

**ADULT LESSON GUIDE  
WINTER 2024-25**

**THE MIGHTY GOD  
IN CHRIST**

**The Godhead  
Celebrated in Song**

**MIRACLES**

**Miracles from Acts 3-12**

**JESUS, OUR  
SACRIFICE**

**The Road to Calvary  
(John 18-19)**

**GOD'S  
WORD**  
FOR LIFE





# **GOD'S WORD**



**FOR LIFE**

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WINTER 2024-25**

# GOD'S WORD

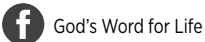


FOR LIFE

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS



## Series 1: The Mighty God in Christ

1.1	December 1	All in Him	8
1.2	December 8	Down from His Glory	16
1.3	December 15	The Great I AM	24
*CS	December 22	The Songs of Christmas	32
1.4	December 29	Precious Name	40

## Series 2: Miracles

2.1	January 5	Worth More Than Gold	48
2.2	January 12	Anyone Anywhere	56
2.3	January 19	Joppa's Miracle	64
2.4	January 26	Prison Break	72

## Series 3: Jesus, Our Sacrifice

3.1	February 2	Et Tu, Judas?	80
3.2	February 9	Even Peter	88
3.3	February 16	Jesus or Barabbas?	96
3.4	February 23	Powerless Pilate	104

\*CS indicates Christmas Sunday.

### EDITORIAL STAFF

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

**WRITERS:** Gayla Baughman, Scott Graham, Andrea Harry, James Littles, Jeremy Painter

### LESSON GUIDE

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# HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE

## GETTING STARTED

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

DECEMBER 1, 2024

SERIES 1: THE MIGHTY GOD IN CHRIST

# 1.1

## ALL IN HIM

Farmer, 1920

Gen 1

**FOCUS VERSE**  
Colossians 2:9  
For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

**LESSON TEXT**  
Genesis 14

**TRUTH ABOUT GOD**  
The fulness of the Godhead dwelt in Jesus Christ.

**TRUTH FOR MY LIFE**  
I feel worship Jesus as the Most High God.

**All in Him**

Gen 1

The mighty in God is to Him, The Prince of Peace is Him, The almighty God with us, He is with us, Lord is The almighty God, He is with us, The one who dwells in Him, The God for whom we wait, He will be the God for us.

or - last - ing Fa - ther, The King e - ter - nal -  
my Word in - car - nate, The help - less one -  
I - der - fal - in wa - dem By whom all things were  
- ve - cated the High Priest, The Lamb for sin - ners  
- dem and per - fect - ion, Our right - eous - ness and  
will come and save us, Our hope and great joy

**Series Overview:**  
Highlighting four songs that herald the power and beauty of the mighty God in Christ, this series takes a closer look at the doctrine that proclaims "It's all in Him," "Down from His Glory," "The Great I Am," and "Take the Name of Jesus" to help us embrace our Oneness heritage.

Gen 1

He dwells all that love, And love of all in Him.

LESSON 1.1

### TEACHING OUTLINE

**Icebreaker:** What is your favorite hymn or worship song? Why is it special to you?

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

I. THE MOST HIGH GOD

A. The Ancient World Was Polytheistic

- What are some polytheistic religions still in practice today?

B. Melchisedec Referred to the Most High God

C. I Will Recognize the Most High God

- How intentional should we be about listening to and singing songs that are doctrinally correct?

II. THE MIGHTY GOD IS JESUS

- What is your favorite Old Testament name or title of God?

A. Isaiah Proclaimed the Messiah Would Be the Mighty God

B. Paul Taught the Fullness of the Godhead Dwelt in the Messiah

C. I Will Worship Jesus as the Most High God

- What are some ways we can give honor to the Lord as the Most High God?

**Internalizing the Message**

- What song best teaches you this beautiful truth about the mighty God in Christ?

**Prayer Focus**

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

- For us to see the Oneness message in Scripture
- For God to help us to boldly share the one-God message with others

## SG TEACHING OUTLINE

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

WINTER LESSON 1.1

### LESSON CONNECTION

A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit.

A few years have passed since a familiar YouTube video circulated among Pentecostal audiences. Those privileged to be at the recorded service were in for a special treat as they witnessed Jesse T. Pugh, a well-known preacher in the United Pentecostal movement, sing. Many loved him and sat in awe at his amazing ability to paint pictures with words as he declared the truth, unwavering in his faith. He did not boast of being a singer, but every once in a while, he would suddenly interrupt an engaging message with a song on his heart.

In one of his sermons, Pugh told of meeting an older gentleman by the name of George R. Farrow at a fellowship meeting. As he talked with this elder, he realized Farrow was the man who penned the song "All in Him." Pugh continued to explain that this song came "right off the hot coals of Pentecost" around the year 1920. Pugh began to sing the song to the audience: "The mighty God is Jesus, the Prince of Peace is He, the everlasting Father, the King eternally."

The congregation joined in with no hesitation; they knew the song well. They continued singing, matching the spirit of the enthusiastic Brother Pugh as he lifted his hands with emphasis and continued to sing. "The wonderful in wisdom by whom all things were made, the fullness of the Godhead in Jesus is displayed, it's all in Him, it's all in Him. The fullness of the Godhead is all in Him, it's all in Him, it's all in Him. The mighty God is Jesus, and it's all in Him" (youtube.com, "It's All in Him" by JT Pugh).

The song "All in Him" has appeared in Pentecostal hymnals for many years and was also published in a hymnal, *Sing Unto the Lord by Word Affaire Press* in 1978. Many Pentecostal churches were blessed to be able to sing this musical masterpiece about the deity of our precious God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Today it is frequently sung at heritage services and vintage Sundays. However, the message is as powerful today as it was when it was first introduced to Pentecostal audiences. The song goes on to declare:

Emanuel, God with us, Jehovah, Lord of Hosts!  
The omnipresent Spirit, Who fills the universe.  
The Advocate, the High Priest, the Lamb for sinners slain,  
The Author of redemption, O glory to His name!

Thank you for this beautiful, powerful song, George Farrow. What joy to declare in song that the mighty God is Jesus. He is the one in whom all the Godhead dwells bodily, it's all in Him.

## LESSON CONNECTION

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

# BIBLE LESSON

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

## BIBLE LESSON

### I. THE MOST HIGH GOD

#### A. The Ancient World Was Polytheistic

God's plan was for humanity to worship Him alone. The belief that there is only one God is referred to as monotheism. However, as time has marched, people began to spiritualize temporal things. They carved images and statues of other gods and then worshipped them.

It is hard to pinpoint when polytheism, the worship of multiple gods, came into existence. At times the close encounters with polytheistic cultures had a negative effect on the Israelites. During their years of sojourn in Egypt, the Israelites lived separately in Goshen, but the influences of Egyptian culture crept in. The Egyptians seemed to worship everything from cats to crocodiles, the Nile River, the sun, and nearly everything else under the sun.

When God delivered the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, a mixed multitude left with them (Exodus 12:38). This mix could have been from marriages or from sympathizers to the Israelites' cause. Whatever the case, when they camped near Mount Sinai with Moses, many of them grumbled and complained. Their influences possibly led Aaron to carve a golden calf while Moses was on top of the mountain spending time with God. These influencers loudly shouted: "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (Exodus 32:4).

There was no mistaking God's message to humanity: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). Moses walked back down the mountain with the Ten Commandments in his hands to let Israel know God was calling for His people to worship Him alone, but they had already danced across that line between monotheism and polytheism as they danced in front of a golden calf.

#### B. Melchisedec Referred to the Most High God

God frequently reminded His children He was the one true God. He spoke through the prophet Isaiah, addressing idol worshippers and reminding them: "I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God" (Isaiah 44:6).

One of God's titles is the Most High God. The first time we read this sacred title was the time Melchisedec blessed Abram (later known as Abraham). Abram was returning home from a victorious battle, and Melchisedec, the priest and king of Salem, went out to meet him. Melchisedec took food and drink, and he spoke a blessing over Abram. (See Genesis 14:18-20.)

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

What are some  
polytheistic religions  
in our world today?

11

## INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

ALL IN HIM

Martha sat on the porch swing and watched her five-year-old son, Jason, play in the front yard. He was singing at the top of his lungs the latest Sunday school song he had learned. Martha's heart swelled with happiness to see her child happy, smiling, and singing. He seemed to be enjoying the moment, and she shared in his responses. Her mind began to wander into the beauty of singing as a sign of joy in her child.

We may ask ourselves what emotion produces inspiration. A masterpiece, such as a moving song, plucks at our emotions. A beautiful painting capturing the essence of God's beauty or a recitation from a gifted orator may bring tears to our eyes.

David wrote some beautiful songs. He was also gifted in playing the harp. First Samuel 16 told us David was so talented that he was invited to play the harp in the king's presence to soothe and calm him. Sometimes David's songs were joyful and upbeat; other times his songs were filled with heart-wrenching emotions from the pit of his soul.

As we ponder the genesis of all songwriting, it seems the writer of "All in Him" was indeed writing something about which he felt quite strongly. The song's lyrics are straightforward, and the repetitious stanza in the chorus drives home an important concept the writer held dear.

*It's all in Him. It's all in Him.  
The fullness of the Godhead is all in Him.  
It's all in Him. It's all in Him.  
The mighty God is Jesus, and it's all in Him.*

Martha was jaded from her deep thoughts as Jason ran up the steps and jumped loudly on the porch where she sat. He pulled at the hem of her dress and pled with her: "Mama, sing with me. Ple-e-e-ase!" Sing with me," Martha joyfully complied. "Who is the Lord, and what is His name?" They began clapping to the upbeat rhythm. "Who is the Lord, and what is His name? Who is the Lord, and what is His name?" Jason's eyes lit up. He jumped up and down, clapping as they continued. "His name is Jesus, Jesus, Jesus is His name." Jason cheerfully informed his mother what he had learned that morning in Sunday school. "Mama, did you know God's name is Jesus?" Martha was amazed a song could bring so much truth to the mind of a little child.

What song best teaches you this beautiful truth about the mighty God in Christ?

### Prayer Focus

- Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:
- For us to see the Oneness message in Scripture
  - For God to help us to boldly share the one-God message with others

15

# INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

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

## LEGEND

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

Contains a suggested discussion question

Gives direction regarding a media callout that is available



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



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



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

## LEARNING AND LIVING OUT GOD'S WORD FOR LIFE



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

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

### CONNECT ON SOCIAL MEDIA



@GodsWordforLife



@GodsWordforLife



@GWFLife



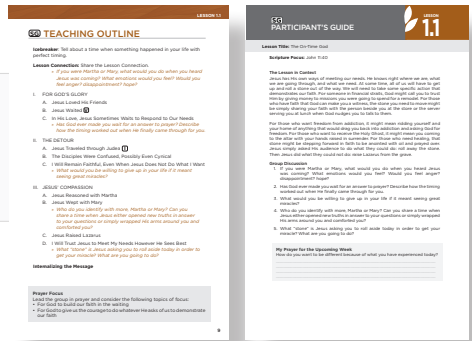
## DIGITAL RESOURCE KIT

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



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

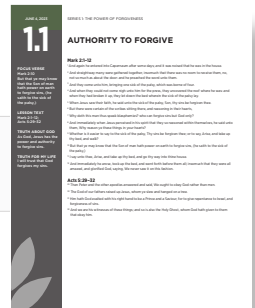
Small Group Teaching Outlines and Participant Guides



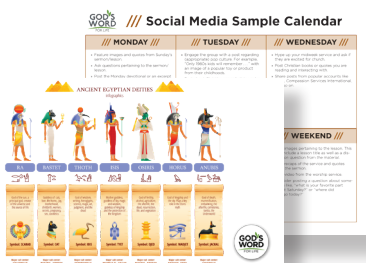
A Powerpoint to Accompany Each Lesson



Lesson Leaves and a Printable Version of the Scripture Text



Social Media Graphics, Tips, and Sample Posting Calendar



# 11

## ALL IN HIM

**FOCUS VERSE**

**Colossians 2:9**  
 For in him dwelleth  
 all the fulness of the  
 Godhead bodily.

**LESSON TEXT**

**Genesis 14**

**TRUTH ABOUT GOD**

The fullness of the  
 Godhead dwelt in  
 Jesus Christ.

**TRUTH FOR MY LIFE**

I will worship Jesus  
 as the Most High  
 God.

### All in Him

Farrow, 1920

George



The migh-ty God is Je - sus, The Prince of Peace is  
 Em - ma - nu - el, God with us, Je - ho - vah, Lord of  
 The Al - pha and O - me - ga, Be - gin - ning and the  
 "Our God for whom we've wait-ed" Will be the glad re



er - last - ing Fa - ther, The King e - ter - nal -  
 - ni - pre - sent Spir - it, Who fills the un - i -  
 - ing Word in - car - nate, The help - less sin - ner's  
 rael re - cre - at - ed, When Je - sus comes a -



1 - der - ful in wis - dom By whom all things were  
 - vo - cate, the High Priest, The Lamb for sin - ners  
 - dom and per - fect - ion, Our right - eous - ness and  
 will come and save us, Our king and priest to

### Series Overview:

Highlighting four songs that herald the power and beauty of the mighty God in Christ, this series takes a close look at the doctrine that inspired "It's All in Him," "Down from His Glory," "The Great I Am," and "Take the Name of Jesus" to help us embrace our Oneness heritage.

Him dwells all full - ness, And Lord of all is He.



## **SG** TEACHING OUTLINE

**Icebreaker:** What is your favorite hymn or worship song? Why is it special to you?

**Lesson Connection:** Share the Lesson Connection. **V**

### I. THE MOST HIGH GOD

- A. The Ancient World Was Polytheistic **I**
  - » *What are some polytheistic religions still in practice today?*
- B. Melchisedec Referred to the Most High God
- C. I Will Recognize the Most High God
  - » *How intentional should we be about listening to and singing songs that are doctrinally correct?*

### II. THE MIGHTY GOD IS JESUS

- » *What is your favorite Old Testament name or title of God?*
- A. Isaiah Prophesied the Messiah Would Be the Mighty God
- B. Paul Taught the Fullness of the Godhead Dwelt in the Messiah
- C. I Will Worship Jesus as the Most High God
  - » *What are some ways we can give honor to the Lord as the Most High God?*

### **Internalizing the Message**

- » *What song best teaches you this beautiful truth about the mighty God in Christ?*

### **Prayer Focus**

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

- For us to see the Oneness message in Scripture
- For God to help us to boldly share the one-God message with others

## LESSON CONNECTION

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*A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit. *

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The congregation joined in with no hesitation; they knew the song well. They continued singing, matching the spirit of the enthusiastic Brother Pugh as he lifted his hands with emphasis and continued to sing. “The wonderful in wisdom by whom all things were made, the fullness of the Godhead in Jesus is displayed. It’s all in Him. It’s all in Him. The fullness of the Godhead is all in Him. It’s all in Him. It’s all in Him. The mighty God is Jesus, and it’s all in Him” ([youtube.com](https://youtube.com), “It’s All in Him by JT Pugh”).

The song “All in Him” has appeared in Pentecostal hymnals for many years and was also published in a hymnal *Sing Unto the Lord* by Word Aflame Press in 1978. Many Pentecostal churches were blessed to be able to sing this musical masterpiece about the deity of our precious God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Today it is frequently sung at heritage services and vintage Sundays. However, the message is as powerful today as it was when it was first introduced to Pentecostal audiences. The song goes on to declare:

*Emanuel, God with us, Jehovah, Lord of hosts!  
The omnipresent Spirit, Who fills the universe.  
The Advocate, the High Priest, the Lamb for sinners slain,  
The Author of redemption, O glory to His name!*

Thank you for this beautiful, powerful song, George Farrow. What joy to declare in song that the mighty God is Jesus. He is the one in whom all the Godhead dwells bodily. It’s all in Him.

# BIBLE LESSON

## I. THE MOST HIGH GOD

### A. The Ancient World Was Polytheistic


God's plan was for humanity to worship Him alone. The belief that there is only one God is referred to as *monotheism*. However, as time has marched, people began to spiritualize temporal things. They carved images and statues of other gods and then worshiped them.

It is hard to pinpoint when *polytheism*, the worship of multiple gods, came into existence. At times the close encounters with polytheistic cultures had a negative effect on the Israelites. During their years of sojourn in Egypt, the Israelites lived separately in Goshen, but the influences of Egyptian culture crept in. The Egyptians seemed to worship everything from cats to crocodiles, the Nile River, the sun, and nearly everything else under the sun.

