes." When God sees that we are faithful in little, He will give us more gifts and responsibilities. We need only to wait for God's time and opportunity.

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



May God give us a heart of understanding and humility so that we will use our gifts wisely to serve Him. For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have (2 Cor 8:12).

Ezra the Scribe

Listed Scriptures

Ezra 1-11; Neh 8-9

Lesson Aim

- 1) To imitate the determination and work spirit of Ezra.
- 2) To have high goals for the kingdom of God.

Memory Verse

"But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night." (Ps 1:2)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Isaiah 46-50

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



Author and date written:

Not stated, but probably Ezra; around 450 B.C.

Historical background:

God's chosen people had sinned. They had turned to false gods and violated God's Sabbath. Although the Lord sent His prophets time and time again to warn the people of God's impending wrath, their words fell on deaf ears. In the year 605/6 B.C., the Lord allowed the Babylonians to crush the nation and tear the people away from the Promised Land. In a series of three deportations the Jews were taken to Babylon where they remained for 70 years (C.f. Jer 29:10). After the period of captivity was over, God remembered His covenant and in 537 B.C., when the great Babylon fell to the Medo-Persians, God stirred the heart of King Cyrus of Persia to allow His people to return to Jerusalem.

The return took place in three stages. Ezra 1-6 talks about the first return to Israel in 537 B.C. The leader of the first group was a man called Zerubbabel (his Hebrew name) or Sheshbazzar (his Chaldean name: see Ezr 5:16). He and the high priest, Jeshua, guided the people back to their homeland to rebuild the temple. They began to build the altar and the temple foundations (Ezr 3). But due to opposition, the project was halted for about 15 years (Ezr 4). During this time the prophets Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the people to complete the work (Ezr 5). King Darius finally decreed that the work should proceed unhindered.

Ezra 7-10 talks about the second return which took place some 80 years later. In the seventh year of Artaxerxes Longimanus, about 57/8 years after the completion of the temple, Ezra led the second group of some 1,754 men and their families back to Palestine where he restored the faith of the people.

The third return to Jerusalem occurred in the 20th year of King Artaxerxes' (465-424 B.C.) reign. Nehemiah led a group of exiles back to Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls, which still laid in ruins since the Babylonian invasion. Within 52 days, Nehemiah completed the rebuilding of the city walls and gates and he made many religious reforms.

W A R M U P



It's Up To You

One song can spark a moment
One flower can wake the dream
One tree can start a forest
One bird can herald spring
One smile begins a friendship
One handclasp lifts a soul
One star can guide a ship at sea
One word can frame the goal
One vote can change a nation
One sunbeam lights a room
One candle wipes out darkness,
One laugh will conquer gloom
One step must start each journey
One word must start each prayer
One hope will raise our spirits,
One touch can show you care
One voice can speak with wisdom

One heart can know what's true
One life can make the difference
You see, it's up to you!

By Catherine Manceaux

B I B L E S T U D Y



Part 1

Ezra's Resolutions

Throughout history God has used common people to change the world. The first disciples of Jesus Christ were unassuming, mostly uneducated, untrained men and women who made strong resolutions for God's kingdom. Today we will study about Ezra, a man who had a great determination to help his people in their darkest and desolate time. Ezra means help or my helper. Ezra 7 tells us that Ezra was from a priestly lineage and was a descendant of Aaron the high priest (7:1-5). His father was Seriah. Ezra was also a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses (7:6), commandments of the Lord, and statutes of Israel (7:11). He was born in Babylon at a time when the kingdom of Judah had been destroyed for a long time and the people were made captives in a foreign land. While in Babylon, God commanded the exiles to build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters. God wanted the people to move ahead with their lives and to settle in Babylon. When seventy years was completed God would visit them and bring them back to Israel (Jer 29:4-6; 10). Although in a foreign land, Ezra provides for us many valuable lessons on how to preserve our faith and do extraordinary works for God.



A He Resolved to Learn the Word of God

Ezra was born in Babylon during the captivity. He had never been to Israel. In other words, Babylon was his home. But unlike the many young Jews at the time, Ezra was not assimilated into the culture, practices and religion of the

Babylonians. Rather, he held onto his faith and Jewish identity despite his environment. Ezra did not merely hold onto his faith, he became a man of the faith in a foreign land. We may have similar backgrounds as Ezra. On the one hand, we are born into Christian families, but on the other we are faced with the world's trends and influences. In order to maintain our identity, we have to understand our precious status and spiritual lineage (1 Pet 2:9). Not only should we hold onto our faith, we should be active witnesses for Christ.

Ezra studied the word of God with a certain attitude—he studied it with faith. When the kingdom of Judah fell, it seemed that God's laws were no longer relevant. To devote time and effort to learning God's law in a foreign land may have seemed futile to many, but Ezra had faith in God and His promises. He believed that the Lord would fulfill His promise to visit His people after seventy years and restore them back to their homeland (Jer 25:12; 29:10; Dan 9:2). He showed such conviction and reverence in God's laws that even the king respected the laws of God (Ez 7:11-26). Sometimes it seems as if we read the Bible to no avail. We do not see how it applies to our lives. But if we study with faith and believe the Bible to be truly the word of God that can instruct us for salvation we will be blessed (2 Tim 3:15).

Reflection:

1. How did Ezra manifest his faith?
2. What was Ezra's attitude towards learning the laws of God?

 **B • He Resolved to Perform the Word of God**

The Bible specifically mentions that Ezra not only studied the word of God, he resolved to do it. True understanding of the word of God involves putting it into practice and experiencing it (Jn 7:17; Js 1:22-25). Had Ezra just resolved to study the word of God, neither he nor his people would have profited from it (Js 2:14-17). Romans 2:13 says, "For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified." Often we listen to sermons as if at a concert. The sermon, like music, will move us for a while, but it has no real impact upon our lives (Lk 7:32). To truly benefit from God's words we need to practice it.

Reflection:

1. Why is it that God blesses the doers of the word of God and not the listeners?
2. Have you ever done something purely because you wanted to obey God's word even though you did not feel like it? What were your thoughts?

 **C • He Resolved to Teach the Law of God in Israel**

Ezra recognized that God sent the Israelites into captivity because they did not follow His laws. Ezra identified the problem and to prevent the people from committing the same sin, he resolved to study the law and educate his people. Ezra was a problem-shooter. He knew where the breach was and he made it his duty to do something about it. Did Ezra have to leave Babylon? No. He could have let others deal with it. Instead Ezra made it his duty to help his people. This meant having to leave Babylon to suffer all kinds of hardships. Sometimes when we encounter problems we react like an ostrich and pretend we did not see the problem, or we let others deal with it. Ezra sets us a good example of shouldering the responsibility even if it means giving up things that are important to us. Today, do we have the heart of Ezra who was willing to suffer for the sake of his brethren? Are we willing to take the initiative to help those in need in the church? One such member who did was a brother who took it upon himself to study sign language so that he could sign the sermons for a believer who was deaf. Nobody asked the brother to do this, but because he saw the need of the believer, he willingly stretched out a helping hand.

Reflection:

1. What resolutions did Ezra make?
2. What resolutions have you made in your faith?
3. When there is a need in the church, are you most likely to jump up and volunteer your services, wait to be drafted or hide in the woodwork?



Part 2
Ezra's Work

 **A • He Led the People Back to the Homeland**

After Ezra decided to return to Jerusalem he called together those who wanted to return. Among the 1,754 people, there were priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers and temple servants (Ezra 7:7) as well as many possessions and livestock. Their journey was an extremely dangerous one. For four months they had to trek for 900 miles on foot through wilderness terrain (Ez 7:8-9).