When God delivered the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, a mixed multitude left with them (Exodus 12:38). This mix could have been from marriages or from sympathizers to the Israelites' cause. Whatever the case, when they camped near Mount Sinai with Moses, many of them grumbled and complained. Their influence possibly led Aaron to carve a golden calf while Moses was on top of the mountain spending time with God. These influencers boldly shouted: "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (Exodus 32:4).

There was no mistaking God's message to humanity: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). Moses walked back down the mountain with the Ten Commandments in his hands to let Israel know God was calling for His people to worship Him alone, but they had already danced across that line between monotheism and polytheism as they danced in front of a golden calf.

#### Teacher Option:

*A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit.* 

*What are some polytheistic religions in our world today?*

### B. Melchisedec Referred to the Most High God

God frequently reminded His children He was the one true God. He spoke through the prophet Isaiah, addressing idol worshipers and reminding them: "I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God" (Isaiah 44:6).

One of God's titles is the Most High God. The first time we read this sacred title was the time Melchisedec blessed Abram (later known as Abraham). Abram was returning home from a victorious battle, and Melchisedec, the priest and king of Salem, went out to meet him. Melchisedec took food and drink, and he spoke a blessing over Abram. (See Genesis 14:18-20.)

It is possible God sent Melchisedec to Abram to remind him of the priority of God's presence. Melchisedec's reference to the Most High God may have been a foreign concept to those with him, but to Abram it was a natural revelation. Abram believed in the Most High God, and he honored Melchisedec as a priest and messenger of God by giving him a tithe of the goods from the battle.

We find several accounts in Scripture where pagan kings declared the God of the Hebrews to be the Most High God. When three God-fearing Hebrew young men resolutely refused to bow to the image of King Nebuchadnezzar, the king grew so angry he had them thrown into a furnace so hot it killed the men who threw them in. However, when the king looked in and saw them alive and walking around in the furnace, he called them servants of the Most High God (Daniel 3:26). They were miraculously delivered that day, and King Nebuchadnezzar declared: "There is no other God that can deliver after this sort" (Daniel 3:29).

### C. I Will Recognize the Most High God

Though we may come against some resistance for believing God is one, we stand firm on the truth we learn from God's Word. When we base all our belief on His Word, we will not go wrong. God's Word is truth. His Word was established at the beginning of time and will prevail forever. (See Luke 21:33; John 1:1.)

God has always intended for humanity to know Him. He wants us to worship Him alone because He is the only one worthy of our worship. God is the only one who can hear and help us when we pray. David, a true worshiper said: "For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone" (Psalm 86:10).

God was intentional to teach humanity the truth about His deity. He commanded mothers and fathers to teach their children there is one God (Deuteronomy 6:4-7). When God gave the law to Moses, the first commandment was to have no other gods before Him. Furthermore, they were prohibited from making any graven image, bowing down to them, or serving them. God declared He is a jealous God. (See Exodus 20:3-5.)

When we are truly devoted to the Most High God, we will be filled with humility and bow down to Him alone. The Most High God is the only one we must worship. Throughout the Old Testament, God emphasized He alone was God. As we recognize the Most High God, we understand there is no other god beside Him. Or before Him. Or above Him. He alone is exalted. He alone is the first and the last. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" (Deuteronomy 6:4).

## II. THE MIGHTY GOD IS JESUS

In the first line of his song "All in Him," Farrow wrote: "The mighty God is Jesus, the Prince of Peace is He, the everlasting

*How intentional should we be about listening to and singing songs that are doctrinally correct?*

Father, the King eternally.” It is a bold statement to declare the mighty God is Jesus. He is the one who elevated the mountains, scooped out the sea, and created humanity in His image. He is the one who created the universe, scattering stars into space, and calculated the delicate position of the sun to be precisely the perfect distance to warm the inhabitants of earth rather than freeze us to death.

God declared He was the Creator in the Old Testament (Nehemiah 9:6; Ecclesiastes 12:1; Isaiah 44:24), yet Jesus was also the Creator (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:10). This truth is not a contradiction of Scripture. We can easily explain that the mighty God is Jesus if we acknowledge God Himself was manifested in the body of Jesus Christ. (See John 1:14; 1 Timothy 3:16.) But not everyone believed Jesus was the mighty God in flesh.

When Jesus was born, the Jews were waiting for God to save them from the unrelenting hold the Roman Empire had on them. Little did they know this mighty King would be born in a stable, laid in a manger, and come into our world as a lowly baby boy called Jesus.

The almighty God of the Old Testament is referred to as our Redeemer and Savior (Psalm 19:14; Isaiah 44:6; 45:22). However, the New Testament gives those claims to Jesus also. In his book *The Oneness View of Jesus Christ*, David K. Bernard helps us see Jesus was Yahweh in human flesh. Bernard comments that many of the statements in the Old Testament attributed to Yahweh, or Jehovah, were fulfilled in Jesus Christ: “The Old Testament describes Yahweh as the Almighty, only Savior, Lord of lords, First and Last, only Creator, Holy one, Redeemer, Judge, Shepherd, and Light; the New Testament ascribes all these titles to Jesus Christ.”

Bernard goes on to say: “In sum, the titles of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit describe God’s redemptive roles or revelations, but they do not reflect an essential threeness in His nature. Father refers to God in family relationship to humanity; Son refers to God in flesh; and Spirit refers to God in spiritual activity.”

#### **A. Isaiah Prophesied the Messiah Would Be the Mighty God**

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). God inspired the prophet Isaiah to express the majesty and glory of the Godhead. Isaiah had a beautiful understanding of who God was, and he was not hesitant to call the coming Messiah the mighty God. We can gain tremendous insight from Isaiah 9:6. Many years before Jesus was born, this prophecy came through Isaiah. He proposed the Messiah would be the mighty God, the everlasting Father. He knew the Messiah would come as a baby. He knew God would

*What is your favorite Old Testament name or title of God?*

be the Messiah, dwelling in flesh, because the baby to come was referred to as “the everlasting Father.” Isaiah also knew this Messiah would have to give His life to save His people because God told Isaiah He would blot out the sins of His people (Isaiah 43:25), which required the shed blood from a perfect sacrifice.

Through Isaiah, God reassured His people He was the only God. “Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God” (Isaiah 44:6).

### **B. Paul Taught the Fullness of the Godhead Dwelt in the Messiah**

Another stanza of the song “All in Him” says: “The fullness of the Godhead in Jesus is displayed.” This statement is understood from Paul’s letter to the Colossians: “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). Jesus is the embodiment of everything the Godhead is. He was the express image of God. God prepared Himself a body to dwell in as He imparted to humanity the grace of forgiveness and redemption.

Paul wrote a letter to Timothy stating: “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (I Timothy 3:16). The great mystery was not the Godhead; it was the Incarnation. God came in flesh as Jesus Christ to save us from our sins.

Paul also wrote: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself” (II Corinthians 5:19). God came in flesh as Jesus Christ to reconcile us to Him and to give us the gospel message of reconciliation. It has always been the will of God to bring people back into right relationship with Him.

### **C. I Will Worship Jesus as the Most High God**

Once we realize Jesus is the Most High God, who was manifest in the flesh (I Timothy 3:16), the whole Bible makes more sense. When Jesus said He knew the Father, He was helping us see the relationship we should have with the everlasting Father. Jesus said He and the Father are one (John 10:30). John said, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The glory of the Most High God dwelt among us.

We still may have difficulty wrapping our brains around the spiritual aspect of His existence. However, when we see in Scripture who Jesus really is, it transforms us completely and causes the Bible to come alive. We do not have to fear death anymore because we have the hope of Heaven. We can pray in Jesus’ name and miracles will happen, just as they did when Jesus walked among us. We have learned the power in Jesus’ name.

*What are some ways we can give honor to the Lord as the Most High God?*



## INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Martha sat on the porch swing and watched her five-year-old son, Jason, play in the front yard. He was singing at the top of his lungs the latest Sunday school song he had learned. Martha's heart swelled with happiness to see her child happy, smiling, and singing. He seemed to be enjoying the moment, and she shared in his responses. Her mind began to wander into the beauty of singing as a sign of joy in her child.

We may ask ourselves what emotion produces inspiration. A masterpiece, such as a moving song, plucks at our emotions. A beautiful painting capturing the essence of God's beauty or a recitation from a gifted orator may bring tears to our eyes.

David wrote some beautiful songs. He was also gifted in playing the harp. First Samuel 16 tells us David was so talented that he was invited to play the harp in the king's presence to soothe and calm him. Sometimes David's songs were joyful and upbeat; other times his songs were filled with heart-wrenching emotions from the pit of his soul.

As we ponder the genesis of all songwriting, it seems the writer of "All in Him" was indeed writing something about which he felt quite strongly. The song's lyrics are straightforward, and the repetitious stanza in the chorus drives home an important concept the writer held dear.

*It's all in Him. It's all in Him.  
The fullness of the Godhead is all in Him.  
It's all in Him. It's all in Him.  
The mighty God is Jesus, and it's all in Him.*

Martha was jarred from her deep thoughts as Jason ran up the steps and jumped loudly on the porch where she sat. He pulled at the hem of her dress and pled with her, "Mama, sing with me. Ple-e-e-ase? Sing with me." Martha joyfully complied. "Who is the Lord, and what is His name?" They began clapping to the upbeat rhythm. "Who is the Lord, and what is His name? Who is the Lord, and what is His name?" Jason's eyes lit up. He jumped up and down, clapping as they continued. "His name is Jesus, Jesus, Jesus is His name." Jason cheerfully informed his mother what he had learned that morning in Sunday school. "Mama, did you know God's name is Jesus?" Martha was amazed a song could bring so much truth to the mind of a little child.

*What song best teaches you this beautiful truth about the mighty God in Christ?*

### Prayer Focus

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

- For us to see the Oneness message in Scripture
- For God to help us to boldly share the one-God message with others

# 1.2

## DOWN FROM HIS GLORY

### FOCUS VERSES

**Philippians 2:10-11**

<sup>10</sup>That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; <sup>11</sup>and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

### LESSON TEXT

**Exodus 33:17-23;**

**Philippians 2:6-11**

### TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God was incarnate in Jesus Christ.

### TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will follow Jesus' example of humility.



### Thinking about Last Week:

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

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

## **SG** TEACHING OUTLINE

**Icebreaker:** Have you ever seen a sight in nature you would describe as glorious? Why?

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

### I. GOD IN HIS GLORY

- A. Moses Prayed to See God's Glory
  - » *Are you willing to passionately follow after God for a deeper relationship with Him?*
- B. God Revealed All His Goodness to Moses
- C. I Will Love and Adore God in His Glory
  - » *What are some other ways God shows us His glory in creation?*

### II. DOWN FROM HIS GLORY

- A. God Humbled Himself at the Incarnation
  - » *What are some ways we can humble ourselves and give sacrificially to others?*
- B. Jesus Was Fully God, Fully Human
- C. I Will Love and Adore God for the Incarnation

### III. HUMILITY TOWARD EACH OTHER

- A. Theology Has Practical Implications
- B. Be like Jesus toward Each Other
  - » *Whom can you spend time with to offer the hope of the gospel?*
- C. I Will Follow Jesus' Example of Humility
  - » *How can we use social media to fulfill the mission to love God and love people?*

### **Internalizing the Message** **V** **I**

#### **Prayer Focus**

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

- For God to help us passionately pursue more of Him and a better understanding of who He is
- For God to help us follow Jesus' example of humility and embrace it for our own lives

## LESSON CONNECTION

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When a songwriter is moved with inspiration, many times the results will be an expression revealing a moment of clarity, realization, or some other emotional awakening. Such was the experience of the composer of the song “Down from His Glory.” William E. Booth-Clibborn was born in 1893. After his family came to America, they were introduced to Pentecost in 1906. His family continued preaching and traveling in Europe, America, and other parts of the world. William received the Holy Ghost in 1908 at fifteen years of age. He began preaching in children’s crusades while his parents ministered to the adults. William embraced the Oneness doctrine and was baptized in Jesus’ name at the age of twenty-eight. That same year he penned the words of “Down from His Glory” to the melody of “O Sole Mio” composed by Eduardo di Capua.

“Down from His Glory” is a beautiful testimony of the truth of Jesus’ deity.

*Down from His glory, ever living story,  
My God and Savior came, and Jesus was His name.  
Born in a manger, to His own a stranger,  
A man of sorrows, tears and agony.*

*Oh how I love Him! How I adore Him!  
My breath, my sunshine, my all in all!  
The great Creator became my Savior,  
And all God’s fullness dwelleth in Him.*

Booth’s song is a wonderful account of God stepping down from Glory to save His people. He did not come as the Jews expected He would. They were completely caught off guard because He did not choose to appear with the pomp and circumstance of a mighty king. He chose a humble stable among foul-smelling animals for a birthplace, an animal trough for a bed, and a world that had no room for Him. (See Luke 2:7.) Yet, thank God, He still came.

# BIBLE LESSON

## I. GOD IN HIS GLORY

It may be difficult to define God's glory. The most powerful James Webb Space Telescope cannot capture it. We have made great strides in outer space development, yet all of space, all of the beauty and majesty of what we see through space telescopes, is only a speck compared to eternity. King David wrote: "O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens" (Psalm 8:1).

### A. Moses Prayed to See God's Glory

In Exodus 33:18, when Moses asked to see God's glory, he had no idea what was in store for him. This was not the first time God had appeared to Moses. Moses could remember God's mighty works through the wilderness. Now he stood at the base of Mount Sinai. God had called Moses to this mountain for an important appointment. There God miraculously carved out His covenant with His people on tables of stone. Moses was the only one who witnessed this miracle as he talked to God. However, this experience was not enough for Moses. He longed to see God, to know Him, to find favor with Him. (See Exodus 33:13.) If we cultivate a hunger to know Him in a way we have never experienced before, He will come to us in a new and extraordinary way.

*Are you willing to passionately follow after God for a deeper relationship with Him?*

### B. God Revealed All His Goodness to Moses

God answered: "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee" (Exodus 33:19). What an amazing display for Moses to experience all of God's goodness at one time. To protect Moses, God moved him to the crevice of a rock and covered his eyes so he would not see God's face. Then as God removed His hand, Moses caught only a glimpse of God's back. (See Exodus 33:21-23.) It was a loving, protective act on God's part to show grace to Moses. God gave Moses all he could comprehend of the greatness of God's glory.

### C. I Will Love and Adore God in His Glory

This encounter with God is probably an abbreviated summary of the whole story. The Bible records just enough to put a yearning in our hearts to see God in all His glory one day. Even now God shows His glory in a beautiful sunset or sunrise. When we look at the night sky painted with stars against a black canvas, it seems He is sharing eternity with us.

*What are some other ways God shows us His glory in creation?*

One day we will be with Him in all His glory. Every part of God's creation reminds us how much He loves us. We must purpose in our hearts to focus on the glory He has already shown us. As the lover of our souls, He is winning our hearts and wooing us to love and adore Him in His glory.

## II. DOWN FROM HIS GLORY

*What condescension, bringing us redemption,  
That in the dead of night, not one faint hope in sight.  
God gracious tender, laid aside His splendor,  
Stooping to woo, to win, to save my soul.*

### A. God Humbled Himself at the Incarnation

When Mary gave birth to Jesus, most people did not know He was God Almighty. God stepped through the back door of humanity as a newborn baby. “And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7).

“No room” seemed to be a theme for the coming of Christ. At the onset, when Mary was ready to have her baby, there was no room in the inn. Someone pointed out a stable, complete with foul-smelling farm animals, where the baby could be born with no one to help but Joseph. The couple swaddled baby Jesus snugly in strips of cloth, laid Him in a feeding trough, and counted their blessings.

Many questioned the Incarnation, but Mary pondered these things in her heart (Luke 2:19). Other than God, Mary and Joseph were the only ones who knew the truth about the virgin birth. God planned His entrance into humanity down to the last humble detail. Jesus was born in humility, rejected by His own people, humbled Himself on a cross, and was placed in a borrowed tomb. There was no room in the hearts of many people He came to die for, but He came anyway.

God set a plan in place from the beginning of time to redeem His people. He knew the mission would be difficult, but the plan was flawless. “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:6–8).

*What are some ways we can humble ourselves and give sacrificially to others?*

### B. Jesus Was Fully God, Fully Human

When it was time for God to manifest Himself to humanity, He sent the angel Gabriel to set the stage. The angel told Mary she was highly favored and would conceive, give birth to a son, and call him Jesus. (See Luke 1:26–31.) When Mary asked how this would happen since she was a virgin, Gabriel filled in some of the blanks: “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Joseph received a similar message in a dream. (See Matthew 1:20–21.) When Jesus was born, things may have seemed complicated to others, but it was simple to Mary and

Joseph; they both knew this was God's work. The baby she carried was the Son of God.

Jesus was born of Mary, born of God. That means Jesus was both fully man and fully God. As a man, He was tempted just as we are, but He did not give in to sin. (See I Corinthians 10:13; Hebrews 4:15.) The omniscient God knew all things, but in His humanity, He grew in wisdom and understanding (Luke 2:40). He was omnipotent, all powerful, but His humanity was not super human. The omnipresent God filled the universe, yet as far as we know, the Man Christ Jesus was only in one place at any given time.

In his book, *The Oneness of God*, David K. Bernard explains Jesus as fully God and fully human:

*He could sleep one minute and calm the storm the next minute. He could speak as man one moment and then as God the next moment. We must always remember that Jesus is fully God and at the same time, He was fully man . . . What would seem strange to our human nature becomes understandable when viewed in the context of One who is both fully God and fully man at the same time.*

William Booth-Clibborn's song truly heralds Jesus' humility beautifully:

*Without reluctance, flesh and blood His substance,  
He took the form of man, revealed the hidden plan.  
glorious mystery, sacrifice of Calvary,  
And now I know Thou art the great "I Am."*

### C. I Will Love and Adore God for the Incarnation

John wrote about a new kind of glory we witnessed in the humanity of Jesus Christ: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

When we are filled with the Holy Ghost, the glory of God lives in us. He is available to every human being who will call on His name. The name of Jesus has given us the opportunity to walk and talk with Jesus every day. He loved us while we were still living in sin and gratifying the ungodly hunger of our flesh (sinful nature). God never gave up on us. He stretched out His arms on the cross and drew us to Himself.

We join in with the multitudes who have joyfully sung this chorus:

*Oh how I love Him! How I adore Him!  
My breath, my sunshine, my all in all!  
The great Creator, became my Savior,  
And all God's fullness dwelleth in Him.*

### III. HUMILITY TOWARD EACH OTHER

#### A. Theology Has Practical Implications

Studying the Bible helps us to discover what faith is and how to show mercy. We cling to promises of salvation. Internalizing theology has real, practical implications. We can read and store it in our brains, but if we fail to internalize it, we are left with only head knowledge and miss important directives on how to live what we believe.

Jesus commanded us to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls, and minds. (See Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27.) Then He added a second command, which is like the first: we must love our neighbor as ourselves. (See Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27.) This lesson is key to living what we believe. John reinforced this lesson when he wrote: “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35).

#### B. Be Like Jesus toward Each Other

A few years ago, a popular abbreviation was printed on T-shirts, inscribed on leather bracelets, and proudly printed on bumper stickers: WWJD. WWJD became a sweeping trend. Nearly everyone knew it meant: what would Jesus do? When we question how to treat someone or react to a situation, we should ask, WWJD? Jesus narrowed down the answer to two commandments: Love God. Love people.

First, Jesus taught us how to make God’s plan a priority in our lives. Everything Jesus did pointed to His mission on earth. Second, people were His first priority. He did not judge them; He loved them. The woman at the well was an outcast, but Jesus spent time with her, a hurting woman. When He left, hope welled up inside of her like springs of living water. She ran into the city to tell others about the hope Jesus offered. (See John 4:7-29.)

*Whom can you spend time with to offer the hope of the gospel?*

#### C. I Will Follow Jesus’ Example of Humility

Jesus was our example of humility. He came down from Glory, never once complaining the mission was too hard. He focused on the prize: freedom from sin for His children. We should focus on God’s mission for our lives. What is the goal here? Love God and love people. Jesus’ example of humility was to love God; it is worth it. No matter the sacrifice, the plan of God is worth it. Jesus’ example was also to love people. It is worth any sacrifice to see our brothers and sisters experience abundant life today and everlasting life one day.

*How can we use social media to fulfill the mission to love God and love people?*



## INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

*A supplemental image and video are available in the Resource Kit.  *

Becky sat stiffly on the back row of the large, crowded church. This was not her first time to be in a Pentecostal church, so she knew they were exuberant worshippers, clapping their hands and praying out loud. Even though she felt a little awkward, she kind of liked that aspect of this new experience.

Her attention was drawn to the platform. Someone was introducing a guest. His name was Hugh Rose. She had never seen him before. He was a nice-looking, robust sort of fellow. When he got behind the pulpit, she was astounded by his confident, clear voice. Little did she know that he had done radio work for the national radio station of the United Pentecostal Church International. His smile was engaging as he said a few words before he began to sing. Becky was mesmerized. His beautiful baritone voice reverberated through the auditorium. “Down from His glory, ever living story, my God and Savior came, and Jesus was His name.” He enunciated every word perfectly and sang in perfect pitch from his heart. He sang with such enthusiasm, Becky felt like she was at an opera. This guy was good.

Becky was a little distracted by a crying child until he belted out, “Oh how I love Him!” She felt tears roll down her face. “How I adore Him.” As he sang, her heart melted with each word. “My breath, my sunshine, my all in all.” She stood up with some others, her hands straight up in the air. This response was new for her, but she didn’t care. What she was feeling compelled her to stand in reverence and raise her hands in surrender. It was as if the sound waves of this magnificent singer were raising her up and she was floating in the presence of God. “The great Creator, became my Savior, and all God’s fullness dwelleth in Him.”

Suddenly Becky could see the great truth buried in the last few words of the chorus. “The great Creator”—that was God the Father—“became my Savior.” Wait . . . God the Father became my Savior? Was it possible God came as the baby Jesus to earth to save us? Was He the one who grew up and died on a cross? How could that be? “And all God’s fullness dwelleth in Him.” So Jesus was full of God. It made sense. It was a concept she had never considered. Immediately she began speaking in a language she did not know. The presence of God was so glorious, she did not want the song to end. However, when the beautiful music stopped, the presence of God did not. The whole congregation was worshiping. That day Becky met the God who came down from Glory. She would never forget the man who sang the song that took her to Heaven and back when she received the Holy Ghost. Of Jesus, she could say and sing, “Oh how I love Him! How I adore Him! My breath, my sunshine, my all in all! The great Creator became my Savior, and all God’s fullness dwelleth in Him.”

### **Prayer Focus**

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

- For God to help us passionately pursue more of Him and a better understanding of who He is
- For God to help us follow Jesus’ example of humility and embrace it for our own lives

## 1.3

## THE GREAT I AM

## FOCUS VERSES

John 8:56–59

<sup>56</sup>Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.  
<sup>57</sup>Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?  
<sup>58</sup>Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.  
<sup>59</sup>Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

## LESSON TEXT

Exodus 3:14;  
 John 8:42–59

## TRUTH ABOUT GOD

The I AM manifested Himself as Jesus Christ.

## TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will worship Jesus as the I AM.



## Thinking about Last Week:

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

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

## **SG** TEACHING OUTLINE

**Icebreaker:** If you could only use one tool for the rest of time, which item in your toolbox do you think could function best as an all-in-one versatility implement?

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

- I. GOD REVEALED AS THE I AM
  - A. God Revealed His Name to Moses
    - » *What would you do if you heard God audibly call your name?*
  - B. I AM Means God Is All in All
    - » *How has God shown you He can meet all your needs?*
  - C. I Will Worship God as the I AM
- II. THE I AM REVEALED AS JESUS CHRIST
  - » *The law included judgment for both parties when caught in adultery, so why do you think the Pharisees only brought the woman accused of adultery to Jesus?*
  - A. The Religious Leaders Were Offended at Jesus **V**
  - B. The Jews Claimed Abraham as Their Father, but Jesus Refuted Their Claim
    - » *What would you do if you suddenly realized that traditions you have been taught do not line up with Scripture?*
  - C. Jesus Revealed as the I AM
  - D. I Will Worship Jesus as the I AM
    - » *What encounter have you had with God that made you want to sing?*

### **Internalizing the Message**

#### **Prayer Focus**

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

- For God to help us understand He is everything we need
- For God to help us understand when Jesus said He was I AM, He was saying He was God

## LESSON CONNECTION

*A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. *

**K**athleen (S. K.) Grimes was the wife of Bishop Samuel Joshua Grimes, the longest presiding bishop of the Oneness Pentecostal group Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (PAW). She was a prolific songwriter, and she wrote a number of Apostolic hymns, including the classic “The Great I Am.” Her songs were published in a songbook *Echoes of Zion* in 1948. Many Apostolic churches have sung “The Great I Am,” celebrating the beautiful truth of one God and the attributes only He can possess.

Grimes successfully etched truth from God’s Word into our hearts through her song. There is no doubt who the Great I AM is after experiencing her musical message. Her song unapologetically includes several names of God, reflecting her familiarity with God’s Word, and points to the truth that Jesus is the I AM.

Jesus confirmed He was God manifested in the flesh when He stated: “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). This was one of the boldest claims to deity Jesus made while He walked this earth. It may have been one of the most provoking statements that sealed His death with the unbelievers who had Him crucified. The great I AM came to earth as a little baby, and when the time was fulfilled, He paid for our sins through His amazing redemption plan. God came in flesh and dwelt among us. We celebrate this wonderful truth to this day. Jesus Christ is the great I AM.

*He’s the great I Am, the everlasting Father,  
He’s the Prince of peace, the great eternal Wonder,  
Holy Counsellor and Zion’s righteous Gov’nor,  
He’s the great, He’s the great I Am.*

*God is Elohim of all the holy prophets,  
The El-Shaddai of all the seers and sages,  
He’s the mighty One of all the sacred pages,  
He’s the great, He’s the great I Am.*

*He’s Jehovah God, the coming King of glory,  
He’s the true Nissi, the Lord of grace and favor,  
He is Jesus Christ, Redeemer, Friend and Savior,  
He’s the great, He’s the great I Am.*

# BIBLE LESSON

## I. GOD REVEALED AS THE I AM

### A. God Revealed His Name to Moses

Moses was tending sheep for his father-in-law in the desert, far from any distractions, when a brush fire caught his attention. He moved closer to have a look. Strangely, it looked like the bush was burning, but it wasn't being burned up. At that moment a voice spoke from the bush and called Moses by name.

As if responding to a teacher taking attendance, Moses answered, "I'm here." It is not clear when Moses realized he was conversing with God. However, when God warned Moses to come no closer and to remove his shoes because he was on holy ground, Moses obediently obliged. God introduced Himself to Moses, and to make sure he knew *exactly* who was speaking, God said, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:6). Moses immediately buried his face, afraid to look at God. He had no doubt he was talking to Yahweh, God Almighty.

*What would you do if you heard God audibly call your name?*

God had seen the affliction of His children and intended to rescue them from Egypt. God wanted to partner with Moses to deliver the Israelites out of bondage. When Moses realized what God was proposing, a whirlwind of emotions shot through his body. What could God be thinking? God wanted Moses to go back to the place where Pharaoh wanted to kill him. No worries, that was no problem for God. But Moses was frantic, wondering how God thought he was capable of going before Pharaoh, demanding he release a million people who worked for him, and then organizing an exodus out of Egypt. (See Exodus 3:11.) God saw no problem. He assured Moses He would go with him, but Moses still was not sure; after all, he was talking with a talking bush.

Moses was reluctant to accept the challenge at first. He questioned his ability, but God assured him He would go with him. Moses questioned what to tell the children of Israel when they asked who sent him. God said to tell them the God of their fathers had sent him. Moses pressed further, asking what he should say when they asked what God's name is. Perhaps Moses thought he had God now; God would reveal His name, and Moses would be the only one who knew it.

"And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you" (Exodus 3:14). To be very clear with Moses, God confirmed His name was I AM. "This is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations" (Exodus 3:15).

## B. I AM Means God Is All in All

Perhaps Moses scratched his head when God said His name was I AM. The man of many questions still had more. After showing Moses several miraculous signs he could use to convince Pharaoh to let God's people go, Moses still had excuses. He felt unqualified because of his slow speech. To expel all his excuses, God told Moses that his brother Aaron could go as a spokesman. No more excuses—Moses was about to discover the I AM is all in all.

God rained down ten plagues on Egypt. The first few affected Israel, but soon God divided Israel from Egypt, and only Egypt bore the brunt of God's judgment. When Pharaoh finally folded and let them go, God guided them through the desert with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. God had packed a picnic basket full of miracles for the journey. He had all the bases covered. Everything they would need, God would provide. They would know He is the I AM, all in all.

Moses led this mass of people right up to the shores of the Red Sea. What now? Thundering hooves sounded like drums of war chasing them. Pharaoh had changed his mind and was pursuing them. What now? God had a plan; He cloaked His children with the cloud and moved it behind them. Then He simply parted the waters and made the muddy floor of the Red Sea dry for Moses and the children of Israel to pass. God always has a plan. Not only did He save all His children, but God magnified the miracle in a way only He can. Dry land? Of course. I AM the I AM, all in all.

When all His people finally reached the other side, the waters suddenly crashed back into place, rushing with such force that the Egyptian soldiers giving chase were drowned. The children of Israel had front row seats for this miracle. God apparently left an impressionable sign for Pharaoh also. God is the protector for those who serve Him and the avenger for those who torment His beloved children. He is the I AM, all in all.

It was time to celebrate. Moses and Israel composed a worship song on the spot: "I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation" (Exodus 15:1).

*How has God shown you He can meet all your needs?*

## C. I Will Worship God as the I AM

Moses was overcome with awe for what God had just done. He broke out in song, worshiping God Almighty for bringing them through the Red Sea. Worship is an expression of reverence or adoration for God. Moses certainly felt those things as he led God's children in an exuberant worship song.

"Where words fail, music speaks" is a quote attributed to Hans Christian Anderson. Perhaps both Moses and Kathleen Grimes felt words were not adequate to express their feelings toward

the great I AM, so Moses wrote his song glorifying his All in All, and Kathleen wrote “The Great I AM.”

## II. THE I AM REVEALED AS JESUS CHRIST


Several religious leaders made quite the entrance when they barged in while Jesus was teaching and threw a woman at His feet. They charged her with the sin of adultery and were ready to stone her. They gaped at Jesus, rocks in hand, as He stooped down, wrote something staggering in the dirt, and then stood and called out the one without sin to cast the first stone. (See John 8:4-11.) Jesus just forgave a woman caught in the act of adultery, never mind the fact only God could forgive sins. The religious leaders’ trap was thwarted, and most of them meandered off into the crowd. Jesus turned back to those He had been teaching.

*The Law included judgment for both parties when caught in adultery, so why do you think the Pharisees only brought the woman accused of adultery to Jesus?*

### A. The Religious Leaders Were Offended at Jesus

This day was challenging for the religious leaders. They were desperately trying to discredit Jesus and ruin His ministry. However, with every accusation they threw out, Jesus had a comeback they could not dispute. They had a heated discussion about Jesus’ origin and authority. He claimed to be from Heaven, equal with God Himself. He made statements like: “I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come” (John 8:21). Of course, they took it as an affront when He told them they could not go to Heaven.

He also accused them of being from below because they were of this world, but He was from above and did not belong to this world. Then He further offended them by saying: “If ye believe not that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). They hotly demanded, “Who art thou?” (John 8:25). Jesus confirmed what He had been saying all along: “When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am *he*” (John 8:28).

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

### B. The Jews Claimed Abraham as Their Father, but Jesus Refuted Their Claim

The Jews declared, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus responded: “If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham” (John 8:39). They were certainly ethnic descendants of Abraham, but they were not behaving as his children. Jesus raised their ire even further when He declared: “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad” (John 8:56). *What?!* How could Jesus, who was not even fifty years old, claim to have seen Abraham?

*What would you do if you suddenly realized that traditions you have been taught do not line up with Scripture?*

### C. Jesus Revealed as the I AM

Jesus boldly responded: “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). This declaration was the last straw. The Jews picked up stones intending to kill Jesus on the spot for His blasphemy. However, Jesus disappeared through their midst out of the Temple.

Jesus revealed Himself as the I AM. It was a bold statement to make to Jews of generational monotheism (worshippers of one God). They had worshiped God as Yahweh for years. For a man—one they could see, touch, and hear—to claim to be that God was difficult for them to process.

Jesus claimed to be the I AM, the very God who revealed Himself to Moses from a burning bush. To the Jewish leaders, His claim was blasphemy. However, it was the truth. Jesus had yet to fulfill His purpose on earth, but some of those listening that day would look back and see Jesus was truly the Son of God. He would sacrifice His body on a cross, but His Spirit—the I AM—would live on to fulfill everything Jesus promised while walking on this earth.