Besides making physical preparations for the journey, Ezra made spiritual prepa-

rations too. He knew that the journey would be a dangerous one. It would have been legitimate for Ezra to ask the king for a military escort for protection, but Ezra did not want the people to rely on the arm of flesh but on God (2 Chron 32:7-8). Ezra led the people to beseech the help of God through fasting and praying. Ezra was thus a spiritual leader. He led the people in the right direction, which was towards God. This principle applies to our work in church and even in the family. As an RE teacher, choir conductor, youth leader, or even an older brother or sister, our attitudes and our faith will directly influence those whom we are responsible for. If as a leader we emphasize prayer, our RE class or our family members will emphasize on prayer. If we are non-committal about everything, then others will be too.

Reflection:

1. If you are an RE leader, a choirmaster, or a youth leader of some sort, reflect on how you have led others. Do you lead others to God?

B. He Summoned All the Levites

Not long into their journey, Ezra discovered that no Levites were among the group. These men were important to the service of the God yet they were unwilling to go when their services were needed. Ezra therefore sent men to encourage the Levites to join them. Consequently, 220 men rose up (Ez 8:17-20). Ezra demonstrated good leadership skills; he did not force the Levites to return, but he aroused their sense of responsibility. There may be brothers and sisters who are weaker in faith, who feel they do not have the talents, or who are not eager to participate in the divine work. Instead of disregarding them altogether, we need to encourage and inspire them to do the work together.

C. He Publicly Calculated the temple Treasures

When the people had decided to return, the king with his counselors and all of Israel offered much gold, silver, and vessels to be brought back to Jerusalem. There were 650 talents of silver, silver vessels worth a hundred talents, a hundred talents of gold, twenty bowls of gold worth a thousand darics, two vessels of fine bright bronze. Ezra then appointed twelve of the leading priests to make an inventory of all the treasures and to safe-guard them until they got to Jerusalem (Ex 8:24-30). Why did Ezra go to such pains to count the temple treasures?

By counting the vessels, Ezra was making a distinct separation of things that belonged to God. Ezra made it known that every object used in temple service

was set apart for God; they were considered holy treasures to be guarded with special care. This teaches us that we cannot take the things of God for our own personal use. The vessels of God need to be used only for purposes of serving God. Judas Iscariot is a good example of someone who did not differentiate between the things that belonged to him and the things that belonged to God (Jn 12:6).

Ezra further teaches us to be meticulous when doing church work. We need to take special care of whatever God has entrusted to us. If God has entrusted us to manage the accounts for the youth group for example, we need to be careful that every cent is accounted for and used for God. The vessels can also represent the believers who are vessels of God (2 Tim 2:20-21). As RE teachers, or youth group leaders, God has entrusted the brothers and sisters to our care. We need to know exactly who our sheep are and be accountable for each one of them.

By giving a clear account of all the treasures, Ezra prevented possible future misunderstandings. Although Ezra was honest and upright, he would probably have been a prime suspect had the treasures been stolen. Ezra therefore used wisdom and good judgment in all his doings. He made sure that he stood blameless in front of men and God (2 Cor 8:20-21; Ac 11:27-30).

Among the old Chinese folk songs, there is one called the "Song of the Gentlemen," which contains the following lines: "A gentlemen must prevent possible troubles and not place himself under suspicious circumstances. He is not to fasten his shoe lace in a melon field, or adjust his hat under a plum tree." This means that a gentleman's actions must be respectable and he should behave such that his conduct does not give rise to misunderstanding. When he walks by a melon field, he is not to fasten his laces even if they have come loose. When he passes a ripe plum tree, he is not to raise his hands to adjust his hat even if it has become crooked. In this way, no one will accuse him of trying to steal melons and plums.

Reflection:

1. When Ezra discovered that there were no Levites among the returning group, he told men to encourage them in the work. What lessons can we learn from Ezra regarding those who are not eager to do God's work?
2. Why was Ezra so meticulous in counting the temple treasures?

Do He Restored the faith of the Israelites

When Zerubbabel and the first group of captives returned to the homeland eighty years earlier, they began to rebuild the temple that was destroyed. The rebuilding of the temple was a physical project. What Ezra faced now was a more difficult task, that of reconstructing the hearts and faith of the people. When Ezra arrived in the holy city, he was greatly grieved to learn that the people of Israel had not kept themselves separate from the peoples of the land, but had intermarried with them. Ezra saw history repeating itself before his very eyes. How did Ezra deal with the sins of the people?

Deeply grieved, Ezra fasted and prayed (Ez 9:3-15). Note how Ezra reacted to the sins of the people; he tore his garments and mantle, pulled hair out of his head and beard, fasted and mourned for sins. In his prayer, Ezra uses the words: we, our, us. This was the prayer of someone who had not sinned, yet he identified himself amongst the offenders. Ezra did not pray as one who was free from sin and pointed a finger at those who did, like the Pharisee (Lk 18:9-14). He truly repented and prayed for the sins of the people. Touched by Ezra's tears of grief and love, a great assembly of men, women and children gathered, weeping bitterly and vowing to change.

Ezra was very sensitive to sin. While the leaders thought that their sins in marrying gentiles were inconsequential, Ezra viewed their sins as a serious violation against God. Sensitivity to sin does not come from our emotions or feelings. It comes from an understanding of God's word. Ezra was well versed in God's words and as a result he had an acute awareness of what was right and wrong. He knew that to remove sin from their midst, the people had to separate themselves from their gentile spouses and children. Although this measure seems extreme and callous, it was necessary to preserve Israel as a nation committed to God. Sometimes when dealing with sin we have to be brutal. Sin is like a cancerous tumor. We cannot care for it and tend to it lovingly. We have to cut it off immediately. Otherwise it will spread and cause death. Living in the end time, we need to have Ezra's sensitivity towards sin. We cannot compromise with sin, but remove the cause of sin courageously.

Reflection:

1. What makes Ezra a good spiritual leader?
2. Is there anything in our lives that causes us to sin?
3. Are there any character traits or weaknesses in us that separate us from God?

4. What steps do we need to take to actively remove the root of these problems?
5. How do you respond to problems in the church— do you tackle difficult issues head on or do you avoid confrontation and ignore the problem?

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



Due to the nature of this lesson, the Check For Understanding questions can be found after each Bible Study section under the heading "Reflection".

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



Making a Difference

Below is a short prose piece/work written by a monk. Share it with the class and then complete the activity.

*When I was a young man, I wanted to change the world.
I found it was difficult to change the world, so I tried to change my nation
When I found that I couldn't change the nation, I began to focus on my town
I couldn't change the town and as an older man, I tried to change my family.
Now, as an old man, I realize the only thing I can change is myself
And suddenly I realize that if long ago I had changed myself,
I could have made an impact on my family
My family and I could have made an impact on our town.
Their impact could have changed the nation and I could indeed have changed the world.*

Unknown Monk

Our lives are short. It is commonly believed that the most meaningful life is one in which after we have departed from the world, we can say we have helped to make the world a better place. Many of us may have dreams and ideals to change the things around us or achieve great things for God. But making a difference in our lives and in the lives of others does not happen immediately, or involve a gigantic leap. Rather, changes most often occur over a span of time consisting of many little steps. Today we learned that Ezra's resolutions greatly impacted the faith of the Israelite nation and prevented them from heading for another spiritual decline. But

Ezra was given a chance to make a difference starting with himself. He resolved to find out about God's will in his life. He resolved to study and learn God's word, to practice it and then to teach it to others.

In the following exercise, reflect on the various areas of your life and character that you need to improve on. Be honest with yourselves and get into the nooks and crannies. Often we tend to neglect the small things, but it is these very things that may hinder our progress in faith. For example, we may be a person who flares up easily. Think of the reasons why we get so hot-tempered. Have we done anything about it? What does the Bible say? How are we going to apply those teachings in our daily life so that we actively remove it? If we continue to examine ourselves in this way and apply the words of God in our daily lives, we will surely see a change in ourselves and the people around us.

Things I need to change	What does the Bible say about this?	How am I going to put it into practice?	How am I going to teach others?

REFLECTION & PRAYER



Ezra made it his duty to study and practice the word of God. He made it his duty to teach his own generation the laws and ordinances of God. He made it his duty to lead the Jewish exiles back to Jerusalem in peace and safety and to turn their hearts back to God. Let us purify ourselves from what is ignoble, so that we can be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work (2 Tim 2:21).

Lesson 11

Lydia, the Seller of Purple

Listed Scriptures

Acts 16:1-40; Phil 1:10; 1 Pet 3:1-6

Lesson Aim

- 1) To learn the important role of women in the service of God
- 2) To learn the importance of apportioning time for God in our busy lives

Memory Verse

"Charm is deceitful, and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised." (Prov 31:30)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Isaiah 51-55

BIBLE BACKGROUND



Philippi was the leading city of the region of Macedonia, which is northern Greece today. Philippi was an important center of business, government, communications and culture. It sat at the crossroads between Europe and Asia, and was a good center for church planting. During his second missionary, the Holy Spirit beckoned Paul to go to Macedonia and it was at this point that the church in Philippi was founded. The church later consisted mostly of gentile (non-Jewish) believers.

Thyatiras

Thyatiras was one of the Macedonian colonies and a city known for its commerce. From names discovered in monuments it is evident that the city was the melting pot of many nations and that the chief object of worship was Apollo, who was worshiped as the sun god under the name of Tyrinnus. Thyatira was conspicuous for its many guilds, which were united by common pursuits and religious rites. One of

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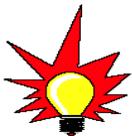
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these guilds was that of dyers. The water of the area was so well adapted for dyeing that no other place could produce the scarlet cloth out of which fezzes were so brilliantly and so permanently dyed. This unique purple dye brought the city universal renown. Lydia was a well-known seller of this product and typifies a successful businesswoman in a prosperous city.

Purple cloth

The purple dye was a brilliant red-blue color prized by the ancients for dyeing garments (Prov 31:22; Jer 10:9). One of the chief sources for purple was a tiny mollusk. The dye taken from these shellfish came from the slimy secretion of a gland. This secretion is not red or violet but whitish at first. When exposed to the sunlight, it changes color, passing through various shades until it settles into the purple color. Great labor was required to extract the purple dye and hence only royalty and the wealthy could afford the resulting richly colored purple cloth from which garments were made.

W A R M U P



Dear Friend,
How are you? I just had to send you a note to tell you how much I care about you. I saw you yesterday as you were talking with friends. I waited all day, hoping you would want to talk with me too. I gave you a delightful sunset to close your day, and to rest you... I waited, but you never talked to me. It hurt me, but I still love you because you are my friend. I saw you sleeping last night and longed to touch your brow, so I spilled moonlight upon your face. Again I waited, wanting to rush down so we could talk. I have so many gifts for you! I love you! You awoke and rushed off to your daily activities. My tears were in the rain. If you would only listen to me! I love you! I try to tell you in the deep blue sky and in the stillness of the night. I whisper my love to you in the quietness of the silent snow, shout it in the mountain streams. I give the birds songs to sing to you. I clothe you in fresh, clean air filled with the scents of nature. My love for you is deeper than the ocean and bigger than the deepest need in your heart! Ask me! Talk with me! Please don't forget me! I have so much to share with you! I won't bother you any further. It is your decision. I have chosen you and I will wait. I love you.

Your friend,
Jesus



Lydia's Life

The Bible is filled with examples of women who were greatly used by God—Deborah, Ruth, Hannah, Esther, Mary, and Priscilla to name just a few. In contrast to cultural standards where women were often treated as property or at least as second-class citizens, the Judeo-Christian ethic elevated women to a previously unheard of status. In the Bible, women are given a special position. In the Old Testament, we have women prophets and female judges and in the New Testament there were many women who followed the Lord and provided for the needs of the disciples and the Lord Jesus. Many were commended and praised by Him for their love and devotion. Even in most churches today, there is a higher percentage of fervent sisters than there are brothers. Lydia was one such example in the Bible of a fervent and God-loving woman. Lydia was converted when Paul visited Macedonia during his second missionary journey. On the Sabbath while preaching by the riverside God worked with Paul and moved Lydia to accept the truth, making her the first believer in Europe. Because of Lydia's good example, the church in Philippi became an exemplary church in Macedonia. Today, Lydia's virtues can be an example for all.



A Daily Life

a. She was very diligent

Lydia was from the city of Thyatira. The Bible specifically mentions that she was a seller of purple goods, a valuable and expensive material often worn by the nobility or royalty. Lydia was thus a wealthy businesswoman, a person of means. Greek women in Lydia's day held elevated status and were able to conduct business and hold honorary public titles. Thyatira was a city known for its commerce, so Lydia may have brought her business to Philippi from there. It is also recorded that Lydia had a family, but there is no mention of who her family members were. Nevertheless, Lydia's conduct is reminiscent of the virtuous wife recorded in Proverbs, who looked to her household and

worked hard to support the family (Prov 31:10,13, 24,27). We too should be diligent in all that our hands find to do (Prov 10:4; 13:11; 2 Thess 3:8-12).



B Spiritual Life

a. She was a fervent worshipper of God

Before Lydia was converted to Christianity, she was a worshipper of God (Ac 16:14). She was a God-fearing person who prayed and attended services regularly. Her actions reflected a hunger for a deeper spiritual experience and as a result she saw the guidance of God (Ps 33:18; 25:12-14). Through Paul, she was able to hear the gospel of salvation so that she was baptized along with her family. Generally business people are so engrossed in their affairs that they have no time for God. Yet, despite all her secular obligations, Lydia balanced her career and spiritual life well and found time to worship each day. Because Lydia was willing to put aside her work, God occasioned an opportunity for her to listen to the gospel.

b. She observed the Sabbath

On the Sabbath, Lydia went to the place of prayer by the riverside to pray and listen to God's law. Because of this she had a chance to hear Paul and thus believe in the Lord Jesus (Ac 16:13). Although Lydia was a businesswoman, the Sabbath meant more to her than making money. Lydia recognized the importance of the Sabbath as God's holy day and a day of rest from her worldly labors.

The Book of Isaiah 58:13-14 teaches us how we should honor the Sabbath and thus receive the blessings of God.

v.13a "If you turn back your feet from the Sabbath from doing your pleasure on my holy day... or going our own ways." This means that we should put aside our own affairs and postpone all engagements to observe the Sabbath fully. If our friends want to meet up, or if an SAT class falls on Sabbath, we should be firm about not attending or have it rescheduled. The Sabbath is God's holy day and should be spent with God and His people.

v.13b "we should refrain from talking idly"

On the Sabbath we should avoid talking about the things of the world, such as the latest movie, or the latest fashions. Instead we should encourage each other in the faith, and share how God has worked in our lives.

v.14 talks about the blessings we will receive if we do the above. God will enable us to "take delight in the Lord, ride upon the heights of the earth, feed with the heritage of Jacob your father." When we set aside this day to worship the Lord, we will receive spiritual encouragement and power from listening to His words and prayer. His words to us will be "sweeter than honey," and nourishment to our hungry souls. Through prayer we will transcend great heights and enjoy sweet communion with God. Through fellowship and sharing with the brothers and sisters, we reach a oneness in the body of Christ (Is 56:2; 58:13-14).

c. She opened her heart to give heed to the word of God

It is interesting to note that out of all the women who had gathered at the meeting place, Lydia was the only person who received the truth. What made her different from the rest? Lydia attended services with a reverent heart and when she heard the word of God, God opened her heart to understand the message (Ac 16:14).