Jesus is God who came in flesh. Such a concept is hard for unbelievers to grasp, but it is a wonderful truth for true believers. The disciples saw the miracles Jesus did in His Father's name. They witnessed Him raise the dead to life. No one had ever demonstrated that kind of power. Jesus was quick to explain the power did not come from His humanity but from the Spirit that indwelt Him. He could do nothing in the flesh that God had not already ordained. Eventually His followers finally understood what He was saying, and they acknowledged Jesus Christ was the manifestation of God, the great I AM. "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (1 Timothy 3:16).

#### **D. I Will Worship Jesus as the I AM**

We have every opportunity to worship Jesus in spirit and truth. True worship comes as we engage spirit and truth. (See John 4:23–24.) When we worship in spirit, our adoration comes from the core of our sincere and genuine heart for the goodness and greatness of God. We must also worship Him from a firm foundation of truth. We understand who Jesus is, and we live according to what He teaches us through God's Word. God declared He was the I AM from the beginning of time, and He will be the I AM forever.

*What encounter have you had with God that made you want to sing?*



## INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Leah had a good life. Then one day she collapsed in a pool of blood, and her nightmare began. She went to see many doctors, paying the bills with homemade baked goods. As the years went by, her neighbors bought her homemade bread, helping her bring in enough money to pay doctors' bills. Now, she was not strong enough to stand and knead the dough. She had spent all her money on doctors. She wasn't sure what she would do.

She had endured this sickness for twelve years. Doctors were as perplexed as she was, calling it an "issue of blood." *Of course it's an issue*, she thought wryly. When she stopped crying, she pulled herself up into a sitting position.

Dinah, her dearest friend, tapped on the door and walked in. She was worried. "Leah, you cannot live this way. Every day you are getting worse." Leah sighed. She had no hope. She was gaunt, looking like a skeleton barely covered in flesh.

Dinah excitedly gushed, "You know Jesus, the man I've been telling you about who performs miracles? He is coming to our town today. He can heal you." Hope flickered in Leah's eyes. She hobbled toward the door before she collapsed to her knees. She thought, *If only I can get to Jesus, the miracle man*. She had heard so much about Him from Dinah. "He performs miracles, Leah." Dinah sparkled when she talked about Jesus.

Dinah did her best to help her friend, but Leah was just too weak. Dinah went ahead while Leah rested. The crowd was dense, pressing in as they made their way, passing Leah only a few yards away. How would she ever get to Jesus? She could see Jesus' sandals. She knew it was Him. She thrust herself into the crowd, crawling on her hands and knees. Some kicked her, but she relentlessly pushed on. At last she was close enough to touch the hem of His garment with her fingertips. Suddenly she felt a warm rush of healing virtue flow through her body. She stood up and realized her strength had returned.

Jesus stopped and asked, "Who touched Me?" The people around Jesus shrugged. "Jesus, people are all around you. Everyone wants to be close to you. What do you mean who touched You?" "Somebody touched Me. I felt virtue leave My body."

Leah trembled. Oh dear, now *everyone* knew it was her. She threw herself at Jesus' feet and thanked Him, explaining all about her twelve-year *issue*. She was healed. Jesus lifted her up by the hand and said kindly, "Daughter, your faith has healed you."

Jesus restored her health and her humanity. He gave her life back to her. She was able to keep her house. She did not have to beg on the streets. She could bake again, and she had no more doctors' bills. Jesus was truly everything she needed. No one else could do what He did for her. He was her all in all, the one who met Moses and forgave an adulteress. Jesus is the great I AM.

### Prayer Focus

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

- For God to help us understand He is everything we need
- For God to help us understand when Jesus said He was I AM, He was saying He was God

# CS

## THE SONGS OF CHRISTMAS

### FOCUS VERSES

Luke 1:46-47, 68-69

<sup>46</sup>My soul doth magnify the Lord,  
<sup>47</sup>and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

....

<sup>68</sup>Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,  
<sup>69</sup>and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.

### LESSON TEXT

Luke 1:46-55, 67-79

### TRUTH ABOUT GOD

The Incarnation brought joy to the entire world.

### TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will praise God for His incarnation.



### Thinking about Last Week:

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

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

## **SG** TEACHING OUTLINE

**Icebreaker:** In your opinion, what is the best Christmas hymn and why?

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

### I. MARY'S SONG

#### A. God Worked a Miracle for Mary and Elisabeth

» *What other challenges would Mary have faced as a single pregnant teen?*

» *What challenges would Zacharias and Elisabeth have faced as first-time senior parents?*

#### B. Elisabeth Recognized the Messiah in Mary's Womb **I**

#### C. Mary's Song Praised God for Caring for Her

» *Describe a time in your life when you felt God's care for you when you needed it most.*

#### D. I Will Praise God for Caring for Me

» *Have you ever written a song or poem of praise or journaled a praise to God? What were some of the lines or points of worship?*

### II. ZACHARIAS'S SONG

#### A. Zacharias's Song Praised God for Remembering the Jews **V**

#### B. Zacharias Prophesied Jesus Would Be Our Savior

» *What would you have felt if you heard what Zacharias and Mary heard after four hundred silent years?*

#### C. I Will Praise Jesus for Being My Savior

### Internalizing the Message

#### Prayer Focus

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

- For God to give us a song of praise for His incarnation
- For God to give us boldness to sing our song for His glory

## LESSON CONNECTION

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The writer tells of Christmas as a child: My parents were pranksters. They liked to see us kids bumfuzzled. My little brother and I would go into their room each Christmas morning to wake them so we could open gifts. One Christmas morning, they were nowhere to be found. We searched the whole house, wondering what had happened to our parents. Being raised Apostolic, our minds immediately went to the Rapture. If we missed it, we would be getting a lot worse than coal in our stockings this Christmas. We wandered back into their bedroom and sat on the bed, wondering what we would do for food while waiting for the Antichrist to reveal himself. Suddenly our parents jumped out of their closet. We let out a scream (and a sigh of relief).

But the biggest prank occurred one Christmas morning when my brother and I found a present with both our names on it. My parents made us open it last. Yep, this was the big one. We ripped the paper off the huge box to see what we were hoping so much to see that year: a Nintendo Entertainment System, complete with the Mario Brothers game and the big orange Duck Hunt gun. My brother and I hooped and hollered and even hugged each other, which was rare. We opened the box, and to our dismay and horror, the large box only held two small plastic candy canes filled with chocolate candies.

My mom said in the sweetest voice, "Merry Christmas, guys." We were disappointed and looked at each other on the brink of tears when my dad yelled, "Hey, look over here!" He then knocked over a stack of VHS tapes, revealing the Nintendo all hooked up and ready to play. We jumped up and down and cheered. Dad had redeemed the day. Had we been able to find any words to speak, we may have sung praises to him.

# BIBLE LESSON

## I. MARY'S SONG

### A. God Worked a Miracle for Mary and Elisabeth

Mary may have felt like she was being tricked as well when an angel appeared to her with this greeting: "Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS" (Luke 1:30-31). She may have thought, *Did I hear that shiny angel right? Maybe he mistook me for someone else.* Surely this honor would not come to some peasant girl in little, ol' Nazareth. Who was she? And who would believe she actually had an angelic visitation? Furthermore, how would she convince her family and friends the baby she had conceived was from God?

*What other challenges would Mary have faced as a single pregnant teen?*

Gabriel continued his unexpected message to Mary, announcing, "Thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age" (Luke 1:36). Mary may have let out a small sigh of relief to know she would not be the only woman in her time who was the recipient of an angelic visitation and a miracle baby. Her cousin Elisabeth was also with child. In this case, Elisabeth was not a young maiden, but a married woman of several years.

The angel did not appear to Elisabeth, but to her husband, Zacharias. He was a priest performing his priestly duties in the Temple. That day he was burning incense at the altar when an angel appeared to him with a message: "Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John" (Luke 1:13). When he heard the reason for his angelic visitation, he doubted it was possible and questioned the angel.

Mary questioned also, but she was just a young girl. She innocently asked Gabriel, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (Luke 1:34). Gabriel was kind in explaining to her exactly how it would all happen. (See Luke 1:35.) Being satisfied with his answer, Mary responded in faith: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38). Zacharias, however, was a priest. He should have known better. He should have believed and not doubted what God wanted to do in his life. Not only was Zacharias going to be the father of a great prophet, but this was the answer to his own prayer for a son. Because of his unbelief, Zacharias was struck silent and was unable to speak until the day his son was born. (See Luke 1:20, 64.)

*What challenges would Zacharias and Elisabeth have faced as first-time senior parents?*

### B. Elisabeth Recognized the Messiah in Mary's Womb

During her pregnancy, Mary journeyed around eighty miles to see her cousin Elisabeth. (See Luke 1:39-40.) "And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: and she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art

**Teacher Option:**

*A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. I*

thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord" (Luke 1:41-45).

What a revelation! Elisabeth heard Mary's voice, the babe leaped in her womb, and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost. Then she prophesied to Mary, saying Mary was indeed carrying the Messiah in her womb. What a comfort to Mary to know what the angel had declared was already coming to pass. What a comfort to know someone else believed her story without even hearing it. What excitement to hear Elisabeth proclaim it with the power of the Holy Ghost in her words.

### C. Mary's Song Praised God for Caring for Her

Mary responded with what Bible scholars call "Mary's Song," recorded in Luke 1:46-55. Mary had no idea her praise to God would become a portion of holy Scripture. It is beautiful to read how thankful Mary was to be called blessed and to be regarded by God in her low estate. Clearly she saw herself as unworthy, but her passionate song testifies of God as a loving and caring God who sees people where they are and chooses them anyway, regardless of talent, race, gender, or class distinction.

"And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation" (Luke 1:46-50).

### D. I Will Praise God for Caring for Me

We may not have been the recipient of an angelic visitation, but the God of angelic hosts loves each of us. He has surely seen us in our low estate and has shown us the mercy Mary mentioned stretches from generation to generation. Let's join Mary in her song and declare He has done great things for us and holy is His name.

## II. ZACHARIAS'S SONG

### A. Zacharias's Song Praised God for Remembering the Jews

Elisabeth's time was come, and she delivered her promised son, whose purpose was to prepare the way of Jesus. On the eighth day, as was the custom, they circumcised their baby boy. The people who were with them during this time began to call the baby Zacharias, after his father. But Elisabeth "answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John. And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name. And they

*Describe a time in your life when you felt God's care for you when you needed it most.*


*Have you ever written a song or poem of praise or journaled a praise to God? What were some of the lines or points of worship?*

made signs to his father, how he would have him called. And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all. And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God” (Luke 1:60–64).

As soon as Zacharias informed the crowd his son would not be named after him but would be called John just as the angel had said, he was able to speak and praise God. In the time of his silence, he was reminded to trust and believe the word of the Lord. Once he declared the baby’s name to be John, he was able to speak out praise to God.

Opinions differ as to why Zacharias was struck silent until John was born. Mark Pickens, blog contributor and field associate for Anabaptist Disabilities Network, writes: “Biblical interpreters commonly view Zechariah’s temporary impairment in speech as a punishment for his lack of faith. . . . Perhaps . . . Zechariah’s inability to speak served as a sign of the promise that abundance and salvation after generations of silence was coming in the birth of John, and the birth of Christ” (“Advent 3: Zechariah’s Silence”). This type of sign from the Lord could very well be the case, as we see it happened in Ezekiel 24:27: “In that day shall thy mouth be opened to him which is escaped, and thou shalt speak, and be no more dumb: and thou shalt be a sign unto them; and they shall know that I am the LORD.” Whether a sign or a punishment, Zacharias was surely glad God gave him a second chance to believe.

**Teacher Option:**

*A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit.* 

Zacharias also was filled with the Holy Ghost and proclaimed great praise to God, often referred to as the “Song of Zechariah,” “The *Benedictus*,” or song of thanksgiving. Luke 1:67 refers to it as a prophecy. “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he sware to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life” (Luke 1:68–75).

Just as Mary’s song mentioned her people, Israel, Zacharias’s song also mentioned God showing love and mercy to His people. It speaks of God remembering His holy covenant to His people, the Jews, and the oath He made to their father, Abraham.

**B. Zacharias Prophesied Jesus Would Be Our Savior**

Even after four hundred years of silence—the dark ages of the Bible when God spoke not a word, nor had any more prophets to speak on His behalf—God had not forgotten His promises. He had

not forgotten His people. Not only did Zacharias's Benedictus tell of the love of God for His people, but it prophesied of good things to come for them. He told of God's mercy, "whereby the dayspring from on high" would visit. God came to shine radiant light on the darkness of the earth. He came to guide us to peace. He came to be God with us. He came to be our Savior.

*What would you have felt if you heard what Zacharias and Mary heard after four hundred silent years?*

### **C. I Will Praise Jesus for Being My Savior**

Because of what our great God has done, we also have seen His glorious light and have been guided to His lasting peace. He was a covenant-keeping God then, and He is a covenant-keeping God now. Just as those in the Bible had reason to praise God, we have every reason to praise our God. He is still moved with compassion for His people. He still sees, hears, knows, responds to, and delights in His people. Just as those in the Bible exclaimed their songs of praise for the wonders God performed in their lives, we also can proclaim the wonders God has performed in our lives.

We each have a song of praise to offer our great God. He is our Savior, Redeemer, King, Lord, Ruler, Creator, Healer, Defense, Shield, Buckler, Waymaker, Miracle Worker, Promise Keeper, Light in the darkness. When we begin to think about the goodness of God in our lives, a song of praise erupts from within. It is not Mary's song or Zacharias's song: it is our song.



## INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

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The music team practiced for months to sing beautiful Christmas songs that went along with whatever the church's theme was for that year. Whether it was light or hope or peace, each song they sang matched the theme. One Christmas during the cantata, the choir ended a particular fast song with a huge crescendo and a high note held out for a significant amount of time. The director raised her arms high and wide, and her hands shook while the choir held out the note. It was all very dramatic.

After the cantata, a friend showed the director a video of her oldest daughter, who was six or seven at the time, mimicking her every move during the high note. Her arms were outstretched in the same way the director's were, her head back, her mouth wide open, and her hands shaking like jazz hands while they held out that final high note. She was right there with the choir, singing with all her might, directing the choir with her mom.

This Christmas, sing out a song of praise to Jesus with all your heart. Stretch your arms high and wide to Him, like He did for us. Let your own Benedictus erupt from your heart to the one who left His heavenly home and royal throne to dwell among us, to become one of us. Oh, what a Savior. Hallelujah! Let our lives loudly proclaim His amazing grace.

### **Prayer Focus**

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

- For God to give us a song of praise for His incarnation
- For God to give us boldness to sing our song for His glory

# 1.4

## PRECIOUS NAME

**FOCUS VERSE**

Acts 4:12

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

**LESSON TEXT**

Isaiah 12:1-6;

Matthew 1:21;

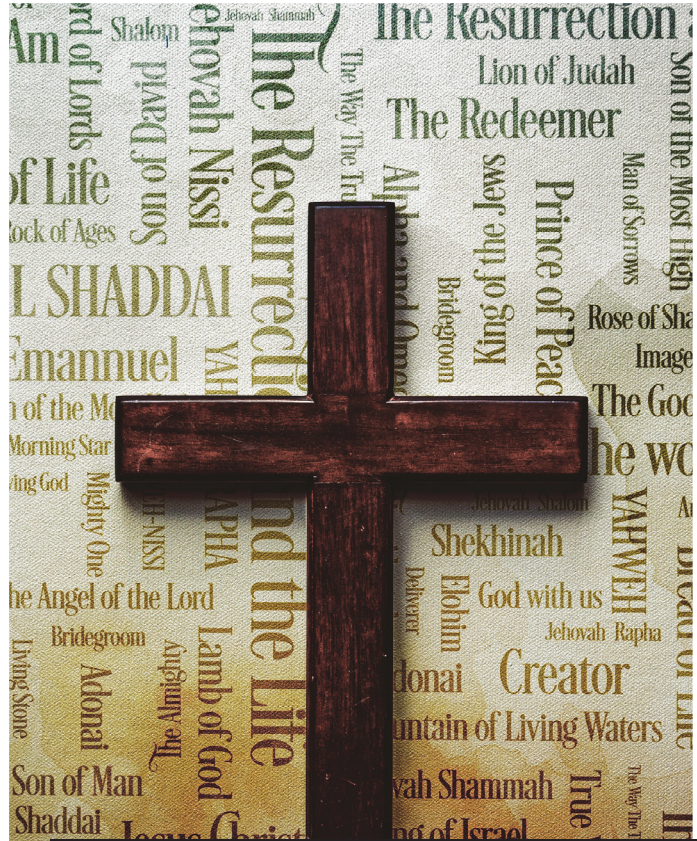
Acts 4:12; 22:16

**TRUTH ABOUT GOD**

Saving power is in the name of Jesus.