What is our attitude when we attend services? Do we have a reverent heart? Or have we grown indifferent to the sermons? We have to examine our hearts when listening to the word of God because that will determine how much we receive from the sermon. Recall a time when you were thirsty for God's words. Most likely, you received a lot from that particular message. But what about the times when you really didn't care? We find that even though the speaker may have given a great sermon, you did not receive much because your heart was not there. If this persists over a period of time our spiritual lives will be undernourished and we will stray (Eccl 5:1; Lk 10:39; 1 Thess 5:20; Heb 2:1-3).

Reflection:

1. What can we learn from the way Lydia balanced her family, career and religious life?
2. How does Lydia demonstrate her devotion to God?



C Life of Service

a. She led her entire family to the Lord

After Lydia understood the truth, she shared it with her family so that she and her household were baptized. Do we still have family members who are not yet believers? The Lord has chosen us so that through us the gospel can reach our loved ones. When God told Noah that He was to send a flood, he brought his entire family into the ark and was saved (Heb 11:7). After saving the spies,

Rahab made a pact with them that they would spare her life and that of her family's (Josh 2:12-14, 17-21). The Lord has commanded us to preach the gospel, and we should begin with the people that are closest to us. We need to pray for them and inspire them through our good faith and conduct (Cf 1 Pet 3:1-4).

Testimony:

There is a truthseeker who came to the true church and received the Holy Spirit. One night she had a dream. In her dream, she saw herself going into a bakery to buy bread. Coming out of the store, she hugged her loaf of bread and walked happily to catch the bus home. When she got on the bus, she noticed that there was no driver, and although it was a huge bus she was the only passenger. The bus began to move but very shortly, it took off into the skies. As the bus floated in the air, she saw herself enjoying the beautiful view, her heart filled with joy and contentment.

When the truthseeker awoke from her dream, she did not understand the meaning of her dream. Later, she understood that since coming to the True Jesus Church, she had received the Bread of Life— the word of God and the Holy Spirit. She cherished this with all her heart. The bus she embarked on was homeward bound, and she realized that she had begun her journey towards the heavenly home. On realizing this, the truthseeker was very joyful, but suddenly she became very sad. She thought, "Why am I the only person on this huge bus? How can I be enjoying God's grace alone when there is so much space in the bus for many more people? Where is my husband? Where are my parents and my siblings?" She realized then that although she was heaven-bound, her husband and her family were not traveling with her because they had not yet accepted Christ. Realizing this, the truthseeker spent much time praying and weeping for the salvation of her husband and family. She prayed that God would show mercy by choosing them. Thank God, that some months later, her husband believed after receiving the Holy Spirit, and both husband and wife were baptized on the same day. Today, she continues to pray that the rest of her family members will also be saved.

Reflection:

1. Do we have non-believing family members?
2. What have we done to bring them to the Lord?
3. What challenges are there in bringing our family members to church compared to bringing non-family members?

b. She welcomed visitors

After Lydia's baptism, she invited apostle Paul to stay with her and her family. Lydia practically begged for the opportunity to host Paul and Silas in her home. She said, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house

and stay" (Ac 15:16). Rather than seeing the apostles as a burden and their presence as a disruption to her family's routine, Lydia laid out the welcome mat. Because of her sincerity and warmth, Paul remained with Lydia until his departure (Ac 16:15, 40). Later, Lydia also opened her house to the saints of God and her home became a center of Christian fellowship in Philippi. We can see that Lydia's fervency and warmth rubbed off onto the Philippian church. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul mentions that after he left Macedonia, the members in Philippi again and again sent aid to Paul (Phil 1:5). This virtue of "contributing to the needs of the saints, and practicing hospitality" may have been the influence of Lydia who was the first seed of the gospel (Rom 12:13). In Matthew 10:40-42, Jesus Christ teaches us the importance of welcoming others. The Lord promises that by receiving others we will not lose out on our reward even if we offer something as minute as a cup of cold water (Heb 13:2). Jesus Christ particularly mentions receiving those who live by and preach the word of God. By receiving them we are supporting and participating in the divine ministry (3 Jn 6-10).

c. She used her wealth for the Lord

Lydia used her business, the money she earned and all her possessions to help God's servants in their ministry. God desires that we be good managers of the material possessions He has entrusted to us. Lydia's earnings were used to further the gospel. Lydia sold purple to honor God. She used her connections to spread the gospel throughout the civilized world. Therefore, regardless of what we do by profession, our goal should be to offer our wealth and our talents to promote the gospel and to help our brothers and sisters.

Reflection:

1. What kind of jobs can women take on in the church?
2. What is the Bible's teaching on showing hospitality?
3. How have we utilized the wealth, talents and wisdom that God has bestowed upon us?

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



Due to the nature of this lesson, the Check For Understanding questions can be found after each Bible Study section under the heading "Reflection".



Time Management

From our lesson today, we learned that although Lydia was a busy career woman with responsibilities toward her family and her business, she was able to maintain a close relationship with God and support the ministry.

Today we all lead very busy lives. The most common complaint is that there is not enough time to fit everything in let alone pray and read the Bible. However, each day, God hands us 24 hours to live life to the fullest. That's 1,440 minutes. How we manage and prioritize our time is up to us but the outcomes are drastically different. Some people can spend more than an hour a day dressing and grooming, but can't find a small amount of time to spend with God. Some can spend hours in front of the television, but spend no time with God. How we invest our time will be what we get in return. The result of spending time with God each day is a meaningful and abundant life on earth as well as a future eternal life. Thus in Ephesians 5:15-17, apostle Paul reminds us to "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil" (Eph 5:15-17).

In the following exercise, ask students to follow the directions and then discuss the questions below:

Instructions:

1. Fill in your typical weekly schedule, Version A (see Student Workbook).
2. Categorize the time spent into the six major categories (to the nearest hour or fifteen minutes, depending on the students' ages— See categories below).
3. Rank the six categories and calculate the percentage by category.
4. Fill in the time pie using the calculated percentage (use the visual to stress the point that we spend very little for God).
5. Set a goal in terms of how much time (in percentages) you would like to dedicate to God (use ten percent as the minimal goal for everyone; for students who already spend more than ten percent, ask them to identify the next level they would like to achieve...like fifteen or twenty percent).
6. Based on your newly identified goal, fill in what your weekly schedule would be like with the improvement, Version B (see Student Workbook).
7. Put up your Version B schedule at some place very visible (such as on your computer, on your mirror, in your organizer/notebook) for a few weeks to

remind yourself of the change you need to make.

Categories:

1. Sleep & Daily Living Routine
2. School & Studying
3. Work
4. Church, Cultivation & Holy Work
5. Leisure
6. Other

Discussion Questions:

1. From the exercise what did you discover about the way you use your time? (Students will probably find that they normally spend less than 10% of their time on or for God and the rest of the time on themselves. If we are to apply the concept of offering tithe to our time, we should all aim to dedicate at least 10% of our time for God's use).
2. How does your time management reflect your priorities in life?
3. Why is it difficult for most people to have a consistent time with God each day?
4. Suggest some ways that can ensure quality time with God.
(Do not let excuses or interruptions dictate your time with God
Set aside a specific time where you can give your fullest attention
Find a quiet place without interruptions
Determine what you hope to accomplish).

Suggested Reading: "Making Time for God," *Manna* Issue 35 Apr-Jun 2001, "Made for Me," *Higher Ground*, Summer 1997, "How to apportion your time for God," *Manna* Issue 23, November 1994

REFLECTION & PRAYER



May our prayers be as Moses who said, The years of our life are threescore and ten, or even by reasons of strength fourscore; yet their span is but toil and trouble they are soon gone and we fly away teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom (Ps 90:10, 12).

Eli the Priest

Listed Scriptures

1 Sam 1-4; Deut 6:1-9; Prov 4; Ex 28-29; Lev 3

Lesson Aim

- 1) To enable students to recognize and value the noble status God has given us.
- 2) To realize the importance of establishing a family altar and religious education.
- 3) To realize the importance of sustaining our faith throughout our entire lives.

Memory Verse

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." (Prov 22:6)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Isaiah 56-60

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



Since the fall of man, man could no longer come directly before God. Thus in the Old Testament God set up a system of priests who stood in the gap between God and man. At Sinai God designated Aaron, his sons and his descendants as priests. The priests were chosen and set apart for God's service. They were the people's representatives before God, and as such were required to live lives worthy of their office. Being holy formed the indispensable condition of approach to God. Hence in the qualifications necessary for the priestly office, bodily defect or infirmity were not allowed. At the same time they had to be spiritually blameless and sanctified in heart.

The chief, or high priest supervised the priests and Levites. Only a direct descen-

dant of Aaron could become a high priest. They supervised sin offerings (Lev 4), ascertained the will of God by the Urim and Thummim (Num 27:21; Neh 7:65) and each year went into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people (Lev 16). The Levites served as assistants to the priests.

W A R M U P



How do you generally deal with problems? Do you deal with them immediately, procrastinate till the last minute or ignore them? What would the consequences be for each response?

B I B L E S T U D Y



Part 1

The Failure of Eli

The Book of First Samuel is a book of great beginnings and tragic endings. Eli means Jehovah is high or My God. He belonged to the tribe of Levi and must have certainly begun his life in close communication with God. For years he acted as a judge and high priest in Israel. But despite his good beginning, his life ended in ignominy. In his old age instead of receiving a reward for his many years of service, Eli received a curse. His tragic end and weaknesses in character serve as warnings for us today.



Ao *Eli Failed Spiritually*

During this period of Israel's history a spiritual famine had swept across the land (Amos 8:11) and the lamp of God was almost distinguished. 1 Samuel 3:1 says, "And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation." Without God's word the people cast off restraint and the society became corrupt (Prov 29:18). Amidst the darkness was the high priest Eli. He was the mediator between God and man but he was a poor spiritual leader whose weaknesses led to the decline of the nation's faith.

a. **Spiritual eyesight dimmed**

The Bible tells us that Eli was advanced in age. Eli not only aged physically, but he had also allowed himself to age spiritually. 2 Samuel 3:2 says Eli's eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see. Not only had his physical eyesight dimmed but his spiritual eyesight had declined also. A person who has poor spiritual eyesight is a person who lacks spiritual discernment. He mistook Hannah who was praying earnestly as being drunk. Although he was a priest and a judge, he lacked the ability to judge what was right and wrong. His priorities and values were turned upside down and he neglected the weightier matters of God. As a result Eli was like a blind man leading the blind (Mt 15:14). 2 Corinthians 4:16 exhorts us that "although our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day." We cannot allow ourselves to disintegrate spiritually as we get older, but to be "transformed by the renewing of our mind, that we may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom 12:2).

b. **Eli's heart was distant from God**

1 Samuel 3:1 tells us that God's words were rare and visions were infrequent. Although Eli was the priest, God did not reveal Himself to him as Eli's heart had drifted far from God. God spoke to the boy Samuel instead. Although Samuel was merely 12 years old at the time, he had a pure heart, served daily in the temple and grew in the presence of God. Consequently, God constantly appeared to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of God (3:21). In life, we will only share our innermost secrets with the people closest to us. God revealed to Abraham what He planned to do to the cities Sodom and Gomorrah because Abraham was a friend of God (Gen 18:16-18). By the same token, God will abide with us and speak to us through His Spirit and His words only when we obey His will and draw close to Him.

Reflection:

1. One of the common weaknesses among believers is that the longer we believe in God, the less dynamic our faith becomes. How can we counteract "spiritual aging"?
2. How does the faith of Eli and Samuel differ?
3. How can we gauge ourselves to ensure a close relationship with God?



B. Eli failed as a Priest

a. He allowed the priesthood to fall into disrepute

Eli was a priest and a judge (1 Sam 4:18). He was responsible for teaching the laws to the people, executing judgement and offering sacrifices on behalf of the people. God reminded Eli how his lineage had been especially chosen to serve God: "Did I not clearly reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house? Did I not choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be My priest, to offer upon My altar, to burn incense, and to wear an ephod before Me? And did I not give to the house of your father all the offerings of the children of Israel made by fire?" (1 Sam 2:27-28). Unfortunately, Eli did not live up to this role. He did not treasure the priesthood, or maintain its sanctity. On one occasion, Eli saw Hannah praying in the temple, and mistook her for being drunk. This tells us that when people came to offer sacrifices, drunkenness was probably a common occurrence, for the people had no regard for the temple of God. As a priest, he had the responsibility to instruct the people about fearing God and how to behave in the temple (Num 3:38). Sadly, Eli failed to establish any respect for the priesthood and permitted sin and corruption to dwell within.

b. He did not set his heart right before God

Although Eli had served many years as a priest, his heart was not right before God. One day the Lord sent a man of God to rebuke Eli saying, "Thus the Lord has said, 'Why do you kick at My sacrifice and My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling place, and honor your sons more than Me, to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people?'" (1 Sam 2:27-29). Although Eli did not personally take the meat from the offering pot, he condoned it and enjoyed the choicest parts along with his two sons. He misused his authority and status to "fatten himself." He appeared to be godly and devout while inside he was full of selfish gain. While we serve God, we need to examine our inner heart. We have to set our hearts right before God otherwise our service will be fruitless and we will be rejected by God.

c. He did not choose a good successor

Eli had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, whom Eli appointed as priests. Although they were priests the Bible describes them as "corrupt men who had no regard of the Lord" (1 Sam 2:12). They mistreated the people of God, treated the offering of God with contempt and their sins were great before

God (1 Sam 2:12-17). In order for the work of God to continue to prosper it is important to cultivate successors and future pillars of the church (Lk 10:2). In the Bible, there are many great leaders who trained up successors to continue with the work. Moses trained Joshua (Ex 33:11), Elijah trained Elisha (1 Kgs 19:16, 19-21), the Lord Jesus trained the 12 disciples, and Paul trained the young Timothy. Since Eli failed to train his sons, God personally appointed the young Samuel as the prophet instead. As the future pillars and workers of the church, we should recognize the responsibility that will be placed upon us and prepare ourselves to receive the baton for the glory of God.

Reflection:

1. How did Eli fail as a priest?
2. When Eli saw corruption and sin infiltrating the temple, he did not do anything about it. What should we do if we see sin and weakness among the brothers and sisters we know?
3. How have we prepared ourselves to receive the baton as future pillars of the church?



C. Eli failed as a Parent

a. Eli's sons showed contempt towards God

Eli had the great responsibility to oversee all of the worship in Israel. But in the process he neglected the responsibilities in his own home. Although Eli's two sons were raised in a priestly family, their conduct was worse than the gentiles. Children are an inheritance from God and parents have the duty to bring their children up in the faith. What was the result of Eli's negligence?