**TRUTH FOR MY LIFE**

I will call on the name of Jesus.



**Thinking about Last Week:**

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

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

## **SG** TEACHING OUTLINE

**Icebreaker:** Do you know what your name means? How important is your name's meaning to your character and personality?

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

» *What current songs proclaim the importance of Jesus' name?*

### I. THE IMPORTANCE OF GOD'S NAME

- A. God's Name Reveals His Nature and Character
- B. The Revelation of God's Name Invites Relationship with Him
- C. I Will Honor the Name of God

### II. THE REVELATION OF THE NAME OF JESUS

- A. The Meaning of the Name Jesus
  - » *Have you ever called on the name of Jesus and knew He answered you immediately?*
- B. The Precious, Saving Name of Jesus
- C. What It Means to Call on the Name of the Lord **V**
  - » *Why do you suppose Saul began to go by the name of Paul? How significant is our identity to our testimony?*
- D. I Will Call on the Name of Jesus
  - » *Who do you know who needs the interceding power of prayer in Jesus' name?*

### **Internalizing the Message**

» *How can we share the name of Jesus with others without being pushy or self-righteous?*

### **Prayer Focus**

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

- For God to help us share the power of the name of Jesus
- For us to rejoice in being His children who are blessed to take on Jesus' name

## LESSON CONNECTION

A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. 

Lydia Odell Baxter was an avid writer. In 1855 she published a book of devotional poems called *Gems by the Wayside*. In 1870 she wrote the lyrics to the song “Precious Name.” Later, William Howard Doane composed the music. “Precious Name” was popular in the late 1800s and appeared in hymnals throughout the 1900s. This song weaves beautiful threads of truth throughout its composition.

*Take the name of Jesus with you,  
Child of sorrow and of woe.  
It will joy and comfort give you,  
Take it then where'er you go.*

*Precious name, O how sweet!  
Hope of earth and joy of heav'n;  
Precious name, O how sweet!  
Hope of earth and joy of heav'n.*

*Take the name of Jesus ever,  
As a shield from ev'ry snare.  
If temptations round you gather,  
Breathe that holy name in prayer.*

*At the name of Jesus bowing,  
Falling prostrate at His feet,  
King of kings in heav'n we'll  
crown Him,  
When our journey is complete.*

“Precious Name” was one of three song titles inscribed on Lydia Baxter’s grave marker. Robert Cottrill, of [worldwisebiblestudies.com](http://worldwisebiblestudies.com), wrote that Lydia did not have an easy life. Her many physical challenges ultimately stole her mobility. She spent much of her adult life confined to her bed. However, these limitations did not hinder her from studying God’s Word and writing songs from her heart. She was outgoing and cheerful, offering encouragement and advice to others. Her home was always open to preachers, teachers, and evangelists (“Today in 1809—Lydia Baxter Born”).

Michael Hawn wrote about Lydia’s accomplishments on the Discipleship Ministries website: “When her visitors were astonished at how she could remain so cheerful in spite of her physical condition, she would respond, ‘I have a very special armor. I have the name of Jesus. When the tempter tries to make me blue or despondent, I mention the name of Jesus, and he can’t get through to me anymore’” (“History of Hymns: ‘Precious Name’”).

Lydia’s song is still sung in churches today. This beautiful song proclaims that the name of Jesus is a powerful tool against the enemy. Jesus’ name is a source of joy and comfort. We call on His name for protection and to help us overcome temptation. Her lyrics remind us Jesus is the King of kings, whom we shall crown with many crowns when we reach our heavenly home.

*What current songs proclaim the importance of Jesus’ name?*

# BIBLE LESSON

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## I. THE IMPORTANCE OF GOD'S NAME

### A. God's Name Reveals His Nature and Character

Many Old Testament names of God were descriptive of who He was and what He did. Names such as *Elohim* (the powerful Creator), *Jehovah-Rapha* (the divine Healer), and *El Shaddai* (the almighty God) give us insight into the greatness of our God. Every name revealed His nature, character, and relationship with His people.

David K. Bernard made this observation in his book *The Oneness of God*:

*Yahweh (Jehovah) is the redemptive name of God in the Old Testament (Exodus 6:3-8), and the unique name by which the one true God distinguished Himself in the Old Testament from all other gods (Isaiah 42:8). It means the "Self-Existing One or the Eternal One." This concept also appears in the phrases "I AM THAT I AM" and "I AM," used by God of Himself.*

Each name, though highly revered, pointed to a time when the "name . . . above every name" would be revealed (Philippians 2:9). In the fullness of time, God would reveal His name to humanity.

### B. The Revelation of God's Name Invites Relationship with Him

As we look at some of the names of God, we can see similar ways He helped and ministered to His people. *Jehovah-Jireh* means "the Lord will provide"; *Jehovah-Rapha* means "the Lord my healer"; *Jehovah-Nissi* means "the Lord my victory"; *Jehovah-Shalom* means "the Lord my peace"; *Jehovah-Raah* means "the Lord my Shepherd"; *Jehovah-Tsidkenu* means "the Lord is my righteousness"; and *Jehovah-Shammah* means "the Lord is present or here with me." Through these names we see how God desires to have a relationship with His people.

### C. I Will Honor the Name of God

The people of Israel were very careful to honor the name of the Lord. Unfortunately, over time this high regard for His holy name has been diluted. We should honor God in every possible way. Knowing God's name brings humility and reverence. Exodus 20:7 teaches us not to take the name of the LORD in vain. With the revelation of His precious name in Matthew 1:21 comes the responsibility to honor the God who bears that name.

Paul's letter to the Colossians admonished to do everything in Jesus' name: "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him" (Colossians 3:17). We pray in Jesus' name, giving honor to God. We are saved exclusively by His name. (See Acts 4:12.)

The more we include the name of Jesus in our daily lives, the more we honor Him.

## II. THE REVELATION OF THE NAME OF JESUS

### A. The Meaning of the Name Jesus

The name *Jesus* means “Yahweh, our salvation.” It comes from the Hebrew word *Yeshua* or *Joshua*, which means “the LORD is salvation.” When the time was right to reveal His name, God orchestrated everything to take place in perfect timing.

Mary was engaged to Joseph. Before they were married, an angel appeared to Mary and told her she would be overshadowed by the Holy Spirit and give birth. The child would be named *Jesus*. (See Luke 1:31.) When Joseph realized Mary was pregnant, he was perplexed and planned to end their engagement. However, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him not to be afraid to marry Mary, for the child was conceived by the Holy Spirit. The angel gave him instructions to name the baby Jesus, for He would “save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20–21).

It was finally time for Isaiah’s prophecies to be fulfilled. (See Isaiah 7:14; 9:6.) God revealed His name to Mary and Joseph first: “Emmanuel, . . . God with us” (Matthew 1:23). His name is Jesus. Soon the world would know.

Jesus came to build a relationship with humanity and bring salvation. His mission focused on His people. To know His name was to know His mission. When we call on Jesus’ name, it becomes personal. Jesus is Jehovah, our Savior. He came for us.

*Have you ever called on the name of Jesus and knew He answered you immediately?*

### B. The Precious, Saving Name of Jesus

Before Christ came, we were bound for a life of meaningless wandering, like spiritual zombies, so to speak. We were walking without purpose, existing without hope. We were helpless to help ourselves, but when we took on the name of Jesus, our lives were completely changed. When God revealed His name was Jesus, our Savior, we had no reason to search anywhere else for our salvation. Today, salvation is offered to everyone who calls on His name. (See Romans 10:13.)

We are no longer identified with the world; we are now identified with Jesus Christ. We put off the old person (who we used to be). Instead of being dead in sin, we are dead *to* sin and no longer slaves to it. We cast off sin like it is an old, tattered coat. We arise alive, putting on a new coat of salvation, with the Spirit of God living in us. We exchange a life of sin for the glory of a new creation in Jesus. (See II Corinthians 5:17.)

Without the blood of Jesus Christ, our debt of salvation would not have been paid. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice, and through His blood, we are forgiven and set free. We are set right with God when we believe and obey the gospel.

The blood of Jesus cleanses us “from all sin” (1 John 1:7). No other person could have offered a sinless sacrifice on the cross to redeem us from sin. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice because He was sinless. Only through His blood are we cleansed by baptism in His name, washing away our sins. (See Acts 2:38.) His name is a precious name above all others because by the name of Jesus we are saved.

“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9–11). No other name can heal us, provide for us, or protect us. Only the precious name of Jesus can save us, forgive our sins, and raise us up when He returns to take us to Heaven.


“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). When we walk in truth, taking on His name, we have life through the power of His name. “But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31). We were dead in our sins before we were saved. (See Ephesians 2:1.) Paul admonished us in several of his letters to “put off the old man” to become new when we are born again. (See Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:9.)

### C. What It Means to Call on the Name of the Lord

Jesus’ name has power, whether we shout it or whisper it. When we call on the name of Jesus, we demonstrate our faith in Him. We show our faith in the God who owns that name. When we call on the name of Jesus, we give God the opportunity to meet our needs. Calling on His name is confessing Jesus is the name of Almighty God in the Old Testament. “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Romans 10:9).

Saul was on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians and take them bound to Jerusalem. Suddenly, on the road, a light shone so brightly, Saul fell to the ground. He heard a voice asking: “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” Saul asked, “Who art thou, Lord?” The voice answered, “I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest” (Acts 22:7–8). God got Saul’s attention. He gave Saul instructions to go into the city and wait to hear what to do. Then when the light was gone, darkness surrounded him. (See Acts 22:10–11.)

Saul’s companions led him to Damascus. A Jesus follower named Ananias prayed for Saul to receive his sight. Saul was instantly healed. Ananias said God had called Saul to be His witness and

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

implored him, “Why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

The urgency with which Ananias told Saul what to do is how God wishes to speak to all of us. When we discover who Jesus is, we should not be reluctant to take on His name. We should be baptized in Jesus’ name as soon as possible. Calling on the name of Jesus in baptism is also boldly demonstrating our faith in Him and spiritual identification with Him. Saul, known as Paul to Gentile believers, became the Apostle to the Gentiles and wrote many letters to the churches, recorded in the New Testament.

*Why do you suppose Saul began to go by the name of Paul? How significant is our identity to our testimony?*

#### **D. I Will Call on the Name of Jesus**

Not long after Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, he and John were on their way to prayer. They came across a man who had been unable to walk since birth. He was begging for coins. They did not have any to give, so Peter offered what they did have. “Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk” (Acts 3:6).

Peter took him by the right hand, and immediately, his ankle bones that had never worked, worked. And his feet that had never walked, walked. He stood up, leaped, and walked into the Temple with Peter and John, praising God.

When we call on the name of Jesus, we engage all power in Heaven and earth. Jesus promised: “If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it” (John 14:14). We have access to healing, deliverance, peace, and the answer to many other needs just by speaking the name of Jesus in prayer.

Jesus included a very powerful statement in His Sermon on the Mount when He said: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Matthew 7:7). We can be assured He is just waiting for us to ask.

*Who do you know who needs the interceding power of prayer in Jesus’ name?*



## INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

James's father was an alcoholic. Many times James watched as his drunken father abused his mom. Afraid, he retreated to his bedroom and covered his head with the pillow. Through his tears he pleaded, "Jesus, help us." Fifteen years later, James sat in a coffee shop. His dismal thoughts were interrupted by a man at the next table talking loudly on his phone. He said, "Sure, I'll pray for you. Jesus, we call upon Your name right now. I pray You would give Bob the strength to do the right thing. Fill his mind with peace and break the chains of addiction. In Jesus' name, amen."

James did not realize he was staring. The man smiled. "Hi, my name is Richard Hartly. Sorry if I was loud, just trying to help a friend." James shook his head politely and faced the man. "Do you really think your advice will help?" "Absolutely! The name of Jesus is powerful. If you believe it, He will do it, simple as that."

A flashback of his horrible childhood made James shudder. "I tried it when I was a kid, but it didn't work." "What do you mean it didn't work?" Richard asked. James described his childhood life of abuse and alcoholism. Richard moved over to James's table. "Let me tell you something. Those nights you called on the name of Jesus, He was there. He was protecting your mother and giving her strength to hold on. He was reaching out to your father, and He was putting His arms around you while you shivered in your bed."

"How do you know that?" James questioned. "Well, you're here now." Richard grinned, "You sat down next to my table." He reached over and asked, "Do you want to pray with me?" Richard shot James a big smile and reached out both his hands.

That day changed James's life. Eventually he found the strength to forgive his father and to pray he also would be saved. James was shocked when he received a call from his father. He had been released from prison and wanted James to pick him up. As his father slid into the passenger seat, James looked into the eyes of a stranger. He did not know what to say. Finally he muttered, "How are you doing . . . Dad?"

"Son, I found Christ in prison. A man named Richard Hartly came every week for Bible studies. I've given my life to God. Can you ever forgive me? Now I know what made your mother so strong. Do you know anyone who will baptize an old sinner?"

"You'd better believe I do." James had forgiven his dad a long time ago. Now he could not wait to take him to Richard. This was not a coincidence.

*How can we share the name of Jesus with others without being pushy or self-righteous?*

### Prayer Focus

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

- For God to help us share the power of the name of Jesus
- For us to rejoice in being His children who are blessed to take on Jesus' name

# 2.1

## WORTH MORE THAN GOLD

### FOCUS VERSES

Acts 3:6-8

<sup>6</sup> Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

<sup>7</sup> And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

<sup>8</sup> And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

### LESSON TEXT

Acts 3:1-10

### TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God still performs physical miracles.

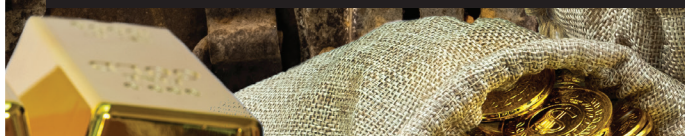
### TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will believe God for miracles in my day.



### Series Overview:

Start at the gate of the Temple in Acts 3, and end up with Simon Peter at the door in Acts 12 as you see God work miracles for His newborn church in the Book of Acts. Build your faith to trust God is still able to do what He has done and so much more.



## **SG** TEACHING OUTLINE

**Icebreaker:** What is the biggest, God-sized prayer you have ever prayed?

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

### I. ALWAYS BE AVAILABLE

#### A. The Man Who Could Not Walk Asked for Alms Daily **I**

» *If your calendar could testify, how important would faithfulness to your spiritual disciplines be to you?*

#### B. I Will Be Available Consistently for God to Perform a Miracle

» *How do you respond when God says no or wait?*

### II. HAVE FAITH TO EXPECT SOMETHING

#### A. The Man Asked Peter and John for Alms **V**

#### B. The Man Expected Something from Peter and John

» *If other beggars were near this man, how would the miracle they just witnessed affect their faith?*

#### C. I Will Believe God for Miracles in My Day

» *What miracle would you most love to witness in your lifetime?*

### **Internalizing the Message**

» *For whom can you pray big prayers this week, expecting God to work miracles?*

### **Prayer Focus**

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

- For God to increase our faith to believe Him for miracles
- For God to give us boldness to pray big prayers, expecting Him to work miracles

## LESSON CONNECTION

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**H**istory is replete with moments of great intrigue. Today's authors of thrillers cannot craft a story filled with more suspense, conspiracies, and political manipulation than many accounts that are already part of humanity's past. One such moment occurred more than fifteen hundred years ago.

The man had a unique name—Sigobert. In the late fifth century AD, he was the king of the Franks, a Germanic people living near the present-day city of Cologne. Their ancestry is thought to trace back to the Turkish city of Troy, which according to legend, fell to Greece by the Greek's deceitful use of a wooden horse—the Trojan Horse. Those who escaped the city are thought to have eventually settled along the banks of the Rhine River, and they became known as the Franks. Sigobert, who had been injured in his knee at the Battle of Tolbiac in AD 496, ruled over them with a perpetual limp. He is known historically as Sigobert the Lame.

He ruled until AD 509, when he was assassinated by his son, Chlodoric, at the encouragement of Clovis I, a man with his own ambitions for the throne. After Chlodoric murdered his own father, he offered a large treasure to Clovis to secure his support in Chlodoric's new reign. Clovis sent emissaries to assess the treasure. They asked the new king, Chlodoric, to plunge his arms into the gold as deeply as he could to convince them the treasure box was deep, not just a small treasure spread over a false bottom. Once the king had immobilized his arms by plunging them deeply into the gold—rendering him vulnerable and defenseless—Clovis's delegation assassinated him, leaving the throne vacant. Clovis quickly convinced the people he should lead them, thus completing his scandalous plan.