- i. Hophni and Phinehas were priests. Their responsibilities were to take care of all the service in the tent of meeting, yet they failed in their priestly duties (Num 18:4).
- ii. They treated the offering of the Lord with contempt (1 Sam 2:13-17; Mal 1:7-8). They did not follow the law when taking the meat (Lev 7:31-34; Deut 18:3-5). According to the law, if the people made an offering of an ox or sheep, the parts that were given to the priests were the shoulder, the two cheeks and the stomach. For a peace offering, the priests were given the breast and the right thigh of the offering. Eli's two sons however, took whatever they wanted. They would send their servants who thrust a three-pronged fork into the pot and took whatever the fork brought up. According to the law, the priests had to offer the fat of the

animal. The Book of Leviticus 3:3-5 tells us that the fat covering the entrails, the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the appendage of the liver had to be burned so that the aroma can be pleasing to the Lord. The fat was considered the best part of the animal which was offered to God, but Eli's sons robbed God of the best. They took the meat even before they were offered to God on the altar and before the fat was burned off (Lev 3:3-5). Such sin is great in the sight of God. When the man who was sacrificing refused to give the priest's servants the meat because the fat had not yet been burnt off, they would not listen. They demanded to have it immediately and they took it by force (1 Sam 2:16).

iii. Eli's sons also committed great sin by lying with the women who served at the entrance of the tent of meeting (1 Sam 22-23; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 18-20).

b. Eli failed to take severe disciplinary measures

When Eli found out about his sons' wicked deeds, all Eli did was to mildly reason with his sons saying, "Why do you do such things?" The cold and callous hearts of his sons were no longer able to hearken to such weak protests. What Eli failed to do was take severe measures to punish them or stop them from serving God. Sometimes severe punishment is necessary to purge sin. Eli did not realize that sparing his sons from punishment meant condemning their souls (Prov 13:24; 22:15; 23:14). Although severe punishment may bring temporary pain and suffering, it reaps peaceful fruits of righteousness (Heb 12:11).

c. Eli loved his sons more than God

Eli was twice warned that judgement would overtake him and his sons, but he did not take any action because he dearly loved his sons. Eli did no more than rebuke them. He did not even strip them of their priesthood. So God rebuked Eli saying, "You honor your sons above me" (1 Sam 2:29). Eli was not willing to stand up for the truth and he had become ineffective as a parent as well as a priest. As a result God took the necessary disciplinary action that Eli would not.

Reflection:

1. What sins did Eli's sons commit?
2. How did Eli fail in disciplining his sons?
3. What is the difference between spoiling our children and loving our children?



Part 2

The Consequences of Eli's Failure

Ao Affected the People of God

Due to Eli's passivity and his sons' wicked deeds, the faith of the Israelites suffered greatly. Their conduct caused the people to despise the priesthood and to lose faith and hope in God. The devout that came to offer sacrifices were sorrowful at the scene. Those who had lost a God-fearing heart "abhorred the offering of the Lord" and had no regard for it (1 Sam 2:24). The wicked and lawless people had an excuse to commit greater sins. All kinds of irreverent activities, such as drunkenness and sexual immorality pervaded. The people did not experience the power and presence of God because the word of God was rare. Truly these were times of spiritual darkness and decline. All this was because Eli chose not to confront the situation. By giving in to their wicked actions, Eli let his sons ruin their own lives and the faith and lives of the Israelite nation (Mt 18:6-7).

Bo His family Was Cursed

Because of their sins, God sent a prophet to announce judgement upon Eli and his house. The prophet outlined a series of tragic events that would occur.

- a. There shall not be an old man in his house forever (1 Sam 2:31-33). All will die early.
- b. Both his two sons will die on the same day (1 Sam 2:34).
- c. Eli's family line will lose the priesthood (1 Sam 2:36).
- d. God will punish Eli's house forever because his sons were blaspheming God and Eli did not restrain them (1 Sam 3:13).
- e. Sins will never be forgiven by sacrifice or offering (1 Sam 3:14).

Because of Eli and his sons' disregard for God, God was to completely wipe them out. God would raise up a faithful priest to take their place, one who would do according to what is in God's heart and mind. This prophecy was fulfilled in King Solomon's time when Solomon expelled Abiathar— the last priest from Eli's household— from being priest to the Lord (1 Kgs 2:26-27). Let us therefore take heed to our words and deeds as Hebrew 4:13 cautions us, "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."



C The Kingdom of God is Shamed

Because of the failed priesthood, the sins of the people increased. They despised God and had no restraint (Prov 29:18). Consequently, when the people went out to fight against the Philistines, God did not abide with them. Many fell in the hands of the enemies and the ark of the covenant was captured so that disgrace fell on the kingdom of Israel (1 Sam 4:1-11; 21-22). A Christian's conduct not only affects him or her personally, but also the glory of the church. We must resolve to walk in God's way so that the kingdom of God can be glorified. The following testimony serves as a good reminder for us. One truthseeker was invited to come to church. When he got there he recognized a brother who was a gambler at the casino he frequented. The truthseeker commented that the behavior of the brother was far worse than some non-believers he knew, and if the church consisted of such people, he would be better off not coming.

Reflection:

1. Share an experience where your actions negatively affected others. What did you learn from that experience?
2. Do our speech and conduct enable others to see Jesus Christ in us?
3. Do godly parents always produce godly children? Explain.

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



Due to the nature of this lesson, the Check For Understanding questions can be found after each Bible Study section under the heading "Reflection".

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



Know the Condition of Our Faith

From our study today, we have learned that Eli was not altogether a bad or wicked person. In fact he comes across as a very mild priest. Eli's weakness was his growing complacency and lack of sensitivity to sin. Although he was a judge, he could not discern between right and wrong and he valued familial relationships more than God and His people. Eli is a good reminder for us especially as the Day of the Lord draws near, to examine the con-

dition of our faith. Most of us were baptized as infants. Over the years, we have come with our parents to attend services and RE classes. We are well acquainted with many of the Biblical stories and characters and are well grounded in our church doctrines and teachings. Despite all this however we need to ask ourselves, "Do I truly know and believe in God?" In 2 Corinthians 13:5, Paul exhorts the believers to, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? -unless indeed you are disqualified."

In the following survey, check the box or circle the answer that most applies to you. As you evaluate yourself, look at yourself objectively and honestly. Try to see yourself as you are now and not what you hope to be in the future. Sometimes seeing ourselves and discovering our faults and weaknesses is a hard process and there are times we don't like to face the truth. But by seeing ourselves clearly we can make improvements, turn back to God and be healed (Is 6:10).

Questions (circle one of the following):

1. a. I am a bro/sis.
b. I am in high school / college / working.
c. My entire family are believers / my parents are non-believers/I am the only believer / other (please specify)
2. On average I have attended services (not including RE classes) at least throughout the entire year (Check a box)
0 times
Once
Twice
Three times
More than 4 times
Once a week
3. I attend church services because
I want to listen to the truth
I want to catch up with friends
My parents insist that I go
It's a habit
Others (please specify)

4. The reasons why I do not / cannot go is because I... (Select at least one answer and three at the most. List your answers in the order of 1,2,3.)
 Have classes
 Find services boring
 Live too far from church
 Prefer to watch TV and be with friends
 Was offended by someone in church
 Others (please specify)
5. This year...
 I am implementing a plan on reading the Bible
 I have a plan but have yet to implement it
 I read the Bible often but have no plan
 I read the Bible now and then
 I rarely read the Bible
 I have never read the Bible at home
6. During the week, I read the Bible....
 Every day
 3-4 times a week
 Seldom
 Never
7. My knowledge of the Bible is
 Very good
 Good
 Fair
 Poor
8. What is the current state of your prayers?
 I receive much strength from prayer
 I get distracted easily
 I recognize the importance of prayer, but I constantly feel weak in prayer
 I feel tired during prayer
 I dislike prayer
9. How have you contributed to the holy work?
 I have a specific responsibility (please specify, then go to Q10)
 I often help when there is a need (go to Q10)
 I sometimes help out

- I rarely take part in holy work (skip Q10, go to Q11)
 I have never taken part in holy work (skip Q10, go to Q11)

10. How do you feel when you are involved in the holy work?
 I feel it's very meaningful
 I learn many things
 I feel weighed down by all the responsibilities
 Others (please specify)
11. I rarely or have never taken part in holy work because....
 I've been too busy with homework
 I don't have the capabilities
 It takes too much of my time
 I don't know where to start
 I have no interest
 My parents have discouraged me from taking part
 Others (please specify)
12. When I feel low, I usually....
 Call up a good friend and talk it over with him/her
 Sleep
 Exercise, or take a walk
 Pray
 Others (please specify)
13. The things I value most are ...(List your 1st, 2nd, 3rd choices)
 Education
 Money
 Faith
 Family
 Friends
 Health
14. Aside from school, the things I devote most time to are.... (List your 1st, 2nd and 3rd choices)
 Listening to music
 Reading books
 Exercising
 Hanging out with friends
 Services and church work
 Others (please specify)

15. The times for Student Spiritual Convocation and SAT classes conflict. My choice would be to...
- Attend Spiritual Convocation (state reason)
 - Attend SAT classes – (state reason)
16. Do your classmates know that you are a Christian?
- They all know
 - Some know
 - They don't know (state reason)
17. Usually, I am...
- More active at school than at church (state reason)
 - More active in church than at school (state reason)
 - More or less the same at school and at church
 - Not active in either
18. How often do you preach?
- Often
 - Sometimes
 - Rarely
 - Never
19. The difficulty about evangelizing to others is
- The fear of rejection
 - The fear of getting laughed at
 - Lack of knowledge
 - Lack of conviction of the truth
 - Others (please specify)
20. The greatest benefit of believing in the Lord Jesus is...
- To be able to be saved and have eternal life
 - To have peace and trust
 - To have higher morality
 - Have not given it much thought
 - Others (please specify)
21. What is your attitude to your faith at this time?
- I strive hard
 - I have not striven hard enough

I have neglected my faith
I can do without it

Analysis and Discussion:

Q. 2-4

The level of church attendance cannot be the sole standard to determine a person's faith. However, it is one way to gauge whether our faith is of importance in our lives. When God is given top priority, we will schedule our time so that we are free to attend services and participate in holy work no matter how busy we are. We have to be watchful that we do not "neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some" (Heb 10:25). If we do not attend services for a long period of time because of our busy schedule, or the fact that someone has offended us, we will stray further and further away from God.

Q. 5-7

Share your own personal experiences and testimonies on reading the Bible. Mention about the benefits and rewards of placing God's word in our hearts (Ps 119; Hos 4:6; 14).

Q. 8

Encourage students to form prayer teams and have them pray together (Dan 2:17-18). Through prayer meetings, students can learn about the needs of others, and weaker students can find support and strength through group prayers.

Q. 9-11

At this age, students should be encouraged to learn how to serve God and participate in the holy work (C.f. 1 Cor 15:58; Rev 14:13; Jn 4:34). Suggest ways for students to start getting involved. Provide basic guidelines, correct principles and concepts of doing holy work. For students who are already active in church work, and have expressed that they are burdened with too much church work, teachers should help students evaluate whether the cause is due to poor time management or taking on too many responsibilities.

Q. 12

There are various ways to deal with spiritual lows. Share your own personal experiences and testimonies (Cf 1 Sam 1:10, 15; Dan 2:17-18).

Q. 13-15

Our choices reflect our values. Our choices determine where we place our heart, time, and effort. From the Bible we can see that the choices made by cer-

tain people reflected what was most important to them. For example, the Lord Jesus' choice (Lk 4:1-12); Joshua's choice (Josh 24:14-15); Paul's choice (Phil 3:7-8). Ask students to look again at their answers and have them question themselves why they have made such choices and explain what the Bible says about these choices (C.f. Mt 6:19-21, 24-34, 1 Jn 2:15-17).

Q.16-19

Encourage students to preach the word of God wherever they go (1 Cor 9:16, 17). They should be reminded that the most effective form of preaching is not so much what is being said but what is demonstrated in daily life. You can also share your own experiences on personal evangelism (C.f. Phil 2:15,16, 1 Pet 3:15-16).

Q.20

Remind students that our lives in this world are short and temporary. Students may not yet fully realize the brevity of life, but they need to be reminded of who they are and their purpose here on earth. Philippians 3:20 tells us that we are citizens of the commonwealth in heaven (C.f. Eph 2:19), and our goal in life is to enter heaven (C.f. 1 Cor 15:19).

Q.21

"The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and every one enters it violently" (Lk 16:16). From this verse, we learn that only those who strive can enter the kingdom of heaven (C.f. Lk 13:24). Those who enter it violently are those who make the utmost effort in denying themselves and changing their ways to conform to God's will.

REFLECTION & PRAYER



Like us, Eli had his merits and weaknesses. Unfortunately, Eli did nothing to change his weaknesses and that of his sons. He responded to them mildly, but took no further action and was thus punished by God. Let us examine our faith, mend our ways and rise from our complacency.

Lesson 13

Review

Lesson Aim

- 1) To learn from the merits of biblical characters and take warning from their failures.
- 2) To learn that we have to undergo a series of steps of transformation before reaching salvation.

R E V I E W

In this quarter we have looked into characters that represent the course of our spiritual life— from the time of our conversion when we take our first step of faith to maturation. Our salvation does not terminate with rebirth for we have a whole life ahead of us. Throughout our lives, we need to ensure spiritual growth, to pursue after transformation and newness in Christ. This also means purging ourselves from the ways of the world, old habits, and unbiblical concepts. With constant renewal, we will achieve maturation. We will bear fruits of peace, joy and harmony, even in old age. Such a life will not only bring blessings to the household of God but ensures our future salvation.

Lesson 1: Abraham

1. What is faith?

The body of truth which constitutes the whole Christian message (Jude 3).

A belief in the Lord Jesus and His redemptive plan.

Faith encompasses a complete confidence and trust in God.

Faith is believing every single word and promise that is written in the Bible about what God is, what He has done, is doing and will do for His saints.

2. How did Abraham manifest his faith when God called him from Ur?

He departed from Ur not knowing where he was to go.

He had to travel a long distance.

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2. How did Abraham manifest his faith when God called him from Ur?

He departed from Ur not knowing where he was to go.

He had to travel a long distance.

He had to leave his country, kindred and father's house.
He departed from Ur having not yet received the promised land.

3. What was the most important lesson drawn from the incident when Abraham was instructed to offer Isaac?

Abraham feared God (Gen 22:12).

4. Why is it difficult to obey God's word?

We are afraid of suffering; We cannot put down our own will; We lack faith in God; We don't understand the reason or logic; We don't understand the truth or the will of God.

5. How can we learn to obey completely?

Ask God to increase our faith and understanding of Him.
Rely on the Holy Spirit to put to death the nature of the flesh which prevents us from minding the things of God.
To be humble and submit to the will of the Spirit.

Lesson 2: Zacchaeus

1. Zacchaeus shows us the kind of response and attitude that we should have when responding to God's calling. What are they?

Grabbed hold of opportunity; Pursued the Lord; Had an earnest desire; Faced problems with courage

2. What does true repentance mean to you?

"Repent" in Greek is metanoia, which means "a change of heart and life, a change of life direction." A person who repents turns from his old ways to wholeheartedly commit himself to doing the will of God.