This sordid story echoes some elements of another story, a more inspiring story, which unfolded over 450 years before Clovis schemed his way to a crown. This former account also centered on a man with a disability. He, too, reached for gold, but this man received something far different than he expected, far better than he expected. As recorded in the Book of Acts, this man received something far more valuable than gold. The healing power of the name of Jesus completely changed his life when two apostolic preachers passed his way.

The man lay at the gate to the Temple and begged for natural treasure, perhaps because he did not understand a greater treasure was available to him through the power of the name of Jesus. But when Peter spoke, the man received a miracle instead of a morsel. No matter what type of coin other generous passersby had been given him previously, what happened on the day chronicled in today's lesson far surpassed any gift he had ever received.

And that is the point. Miracles are more valuable than gold. Through diligence and persistence, humans can amass treasure, but no matter how hard they try, on their own, humans cannot secure a miracle, by its very definition. Miracles are the homestead of the Lord Jesus alone. Just as He did for this man in the Book of Acts, Jesus is both willing and able to work miracles and provide healing in our lives as well.

# BIBLE LESSON

## I. ALWAYS BE AVAILABLE

It has been stated so often, it has largely become a cliché: “The greatest ability is availability.” Sometimes clichés are oft repeated because they’re true. This is one of those. When God wants to use someone, that person must be available. When God wants to bless someone, that person must be available. When God wants to work a miracle for someone, that person must be available.

During His ministry on earth, Jesus sometimes asked something of the individual wanting to be healed. “Stretch forth thy hand” (Luke 6:10). “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (John 9:7). “Rise, take up thy bed, and walk” (John 5:8). “Stand forth” (Mark 3:3). They were not passive participants in the physical healing; Jesus required something of them.


Similarly, we must be active participants in miracles of healing. We must position ourselves properly, make our requests passionately, and respond joyfully. The man in today’s lesson demonstrated all these attributes for us.

### A. The Man Who Could Not Walk Asked for Alms Daily

Before anything else unfolds in the account of this miracle, the Bible pays homage to the man’s faithfulness. He was at the gate of the Temple every day, even though being disabled was cause for exclusion in ancient Jerusalem. We know from Leviticus 21:18 that a man with a disability could not serve as a priest, and David seemed to expand that prohibition further by refusing them to enter into the house of the Lord at all. (See II Samuel 5:8.) Yet this man was willing to face daily rejection and perhaps even ridicule by being placed just outside the entrance to a location forbidden to him.

Each day as worshipers passed by on their way to the Temple, they would see this man trying to eke out a living by begging alms of those coming to worship. His broken body prevented him from making a living any other way. He had no choice but to beg for charity from those passing by. It was no doubt humiliating, but it was a necessary evil in his world. So each day this man asked for others to position him as close to the house of God as he was allowed, hoping he would receive something that would meet his daily needs.

His faithful “attendance to church” positioned him perfectly when his day for a miracle came. Had he wearied of the struggle and decided it was just not worth the effort on that day, he would have missed out on a supernatural, life-changing moment. His commitment to being a daily presence at the Gate Beautiful resulted in him being a recipient of a miracle.

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

*If your calendar could testify, how important would faithfulness to your spiritual disciplines be to you?*

His faithfulness was not evident just in his consistent presence at the gate; he also continually asked for alms. Each person who came by could count on hearing his voice. No one got a pass. Those who had given to him previously were asked to do so again. It didn't matter if they dropped coins in his beggar's cup the day before; he needed money for meals today. He asked those who had never given to him in hopes that on this day their generosity might be manifest. His request was often on his lips. Faithful attendance coupled with faithful requests seemed to be a key to him receiving a miracle.

Perhaps this is why Jesus instructed: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8). The tense of these verbs indicates one who asks and continues to ask, one who seeks and continues to seek, and one who knocks and continues to knock. This is exactly what the man in Acts 3 did.

### **B. I Will Be Available Consistently for God to Perform a Miracle**

If we want a miracle, we must properly position ourselves for a miracle. God has provided us with a church to attend, but we bear the responsibility of doing so. Can God heal His child at home? Of course, but our willingness to be faithful to corporate worship demonstrates something about our faith in Christ. Our hunger for an answer is demonstrated by our desire to be close to worship at every opportunity.

Scripture even instructs us to initiate the call for prayer and not to sit and wait for someone to call us to pray. "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him" (James 5:14-15).

To receive a miracle, we must be willing to ask. We are clearly told to make our requests known to God. (See Philippians 4:6.) And we must be willing to ask repeatedly. God always answers prayer. Sometimes the answer is yes; sometimes it is no; sometimes God's response is wait. God does not weary of us repeating our request while we are waiting. In fact, the Parables of the Unjust Judge and of the Midnight Visitor teach us that "importunity," or the persistent expression of a request, is rewarded.

*How do you respond when God says no or wait?*

## **II. HAVE FAITH TO EXPECT SOMETHING**

Asking is pleasing to God, but asking in faith is productive with Him. The very foundation of our faith walk is summarized in Hebrews: "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). No


matter the magnitude of our need we present, we must expect God is going to do something to remedy it or to get us through it.

### A. The Man Asked Peter and John for Alms

Around three o'clock in the afternoon, Peter and John, who had recently been baptized with the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost, proceeded toward the Temple for prayer. Outside of the Bible, there is no record of one of the gates being called "Beautiful," but most likely the gate referenced in Acts 3 was the Double Gate (which was indeed spectacular) in the southern wall of the Temple Mount. It was quite large and would have been heavily trafficked. As in real estate, this man understood the power of location, location, location.

As Peter and John passed by him, he looked to them—two apostles—for a bit of money to sustain him in his struggling existence. With no social safety net, begging was his only option. It is doubtful he knew anything about the apostles or their newfound faith and spiritual experience. With hopeful expectation, the man merely anticipated the potential "clink" of a coin falling into his cup. Maybe two coins since there were two preachers.

#### Teacher Option:

*A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit. *

### B. The Man Expected Something from Peter and John

After many days by that gate, he had been disappointed more than a few times when worshipers dropped nary a denarius into his cup, but he did not let those disappointments damage his faith. The Bible records he looked at Peter and John expecting to receive something of them. Little did he understand just what he would receive.

Peter stopped and spoke to him the famed words: "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6). Peter was explaining that though he had no natural wealth to share, he had something better. He had access to the healing power of the name of Jesus Christ. The results stunned all on the Temple grounds that day. "And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God" (Acts 3:7–8).

This miracle is particularly notable because it was the first one performed by God in direct response to the expressed faith of one of the apostles after Pentecost. Though they had witnessed Jesus heal vast numbers of people, and though they had been promised this type of power and authority after their new birth, that moment at the gate of the Temple was the first time they put Christ's words into action. As He always does, Jesus proved true to His word, and the now healed man was the beneficiary.

*If other beggars were near this man, how would the miracle they just witnessed affect their faith?*

### C. I Will Believe God for Miracles in My Day

Sometimes we are intimidated by what we do not have rather than having boldness rooted in what we do have. Each Spirit-filled child of God is an ambassador for Jesus Christ. We go with the delegated authority of Heaven in our lives. Accordingly, we have the capacity to pray the same types of prayers recorded in the Book of Acts. Peter and John were human, just as we are, and they were subject to the same human frailties and challenges as we are. Yet they operated in the power of the Spirit through faith in Jesus' name. So can we.

For countless people around us, Jesus Christ is their only answer. Physical maladies plague them, which medical science with all its spectacular advancements cannot remedy. Emotional turmoil has unleashed hopelessness in our society such that suicide deaths are hitting all-time highs. Each of us has neighbors with relational carnage in their paths. Spiritual ruin abounds on all sides of us in the lives of people with whom we interact daily.

We routinely mirror the interaction in Acts 3. Someone on the way to prayer meets someone on the way to nowhere. While we are busily engaged in sanctified pursuits, we pass people whose lives are filled with needs that demand a miracle. That thought would be terrifying if we were expected to produce such miracles. Instead, we can look to Jesus Christ as the source of miraculous power.

Perhaps the challenge is that many times we simply do not ask "big" enough. What would happen if we followed the prompting of the Holy Ghost and walked in faith by praying "big" prayers? We would undoubtedly see more miracles in people's lives. How many of us would have simply cast a coin into that beggar's cup and gone on, or if we did pray, we would have simply prayed that God would bless him and meet his needs? In stark contrast, Peter prayed a big prayer and saw a massive miracle.

"Oh," we might say, "that was Simon Peter." Right you are, and we are children of God, just as he was. The Bible does not say such signs would follow the apostle Peter. It promises: "And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:17-18). As believers, praying for the miraculous and seeing God work the miraculous are all part of our rich, spiritual heritage.

*What miracle would you most love to witness in your lifetime?*



## INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

In many regards, it was a Sunday much like any other. The district camp meeting had concluded, and the guest speaker from the camp stayed over to preach at a local church that weekend. The service was a great one, marked by heartfelt, passionate worship. At the close of the message, a large number of people gathered around the altar, fervently seeking God.

Suddenly, from the center aisle, great praise erupted. The excitement was palpable from across the room, so the speaker made his way toward the celebration. When he arrived, he was greeted by a scene never to be forgotten. A lady, blind since birth, was cupping the face of her grown daughter and staring with wonder at the face she had only been able to imagine up to that point. In one miraculous moment and in response to the prayers of common believers, not of apostles, God had healed her eyes and given her sight for the first time in her life. When she left that service, she left without her white cane. It was laying across the pulpit for all to see, including her. One can only imagine the stories told when she went to apply for her first driver's license shortly thereafter.

Miracles are still part of our spiritual DNA. We should expect such moments. God has not changed, so His working in the lives of people continues. Just as those who populate the pages of the Book of Acts frequently experienced God's suspension of natural laws, so should we as His church today. Those of us who walk in the same truth as they did should see the same sights they saw along the journey.

One of the most oft-misquoted verses in the Bible is Ephesians 3:20: "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." Note that it does not say He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we *can* ask or think, though that is undoubtedly true as well. Instead, Paul pointed out that God's ability is far beyond what we *do* ask and think. The unspoken lesson here is that we should think and ask bigger; what we are currently presenting is certainly not taxing the unlimited resources of God.

This week as we go through life, let us look for opportunities to pray for a miracle. In the grocery store, stop and ask that lady who is suffering in physical pain if you can pray for her. Pause to listen to the lonely man on city transportation and ask if you can pray for him. Tell the despondent teenager you meet on the street that God can heal her depression. Do not be intimidated by the magnitude of the need. Be bold in the majesty of your God. Miracles still happen, and they can happen through your big prayers.

*For whom can you pray big prayers this week, expecting God to work miracles?*

### Prayer Focus

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

- For God to increase our faith to believe Him for miracles
- For God to give us boldness to pray big prayers, expecting Him to work miracles

# 2.2

## ANYONE ANYWHERE

### FOCUS VERSES

**Acts 8:36-38**

<sup>36</sup> And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

<sup>37</sup> And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

<sup>38</sup> And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

### LESSON TEXT

**Acts 8:26-39**

### TRUTH ABOUT GOD

The miracle of God's salvation is for anyone anywhere.

### TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I believe and want to receive the miracle of salvation.



### Thinking about Last Week:

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

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

## **SG** TEACHING OUTLINE

**Icebreaker:** What is the farthest you've traveled for a church service?

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

- I. THE MIRACLE OF SALVATION IS FOR ANYONE
  - A. The Ethiopian Was Very Influential, but a Eunuch
  - B. God Sent a Preacher to the Ethiopian
    - » *What other stories show us God sending a preacher to share the gospel?*
  - C. God's Salvation Is for Everyone, Including Me
    - » *How do you show your gratitude that the plan of salvation is for everyone, including you?*
  
- II. THE MIRACLE OF SALVATION IS FOR ANYWHERE
  - A. Peter and the Ethiopian Were in a Desert Called Gaza **I**
  - B. The Ethiopian Was Hungry to Know More of God **V**
    - » *What indicates when a person is hungry for more of God?*
  - C. God's Salvation Is for Anywhere, Including Where I Am
  
- III. SALVATION IS A MIRACLE
  - A. If You Believe in Jesus Christ, You Can Be Baptized in Jesus' Name
    - » *Share your experience of being baptized in Jesus' name.*
  - B. I Believe and Want to Receive the Miracle of Salvation
    - » *Have you already experienced the miracle of salvation? If not, what hinders you?*

### **Internalizing the Message**

#### **Prayer Focus**

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

- To experience the miracle of salvation
- For God to help us help others experience the miracle of salvation

## LESSON CONNECTION

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Let's imagine for a moment a gathering in Heaven. Standing there in a circle, all dressed in white, are contemporaries of Jesus Christ during His ministry on earth. Each of these received a miracle from the Master. The crowd around this select group is silent, listening to them recount their individual testimonies.

"I heard He was coming by," one might say, "and I was determined to get His attention. I could not see Him. Of course, I had never seen anyone. I had been blind since birth. As the volume of the crowd swelled, I purposed that my volume would as well. I yelled, 'Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me!' I yelled it over and over, even when His followers tried to silence me. He cared enough to stop. He spoke, and suddenly light streamed in for the first time. I could see!"

Another might reply, "I had not seen my family in years because we lepers were banished from the city. Several of us banded together to try to eke out an existence that could hardly be called a living. That horrid disease relentlessly tried to steal our dignity, our humanity. There really was no hope, until someone told us about Jesus. We went to Him, and He sent us all to the high priest to show him we were clean. I simply could not leave without turning back to offer Jesus my thanks. Now I can do that forever."

A father might chime in. "My son was possessed by a terrible spirit. It tormented him, often trying to drown him or burn him. We had no way to control our son, and we were terrified both for him and of him. Can you imagine our elation when someone said evil spirits were subject to the words of Jesus? And they were. Jesus cast out that foul spirit and gave us our son again. I wish you could have seen the celebration in our home that night."

Deaf ears were unstopped, lame legs were suddenly straightened and whole, tongues that had never spoken began to sing, and illnesses that had plagued people for decades were suddenly cast away by the healing power of Christ. It is quite a group, this "miracle club."

Then a new potential member steps forward. Each ear turns to her, awaiting her account of the miracle she received. Was she a former paralytic? Had she been a leper? Perhaps she was blind or halt. It was impossible to tell now in her glorified body. They listen ever so carefully as she speaks through a beaming smile. "I was a sinner, and Jesus saved me."

In the stillness that follows, all recognize the magnitude of that testimony, for it mirrors their own. Each was the recipient of the greatest of all miracles—salvation. And in that, each of us can share as well. The most significant miracle is a spiritual transformation through the power of new birth, and that miracle is available to everyone everywhere. We would be hard-pressed to find more encouraging words than these: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). This miracle is not found in an exclusive club; it is founded on an inclusive invitation.

# BIBLE LESSON

## I. THE MIRACLE OF SALVATION IS FOR ANYONE

The foundational principle that salvation is not limited to a select group of people is essential to a biblical belief structure. One of the tenets of Calvinism—that since before the world began, God selected a limited number of souls to whom He would grant salvation, and no one can alter that predestined eternal fate—is a false doctrine that offers no hope to the whole world. It flies in the face of the truth that “whosoever” may come and be saved. Jesus did not die for the sins of a select few; He died “for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2).

### A. The Ethiopian Was Very Influential, but a Eunuch

A beautiful demonstration of this truth can be found in the eighth chapter of the Book of Acts, and it involves a man commonly known as the Ethiopian eunuch. A eunuch was a man who had been affected or altered in such a way as not to be able to sire children. Such a man was highly sought after in Eastern culture as a servant because he was not a threat around the women of the house, and he would never desire to leave to pursue having his own family.

Although we are not given this man’s name, he carried significant influence. The Bible calls him a man “of great authority” in the direct service of Candace, the Ethiopian queen (Acts 8:27). This high status in the royal house resulted in him being afforded his own chariot in which to ride. This was no small detail. However, for all his wealth and influence, as a eunuch he was excluded from traditional Jewish worship. Deuteronomy 23:1 makes it quite clear that such a man was not allowed to enter “into the congregation of the LORD.” This man was returning from Jerusalem, but while there, he could only look longingly as others entered the courts of the Temple to worship.

### B. God Sent a Preacher to the Ethiopian

Because God cared so much for this religious outcast, He sent Philip to meet the man on his journey home from Jerusalem back to Ethiopia. Philip was enjoying a significant revival in Samaria when God sent an angel who told him to depart from there and go to the desert toward the south. On that journey, Philip saw the eunuch’s chariot, and again the Lord spoke to him, instructing him to go join the chariot in travel. Upon arriving, Philip heard the voice of the eunuch reading from the Book of Isaiah. Philip was privileged to explain to this man the Scriptures that were otherwise incomprehensible to him.