Lesson 3: Cornelius

1. What does it mean to fear God?

It means to have respect and reverence for God and to feel in awe of His majesty and power. To fear God is to recognize Him for who He is; holy, almighty, righteous, pure, all knowing, all-powerful, and all wise. Seeing God in this light, we see ourselves for who we are; sinful, weak, frail and needy. To fear God is to gladly submit and choose God's ways in all things and to keep His commands. Proverb 8:13 says, "The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil." Because we know that God is just and merciful, and detests all evil, we need to keep ourselves holy by abiding by His laws.

2. What relationship does the effectiveness of prayers have with our daily con-

duct?

The effectiveness of our prayers comes as a result of changing ourselves to meet God's will. Our behavior affects our prayer just as prayer affects our behavior. The Bible tells us that even the prayer of one who does not heed God's law is an abomination in His eyes. Aside from asking God to grant our requests, we must be determined to live by God's principles. If we are friends with the world (Jas 4:4), if we possess sin (Ps 66:18), or have incorrect motives - all these will affect our prayers.

Lesson 4: Naaman and Gehazi

1. What aspects of Naaman's behavior are typical of those who are seeking the truth?

He turned to God upon reaching an impasse; Relied on wealth or own ability; Filled with pride; Preconceived ideas.

2. What failings did Gehazi have?

Living in blessing but not appreciating it; Did not care for God's glory; Listened to the stirrings of his heart; Lost discernment

Lesson 5: Daniel and His Three Friends

1. What things did Nebuchadnezzar do for the youths?

They were taught the letters and language of the Chaldeans.
They were employed in the king's palace.
They ate and drank of the king's food and wine.
Daniel and his three friends were given Babylonian names.

2. What was Nebuchadnezzar's ulterior motive for treating the youths so well?

Superficially, Nebuchadnezzar's deeds were acts of kindness and compassion. On a spiritual level however, his kindness was a way to assimilate the youths of Judah into a pagan culture. All this good treatment was a threat to their faith. By giving them different names, the king was making the youths forsake their former identity, and over time, forget their God and nation.

3. What lesson does that have for us today?

The youths recognized their spiritual identity. They knew clearly who they were and where they came from. They were aware of their environment and of the things that may jeopardize their faith. They recognized their purpose. They were there not to strive for a good future. Nor was it their purpose to indulge in the things of the flesh, or to fit in with the people of Babylon. Their purpose was to live a godly life and bring glory to God.

4. What steps did Daniel and his three friends take to retain their faith and identity?

Remained spiritually watchful; Made strong resolution; Ready to sacrifice themselves

Lesson 6: Simeon and Anna

1. How do we find out God's will in our lives?

The key to understanding His will lies in spiritual renewal in Jesus Christ. This is a process where we seek the likeness of Jesus Christ through His words, His Spirit and His love. The more we become like Jesus Christ, the deeper we can comprehend the heart of God. Those who conform to the world cannot understand the will of God (Rom 12:2).

2. What things should we wait for?

The Second Coming of Christ (2 Pet 3:12-13); The fulfillment of God's promises and blessings (Jer 29:10, 33:14); The down pouring of the Holy Spirit (Ac 1:4-5); God's deliverance (Is 33:2, 40:31); Justice (Prov 20:22); Salvation (Gen 49:18; Mk 13:13; Jer 3:25-26); Marriage (Ruth 3:18); For God to fulfill our plans and petitions (Ps 20:4); For Christ to form in us (Gal 4:19; Ps 25:5)

3. Name some reasons for fasting and praying.

To propagate the gospel; To increase in spiritual strength; To confess, repent and request the forgiveness of sins; To seek scriptural understanding

4. What are the correct attitudes we should have while we wait for God?

Wait in silence for the Lord; Continue to keep His commands; Use the waiting time profitably; Continue in prayer

5. What things will prevent us from waiting to the end?

Not seeing the solution to the problem; Focusing on the environment; Peer pressure; Lack of faith in God

Lesson 7: Isaac

1. Why is taking time out each day to meditate important?

When we are constantly surrounded by people, our hearts and minds focus more on the people around us and our environment than on God. When there is a lot of activity in our busy lives, we have little time to reflect and weigh matters. Consequently, we lose our sense of direction, become frustrated and prone to making mistakes. Therefore, we need to take time each day to think.

We need to reflect on ourselves; our actions, deeds and speech. We need to also meditate upon God's words.

2. Isaac was willing to give way to the herdsmen of Gerar. How can we cultivate this spiritual virtue?

Understand that God is in control

Be willing to sacrifice

Do not place emphasis on our rights or regard material gain too highly

Think of the positives

Be more far-sighted in thought

Lesson 8: Lot

1. How are Lot's choices reflective of people of this world?

Seek for comfort and luxury

Seek for success and power

Compromise with the world

Fail to emphasize on spiritual life

2. Contrast Abraham's and Lot's outlook on life.

Abraham's vision was not in this life. His mind was set on things above and he considered God in his decisions. Lot, on the other hand, had his heart set on the world. He pursued the comforts and pleasures of the world. In his decision-making, he had his own benefits in mind rather than God.

3. What does "value system" mean?

Basically our value system consists of all the things that we think is "right" or "wrong." Our values are built over a long period of time. Through the course of time and varying experiences, whatever we believe is right, necessary, or important becomes part of our value system. Once our values are established, they will affect our decisions and actions. It will also reflect in how we live our lives, spend our money, use our time (including spare time) and energies.

Lesson 9: Apollos

1. How did Apollos demonstrate his zeal for the truth?

Preached the word; Defended the truth ; Obeyed the truth

2. How can we defend the truth?

Know God's word well; Confront and stand up for the truth; Rectify and eradicate erroneous teachings

Lesson 10: Ezra

1. What three resolutions did Ezra make?

He resolved to learn the word of God.

He resolved to perform the word of God.

He resolved to teach the law of God in Israel.

2. Why did Ezra take such pains to calculate all the temple treasures?

By counting the vessels, Ezra made it known that every object used in temple service was set apart for God and were considered holy. Ezra teaches us to be meticulous when doing church work. We need to take special care of whatever God has entrusted to us. By giving a clear account of all the treasures, Ezra prevented possible future misunderstandings.

3. How did Ezra deal with the sins of the people?

Ezra fasted and prayed with great grief; He identified himself amongst the offenders; Ezra was very sensitive to sin; He did not compromise with sin, but removed the cause of sin courageously.

Lesson 11: Lydia

1. Although Lydia was a busy career woman, what aspects tell us that she did not neglect her spiritual life?

Lydia was a fervent worshipper of God; She observed the Sabbath; She took time out for God in her busy life; She welcomed visitors; She used her wealth and possession to help the ministry and God's servants.

Lesson 12: Eli

1. How did Eli fail as a priest?

Allowed the priesthood to fall to disrepute; Did not set his heart right before God; Did not choose a good successor

2. How did Eli fail as a parent?

Eli's sons showed contempt towards God; He failed to take severe disciplinary measures when needed; He loved his sons more than God.



“Whatever your task,
work heartily as
serving the Lord and
not men.”

(Col 3:23)

STICK TO YOUR GOALS

CHANGE SIMPLY FOR

THE SAKE OF CHANGE

ISN'T ENOUGH. YOU

NEED TO SEE CLEARLY

A DIRECT CONNECTION

BETWEEN THE

STRATEGY OR

PROGRAM AND YOUR

ASPIRATIONS FOR

YOUR STUDENTS!

Unknown

*“Be an example...of good deeds of every kind. Let everything you do reflect your love of the truth.”
(Titus 2:7)*