When Philip arrived, the Ethiopian eunuch was reading from what we know as Isaiah 53. One wonders if he had read on into what is now chapter 56 as well. There he would have found the words: “Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to

*What other stories show us God sending a preacher to share the gospel?*

the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off" (Isaiah 56:3-5).

Can you imagine how his heart would have nearly burst to read such a promise? He likely would have found it hard to believe God's plans included someone like him. But the preacher, Philip, had been sent to that dry, barren place specifically to expound the Scriptures to this man so he was fully aware that he, too, had a place at God's table. No one is excluded.

### C. God's Salvation Is for Everyone, Including Me

The promise of New Testament salvation knows no social, educational, ethnic, gender, or fiscal boundaries. "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13). God paid the ultimate price on Calvary so everyone who chooses to do so may repent and be baptized both in water and in Spirit. This is the will of God. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9). (See also I Timothy 2:4.)

## II. THE MIRACLE OF SALVATION IS FOR ANYWHERE

Just as the plan of God to save the world embraces all people, it also encompasses all places. Unlike some religious faiths that deem certain locales to be more holy than others and require its adherents to make sacred journeys there to commune with God, the Word of God acknowledges a different truth. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). "That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us" (Acts 17:27). As we follow Jesus, He comes to where we are, no matter where we are.


### A. Peter and the Ethiopian Were in a Desert Called Gaza

The encounter God orchestrated for the Ethiopian eunuch and the man of God occurred in Gaza. At the southern boundary of Israel, Gaza is located in a desert land known as the Negev. This arid place averages only about one inch of rain per year and is subject to extremely hot temperatures. In short, it was not a hospitable environment in which to travel or to interact with people.

Yet God chose this location to bring to the eunuch a profound revelation of God's love for him. The blistering heat did not stop God's will for this man's life. The barren sand could not thwart

*How do you show your gratitude that the plan of salvation is for everyone, including you?*

#### Teacher Option:

*A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. *

God's purpose. Even a shortage of water was not insurmountable, as they arrived at an oasis just when he was ready to be baptized.


Neither can the circumstances or settings of our lives deter God's will. The chronicles of God's church will include accounts of people being saved from a righteous home with godly parents and others who were saved from the home of the town drunk. Affluent cities as well as despondent barrios have seen the Holy Spirit change lives. No nation is bereft of God's touch, no matter the political opposition resident there. Nothing can stop God from reaching people in that land, as the Word clearly promises: "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14). No matter where a hungry soul is, God can arrange a witness there.

## B. The Ethiopian Was Hungry to Know More of God

God went to great lengths to arrange this conversation between Philip and the Ethiopian for a reason both simple and profound: the man was hungry after God. Before we are born again, spiritual starvation is at work within us. Though we may try to fill that craving with any number of carnal pursuits, each of us craves spiritual communion with God. Nothing else can satisfy that longing. The songwriter was right to write: "Only Jesus can satisfy your soul."

The wonderful news of the gospel is that Jesus can and will satisfy the soul that desires Him enough to seek Him. When Jesus presented what we call the Beatitudes, He included these wonderful words: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6). A relationship with Jesus Christ fills us with all good things and finally fulfills all the spiritual lack we have known. "And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). When we hunger for God and desire Him more than the pitiful substitutes we have been consuming, God will meet us anywhere we are.

### Teacher Option:

*A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit.* 

*What indicates when a person is hungry for more of God?*

## C. God's Salvation Is for Anywhere, Including Where I Am

At times it may feel like we are impossibly distant from God. Our choices and their consequences may lead us into dark and lonely places. The enemy of our souls would delight in convincing us we have gone too far down our spiritually destructive path and that God cannot find us in our despair-riddled location. The Bible offers this hope: "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me" (Psalm 139:7-10).

### III. SALVATION IS A MIRACLE

Salvation truly is the greatest miracle we can receive. Medical science can often do things that boggle the human mind, even to the point of restoring the use of limbs or organs that previously were dysfunctional. But no one other than Jesus Christ can bring sinful humanity into right standing with an infinitely holy God. For an inherently sinful person to be the recipient of the righteousness of Jesus Christ is nothing short of miraculous.

#### A. If You Believe in Jesus Christ, You Can Be Baptized in Jesus' Name

After Philip's preaching of Jesus convinced the eunuch, they looked up to see a rare pool of water in the desert. The eunuch asked, "Here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" (Acts 8:36). Philip's response makes it clear: "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37). Only two prerequisites for baptism exist—belief and repentance—and they cannot be separated from one another. Although the eunuch was new to faith, his belief and willingness to repent was enough to make him a candidate for baptism.

*Share your experience of being baptized in Jesus' name.*

#### B. I Believe and Want to Receive the Miracle of Salvation

The choice is ours. If we choose to put our faith in Jesus Christ, the miracle of salvation is ours for the asking. We can choose to repent, to be baptized in Jesus' name, and to open ourselves to receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. While the Ethiopian is only specifically recorded as having been water baptized, we know what salvation entails from the rest of the Book of Acts. Philip had just come from preaching in Samaria, and there we find direct reference or strong inference to all the elements recorded in Acts 2:38. It is only reasonable to believe he preached the same message to the eunuch.

And it is the same message we preach today. That message requires the same response: faith, repentance from sins, baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, and receiving the Holy Spirit. Thank God salvation is for anyone, at any time, in any place. Today is a wonderful day for you to respond to the gospel.

*Have you already experienced the miracle of salvation? If not, what hinders you?*



## INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

If we lined up the people who believed in Jesus from the Gospels and the Book of Acts, they would form a uniquely disparate group. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to find many similarities in their backgrounds. The group would include rich and poor. They were from different political leanings. They were from the ruling class and the working class. Some were educated and some unlearned. All they had in common was that Jesus had saved them.

Joseph of Arimathæa would be there. He buried Jesus in his own tomb. Matthew 27:57 calls him a rich man, which fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 53:9 that Jesus would be “with the rich in his death.” Mark 15:43 calls Joseph “an honourable counsellor,” and Luke 23:50–51 calls him good and just and clarifies that he had not consented to the Council’s decisions to crucify Jesus.

But we would also find Mary Magdelene, a woman from whom Jesus cast out seven devils. We would also see two ex-demoniacs from Gadara, who had known the terror of strange and horrific spirits dwelling in their bodies, causing them to commit all manner of abominable and hideous acts. But Jesus cast out every one of those demons.

Down the line we would find Zacchaeus, who had lined his pockets with dishonest gains by cheating his own people in collecting their taxes to pay the hated Romans. But we would also find Simon the Zealot, whose sect advocated the violent overthrow of the Roman occupation. Only Jesus could join Matthew and Simon, and He did.

The apostle Paul would be there with his advanced educational “degrees” hanging on his wall. He was a man of influence and wealth. But alongside him would be the ignorant and unlearned fishermen who followed Jesus Christ. Each of these would have his or her own story to tell. Those stories would vary vastly. But each had one similar chapter, the one in which each of them responded to the gospel, and Jesus Christ forgave their sins and saved their souls.

Look around this room. We will see much the same thing: manifold stories of the grace of God. Because of that grace, it is often hard to imagine our fellow worshipers as they were before they knew Christ and before we knew them. Drug addiction, lascivious immorality, anger, and hatred—these were the hallmarks of lives we sit with each Sunday.

But the wonder of salvation is this: “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9–11). The gap between “such were” and “but ye are” is the measure of grace. The miracle of salvation is available to everyone everywhere.

### Prayer Focus

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

- To experience the miracle of salvation
- For God to help us help others experience the miracle of salvation

## 2.3

## JOPPA'S MIRACLE

## FOCUS VERSES

## Acts 9:39-41

<sup>39</sup> Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.

<sup>40</sup> But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

<sup>41</sup> And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive.

## LESSON TEXT

## Acts 9:36-42

## TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God can raise us from the dead, physically and spiritually.

## TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will believe God for miracles, even over death.



## Thinking about Last Week:

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

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

## **SG** TEACHING OUTLINE

**Icebreaker:** What is the funniest name in the Bible to you?

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

### I. TABITHA'S LIFE

» *Why is it sometimes difficult to think of people in the Bible as real people we can relate to?*

#### A. Tabitha Was Full of Good Works and Almsdeeds

» *Whom do you know like Tabitha? What makes you appreciate them so much?*

#### B. The Church in Joppa Sent for Simon Peter

#### C. Death Happens to Everyone, Even the Righteous

» *What can you do today to ensure you are ready to meet God?*

### II. PETER'S PRAYER

#### A. The People Showed Peter Evidence of Tabitha's Kindness

» *What impact do you hope to make in your world that will live beyond you? Are you diligently living to make that impact?*

#### B. Peter Prayed for Tabitha Privately; Jesus Raised Her Publicly

#### C. I Will Believe God for Miracles, Even over Death **V**

### III. GOD'S GLORY

#### A. All Joppa Heard of Tabitha's Miracle and Believed in Jesus

#### B. When God Works Miracles through My Prayers, I Will Give Him Glory

» *Could God trust you to give Him the glory when He works a miracle through your prayers?*

### **Internalizing the Message** **I**

#### **Prayer Focus**

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

- For God to work miracles in our day as He worked in the New Testament
- For God to use those miracles to help unbelievers believe

## LESSON CONNECTION

One by one they had fallen. Each one indomitable to man, but all subject to this one from Nazareth who spoke with unrivaled authority. The crowds that thronged Him looked with awestruck wonder each time Jesus reached beyond the boundaries of what they knew as “possible” and performed a miracle. One could trace His journeys by finding people in His holy wake, still amazed at the powerful conquest of so many foes such as disease, the devils, and even death itself.

Jesus had demonstrated His might over sicknesses of all kinds. The lame, the blind, the mute, and the deaf had all witnessed Him defeat their physical ailments. Even the lepers who were deemed hopeless cases by their society had known glorious reunions with their loved ones because Jesus had healed them. So broad was His dominance in the arena of sickness, the Bible summarily records: “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people” (Matthew 4:23). One moment He healed one at the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:8-9), but then “great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all” (Matthew 12:15).

Jesus had also shown His mastery of laws of nature. He demonstrated that gravity, surface tension, and density were all subject to His will when He walked across the surface of the sea. (See Matthew 14:25.) He could not be touched or seen by an angry mob but passed securely through their midst at His pleasure. (See Luke 4:29-30.) Only the power of His words was necessary to alter all laws of meteorology and oceanology when He calmed the winds and waves. This miracle was staggering to His followers. “But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!” (Matthew 8:27).

Jesus was much more than merely a man, as even the powers of Hell acknowledged. Demons frequently cried out in fear to acknowledge their understanding of His identity and His victory. “And unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God” (Mark 3:11). In settings as diverse as the synagogue in Capernaum, the home of a Canaanite woman, and the seashore of Gadara, Jesus simply commanded evil spirits to depart, and they had no choice but to leave.

But one enemy remains. Though it has already received a mortal wound at Christ’s resurrection, death still holds sway over humankind. Death is called the last enemy to be destroyed, for at the end of all things, Jesus will forever vanquish this final foe. (See I Corinthians 15:26.) Death’s demise is foretold clearly in the Scriptures: “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Revelation 21:4). The assurance we have of Christ’s ultimate triumph over death is how He managed it both in His own body and when He confronted it in others during his earthly ministry. In Joppa we have one such encounter in which Jesus showed that even this stubborn adversary took orders from Him.

# BIBLE LESSON

## I. TABITHA'S LIFE

As we read the Bible, at times we may forget that the players on Scripture's stage were real people. They were not just sermon fodder or fictionalized examples from which we can glean spiritual lessons; these were living people with real lives involving real relationships. Perhaps that is why Acts 9 begins telling Tabitha's miracle by helping us get to know her a bit. Doing so allows us to feel the emotions of those deeply moved by this miracle.

*Why is it sometimes difficult to think of people in the Bible as real people we can relate to?*

### A. Tabitha Was Full of Good Works and Almsdeeds

The Bible makes a simple statement to give us a picture of this disciple of Jesus: "Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did" (Acts 9:36). That phrase rolls off the tongue quite easily, but we must consider its significance in the lives of people in Joppa.

She was "full" of good deeds. Tabitha was not a "random act of kindness" person; she was a "routine act of kindness" person. Her acts of charity were not limited to a particular season of the year or to a select group of people. She made it the common fabric of her days to look for ways to encourage and bless other people. It is no wonder, then, that when she died, the community was collectively heartbroken. Tabitha had sown the seeds of such warm feelings by her care and kindness toward others throughout her life.

And the Bible records these were acts "she did." The Book of James had not yet been written when this compassionate woman passed away the first time, so she certainly had never read his instruction that there is no profit in simply saying: "Be ye warmed and filled" to someone who is cold and hungry. (See James 2:15-16.) Tabitha impacted her community by what she did, not simply by what she felt or said. Let us do the same in our community.

*Whom do you know like Tabitha? What makes you appreciate them so much?*

### B. The Church in Joppa Sent for Simon Peter

When Tabitha fell sick and died, those who loved her lovingly tended to her. They went through the appropriate burial preparations for her by washing her body and gently laying her in an upper chamber. This was a practical step to take, as upper chambers were generally well ventilated. Although they would not wait long to bury her, washing and placing her there minimized the challenges that accompanied the odor of death that would quickly fill the air in that warm, arid climate.

When the disciples in Joppa remembered that Simon Peter was in a nearby city of Lydda, they sent two men, asking him to

come without delay. No doubt the ministry of Peter in Lydda was important, but he left his service there immediately to seek what God might do on behalf of His faithful and caring, but lifeless servant.

### C. Death Happens to Everyone, Even the Righteous

Although death is destined for ultimate defeat, it still holds sway over the lives of men and women today. This is true both for the righteous and the unrighteous. The Scriptures inform us that redemption from sin does not exempt us from an appointment with death. “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). Every person, saved or not, will have this encounter unless Jesus comes to catch us away first.

But if we are in Christ, we need not fear death. For the righteous man or woman, death is no longer an evil intruder that breaks into our lives to snatch us away from happiness and loved ones. Instead, death is an obedient servant of God that comes to usher us from a land of suffering and heartache to one of perfect bliss, eternal reunions, and a place where we will worship our Savior face to face. God stepped in to grant Tabitha more time on earth to continue her ministry, but that is not always the case. We must recognize that at some later, unidentified date, even Tabitha went home to her eternal reward. Death happens to all, which is why we must all be ready to meet the Lord when we die.

*What can you do today to ensure you are ready to meet God?*

## II. PETER’S PRAYER

However, on this occasion, death had to bow its grisly knees to Jesus. Up to this point, we have no scriptural record that anyone had been raised from the dead since Jesus’ ascension. Peter and the other apostles had seen the miraculous power of God work through them, but no one had prayed for a dead person and seen the person raised back to life... yet. What was soon to unfold in an upper chamber in Joppa would cement in the church’s development that just as Jesus had commanded death, so also could His followers as He directs.

### A. The People Showed Peter Evidence of Tabitha’s Kindness

Upon Peter’s arrival, he was greeted by a common scene in those days. A large group of mourners, comprised largely of a group of widows, was gathered around the body. Their grief could be heard in the street below. Peter ascended the stairs and likely became the instant center of attention. First, he was a well-known apostle, whose fame was renowned in the church. Second, they were all clinging to hope his prayers would provide a remedy for this tragedy. Those who gathered began to show Peter the coats and garments Tabitha had made for them during her life, possibly attempting to impress on him how desperately they needed her to be resurrected.

Let's pause to consider what tributes to our lives we will leave behind. When our appointment with death comes, what will people have to show of the impact we have made in them? What will live beyond us, whether tangible or not, that will testify to our intentional investment in others? Tabitha had a sizable collection of such testimonies, and we should seek to do so as well.

### **B. Peter Prayed for Tabitha Privately; Jesus Raised Her Publicly**

After watching the widows' quilt show and listening to them testify of Tabitha's charitable life, Peter sent them all from the room so he could pray in private. Some miracles were performed publicly before the eyes of the crowd, but in this instance, Peter wanted to be left alone to pray. Maybe he was not praying for Tabitha's healing at that point; instead, he may have been seeking God as to whether it was His will to raise her up. Perhaps Peter received an assurance it was indeed God's will. At some point in his private prayer, he merely turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, arise." Immediately she opened her eyes, saw Peter, sat up, and was reunited with the saints of the church.

We see no hint of sensationalism in Peter's ministry there. He did not ensure everyone could see him. No theatrical unveiling of Tabitha occurred after her resurrection, but just a simple calling out to the mourners below and a glad reunion. At times God will work a miracle in the eyes of the crowd, but even then, it is so Christ will be glorified, not the person He chooses to use to pray the prayer. Simon Peter was not greater than the Spirit-filled believers who were already gathered there. Signs, including raising the dead, were to follow them just as well as him. For all of Peter's perceived brashness in Scripture, he showed profound humility here in seeking and doing God's will before an audience of one... the One.


### **C. I Will Believe God for Miracles, Even over Death**

Each Spirit-filled believer has been endowed with supernatural power, which we must exercise in the will of God, as children of God. We have the assurance: "All things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23). Witnessing the miraculous in answer to our prayers is part of our spiritual inheritance. "And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:17-18). Though not mentioned specifically, seeing the dead raised is also possible for believers today, and manifold testimonies of this miraculous demonstration exist in our world today.

## **III. GOD'S GLORY**

God should and will get the glory for all He does. This fact is immutable and established in God's Word. In fact, He is rather protective of His glory. "I am the LORD: that is my name: and

*What impact do you hope to make in your world that will live beyond you? Are you diligently living to make that impact?*

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

my glory will I not give to another” (Isaiah 42:8). When the miraculous occurs, we must take great care to ensure no one but the source of that power is magnified, lest destructive pride worm its way into our hearts.

### **A. All Joppa Heard of Tabitha’s Miracle and Believed in Jesus**

We can only imagine how word spread throughout the seaside town of Joppa when a lady so well respected by its citizens was raised from the dead. In every market and shop, talk was saturated with: “Did you hear about Tabitha? Did you hear what happened?” And certainly, some would have discounted it rather than believe, but the Bible records that many became believers because of this miracle. (See Acts 9:42.)

When Tabitha walked down the streets of her town in the remaining years of her life, the influence of this miracle only expanded. She was known as the “lady who died and came back” by those who otherwise did not know her. Her identity became intrinsically linked with her testimony, and her testimony was intrinsically linked with Jesus’ power.

### **B. When God Works Miracles through My Prayers, I Will Give Him Glory**

God answers prayer. We know and believe that promise. And it should be and will be that, at times, amazing miracles will happen in response to our personal prayers. Those occasions are because God has compassion on the needy and chooses to magnify His own name, not ours. People should talk about what God did, not who was praying when He did it.

Peter had already perfected the discipline we must learn of directing men’s applause to God’s praise. Just as he avoided men’s acclaim in Joppa, he had previously shown us how to respond when the man who could not walk was healed at the Gate Beautiful. “And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon’s, greatly wondering. And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?... And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all” (Acts 3:11-12, 16). All glory belongs to God for the wonderful things He has done and will do.

*Could God trust you to give Him the glory when He works a miracle through your prayers?*



# INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

*A supplemental image and video are available in the Resource Kit. *

It was just an “ordinary” church service in a small church in a small town in the Midwest. A group of believers gathered that night in the old building featuring asbestos siding and more than a few needed improvements. The piano was out of tune, the floor furnace glowed red hot during the winter, and plaster was falling from the ceiling over the side of the platform. Gratefully, in years to come a new building was built, but on that fateful night, the church was still utilizing the old one.

And Clyde was there. Clyde was an elder in the church who had served God faithfully for decades. He was present at every service, sitting on the third pew on the left-hand side, sporting his freshly pressed “dressy” overalls (which meant they had not faded yet), a white shirt, and a black string tie. This was his Sunday “go to meeting” attire.

As the service was ending, with worshipers gathered around the altar, the pastor suddenly sprinted off the platform. From his vantage point he saw what had happened behind the backs of the rest of the congregation. Clyde had collapsed in his pew. He suffered a seizure related to his diabetes. His blood sugar had suddenly dropped dangerously low. His family and other concerned friends rushed to gather around him, while others began to lift their prayers toward heaven. Clyde’s son tried to get some sugar between his clinched jaws to counteract what was causing the seizure.

Then it happened—no more breath, no pulse, eyes rolled back, lips and fingertips turning black. This ordeal did not continue for a minute or two, but for over fifteen minutes. During that quarter of an hour that felt like forever, Clyde had no respiration of any kind. One member of the congregation who worked for a local funeral home notated the time of death for the purpose of records. As the reality set in, the pastor called the church to fervent prayer.

Then Clyde inhaled deeply, opened his eyes, and sat up, protesting the crowd of people around him and all the attention being given him. He stood, completely healed, as the congregation erupted in celebration. He drove himself home from the service shortly thereafter and was out working in his garden at six o’clock the next morning.

This account did not happen in first-century Joppa; it happened in the 1970s in Illinois. The lesson writer can share the story because he was there and Clyde was his grandfather. Many others could have written this lesson and included their own accounts of the dead being raised all around the world in more recent years. The same God who worked in that upper chamber through Simon Peter still reigns today and works through His children. Death, the last enemy to be defeated, is already subject to God’s power, and we should never be frightened to speak against it in the name of Jesus.

## **Prayer Focus**

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

- For God to work miracles in our day as He worked in the New Testament
- For God to use those miracles to help unbelievers believe

## 2.4

## PRISON BREAK

## FOCUS VERSES

## Acts 12:7-9

<sup>7</sup> And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.

<sup>8</sup> And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.

<sup>9</sup> And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.

## LESSON TEXT

## Acts 12:1-17

## TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God takes care of His children.

## TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I believe God will take care of His people, even by miraculous intervention.



## Thinking about Last Week:

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

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

## **SG** TEACHING OUTLINE

**Icebreaker:** Where is the most unusual place you have fallen asleep?

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

### I. GOD DELIVERED HIS CHILD

- A. God Miraculously Delivered Peter from His Chains
  - » *How would you have responded if you were Simon Peter?*
- B. God Can Deliver You out of Trouble **V**

### II. GOD LED HIS CHILD

- A. God Led Peter out of Prison to Freedom
  - » *How do you think this miracle happened? Did God keep the guards asleep, make Peter invisible, or both?*
- B. God Can Lead You away from Trouble
  - » *What has God delivered you from that also calls you to walk a different way?*

### III. GOD'S GLORY

- A. God Led Peter to the House Where the Church Was Praying
- B. God Used Peter's Testimony to Build the Church's Faith
  - » *What does this story teach us about how human the early church was? Can you relate to their faith and doubt?*
- C. God Can Use Your Miracle to Bless Someone Else
  - » *What have you been through that has been a testimony to others for the glory of God?*

### **Internalizing the Message** **I**

#### **Prayer Focus**

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

- To have faith to believe God will work miracles
- For God to help us share our testimony of what He has done and build others' faith

## LESSON CONNECTION

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**B**rett left for college, thinking he was prepared for everything. He had filled out all the admissions forms, bought his books, and moved into his dorm room—all one-hundred forty-four square feet of it. He knew there would be long classes and short nights, pop quizzes and final exams. There were even rumors about foosball battles between freshmen and upperclassmen. He was ready. Bring on college life.

But nobody prepared him for the ninety difficult days his body would need to adjust to the radical schedule change of college life. Brett doesn't remember much of the first three months of freshman year because he slept through them. He could fall asleep everywhere. He fell asleep during classes. He fell asleep during chapel services. He fell asleep at church. He fell asleep during his job orientation with Budget Rent a Car. There were just ten trainees sitting around a conference room table learning about corporate discounts on mid-sized cars, and Brett's consciousness was long gone.

Somehow, he got the job, and one day on the way to work, he started to doze in traffic. He spied out a McDonald's parking lot where he could nap before beginning his shift. He simply had to drive through one intersection, turn right into the parking lot, and he was free to snooze. But before he got to the light, he dozed off again and woke up when his 1997 Dodge Neon bumped the much newer, much nicer Lexus stopped in front of him.

Brett was going to school full-time and working second shift full-time. He tried going to sleep earlier and waking up later. He would have hooked up a Mountain Dew IV in his arm if it would help, but he just could not adjust to the new school schedule for those first few months. He was a professional dozer.

But Simon Peter, not Brett, wins the Golden Pillow trophy. On top of a mountain, Jesus was transfigured (completely changed) right in front of him. Jesus' face shone brighter than the sun, and Moses and Elijah, two prominent Old Testament men of God, came all the way from eternity to stand next to Jesus on the mountain, and Peter missed most of it because he fell asleep.

Do you remember the Garden of Gethsemane? The very night Jesus was arrested, tried, and the next day crucified, Peter fell asleep. But this time is even more surprising than those two. The next day was Peter's big day, but his big day was not his graduation day or his wedding day; it was execution day. And Simon Peter was soundly snoozing in the prison on Martyrdom Eve. No doubt he had prayed for God to deliver him, now he slept as he waited for God to answer.

# BIBLE LESSON

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## I. GOD DELIVERED HIS CHILD

Throughout the Old Testament, God is consistently known as a deliverer. The psalmist praised God: “Blessed be the LORD my strength, . . . my goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust; who subdueth my people under me” (Psalm 144:1–2). Further, notice this encouraging list describing God’s identity: “The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower” (Psalm 18:2).

Nothing changed in our unchanging God when He came in flesh. The prophets foretold of Jesus in similar language: “And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins” (Romans 11:26–27). Our Savior is our deliverer, and He has repeatedly demonstrated this characteristic when His children have been in trouble.

### A. God Miraculously Delivered Peter from His Chains

Peter was certainly in trouble. The king of Judea, Herod Agrippa, had put Peter into prison. Herod Agrippa was the grandson of Herod the Great, who tried to have Jesus killed after the wise men presented themselves to him concerning Jesus’ birth. (See Matthew 2:1–18.) While Herod Agrippa was somewhat sympathetic to the Jews during the Roman occupancy (since he was himself a Jewish citizen while also a citizen of Rome), he was not at all favorable toward Christianity. He was personally responsible for the execution of James, the brother of John, and reveled in the joy this act produced among the Jewish religious elite.

Herod Agrippa decided to continue his murderous pattern by having Simon Peter arrested as well, intending to carry out his execution sometime after Easter. To secure him, Peter was entrusted into the care of four squadrons called quaternions, consisting of four soldiers each. These four squadrons likely took turns guarding Peter around the clock. During a quaternion’s shift, two of the members would be chained to their prisoner, and the other two would stand guard outside his cell. They were required to guard him with their very lives. If he escaped, they paid for his life with their own.

The night before Peter was to be brought out for public execution, God sent His angel to intervene. The reason is made quite clear: “Prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him” (Acts 12:5). That angel entered Peter’s cell unseen and unheard, while Peter was asleep between the two guards chained to him. The miraculous power of God was on full display when a light filled the darkness of that prison, yet

no one awakened, neither Peter nor his guards. The angel struck Peter on his side to awaken him and commanded him to stand. When he did, the chains wrapped around him fell to the ground. We can only imagine the commotion created when the chains fell unimpeded to the floor of his cell. Still, those tasked with guarding him were kept in their stupor by the will of God. One moment Peter was bound; the next moment he was loosed.

*How would you have responded if you were Simon Peter?*

### **B. God Can Deliver You out of Trouble**

Today manifold testimonies exist of those who have experienced exactly that type of miraculous touch. Whether an angel was involved may be uncertain, but the chains that consistently bound them fell immediately powerless in their lives. One moment a chemical addiction wrapped around a repentant man, and the next moment he was permanently delivered when he was baptized. One moment depression wrapped like a chain around the heart of a child of God, and the next moment the joy of the Lord shattered it. One moment anxiety tormented a lady's mind, and the next moment trust in God severed the chain as it fell noisily to the ground. One moment of deliverance for these and countless other situations shout the testimony that God can deliver us yet today.

#### **Teacher Option:**

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

We must embrace this truth that God is still a deliverer, not just for Simon Peter and others, but for us as well. God is no respecter of persons, and the accounts we have read and heard of His delivering power are meant to help us believe in what He can do for us. He is not merely a deliverer; He is *my* deliverer.

## **II. GOD LED HIS CHILD**

When God has affected deliverance in our lives, we still need God's direction. Having been set free, we now need an answer to the question: "Now what, Lord?" Peter was no different. He stood between two soundly slumbering Roman soldiers, with two more just outside the door. He could move freely, but where should he go? What should he do now? If he just stood there rejoicing in the chains at his feet, at some point he would be discovered and bound once again. But Peter had no more idea how to proceed now than he had when the chains still bit into his wrists and ankles. God's word of deliverance needed God's work of direction.

### **A. God Led Peter out of Prison to Freedom**

The angel instructed Peter to get dressed and to follow him. Then the angel began to lead the way. It was hard for Peter to believe what happened next, for they passed through both the first and the second ward. These would appear to have been areas of the prison progressively deeper behind the walls. How did they simply walk out? Were the guards all blinded? Were the doors all unlocked? Did they simply pass through the walls as Jesus did after His resurrection? We are uncertain, but we do

know that when this duo approached the main iron gate of the prison that separated it from the city of Jerusalem, that massive restraint opened to them by the invisible hand of God. Simon and the angel walked about a block, and then the angel departed from him with no further instructions.

*How do you think this miracle happened? Did God keep the guards asleep, make Peter invisible, or both?*

How silly would it have been for Peter to have resisted following the angel? It would have been the height of arrogance for him to have said, "I know you brought light into my darkness, and I know you broke the chains off my arms and legs. I know you sang a divine lullaby to the guards so they slept through the noise, and I appreciate it all. However, I am pretty sure I know my way around this prison better than you. Thanks for your help. I will take it from here."

## **B. God Can Lead You away from Trouble**

Similarly, it shows a complete lack of spiritual awareness for a child of God to express gratitude to God with one breath for the miracle of freedom and then express independence from God's leading with the next. We have been miraculously delivered, but we are still completely reliant on God to show us how to proceed, how to live, and where to go. God did not destroy Peter's chains so he could be recaptured before the sun rose on his execution day. Likewise, God did not deliver us so we could wander back into dangerous paths that will lead to our destruction. The God who delivers also directs.

*What has God delivered you from that also calls you to walk a different way?*

## **III. GOD'S GLORY**

The Almighty is quite protective of His glory: "I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another" (Isaiah 42:8). When God performs the miraculous, it is not so the recipient can be held in awe. Neither is it so the one who prayed the prayer may be exalted. Rather, it is always so His name may be praised and His people may be strengthened.

### **A. God Led Peter to the House Where the Church Was Praying**

Though the angel disappeared from Peter's sight only a short distance from the prison from which he had been set free, still the Holy Spirit in Peter continued to lead him. As he pondered all that just happened, God led him to the home of Mary, John Mark's mother. There was no way Peter could have known the believers were gathered there at that moment praying for his deliverance. But God knew. And God knew having Peter arrive was visible evidence that He had heard and answered their prayers. No doubt this miraculous answer would boost the faith of these relatively new Christians.

### **B. God Used Peter's Testimony to Build the Church's Faith**

What happened next is almost comical. A young girl named Rhoda heard someone knocking at the gate. Imagine her trepidation as she stepped out of a prayer meeting to see who

was at the gate, considering James had been killed and now Peter was in mortal danger. Were the guards after them next?

Soon she heard and recognized Peter's voice. But she didn't open the door for him; she ran back into the house to testify that Peter was at the gate. Just as she was surprised to find Peter outside the prayer meeting, she was equally surprised to find doubt inside it. No one believed her. "Don't bother us with some fanciful story of Peter being outside. We're too busy praying for his release from prison to hear such things."

*What does this story teach us about how human the early church was? Can you relate to their faith and doubt?*

Gratefully, Peter continued to knock until the disruption became too much and the people opened the gate to quiet the matter. Their mouths were agape as they looked into the face of the answer to their prayers. When Peter recounted to them the light in the prison, the chains falling off, the guards being blinded, and the doors opening, their praise must have filled the house that just moments earlier had been filled with their prayers. Provision turns petitions into praise breaks.

### **C. God Can Use Your Miracle to Bless Someone Else**

We always must remember that God's works in our lives are not only for our good; they are also meant to encourage those around us. When God miraculously delivers you, and others witness His divine work, it makes a lasting impact on them. Those inside the body of Christ are encouraged to believe God for the needs in their own lives. Those outside the household of faith can be convinced God is real and is also interested in them by observing what He does for you.

To have such a testimony, however, we must be willing to allow God to lead us through difficult valleys. It is self-evident Peter could not have been delivered from prison unless he was first in prison. Divine healing cannot occur unless there is sickness. Provision does not exist where there is no need. Deliverance does not come unless first there is a dilemma. Children of God must trust Him enough to follow willingly where He leads, knowing that on the other side of the test will be a testimony that will bless both them and those who witness their miracle.

*What have you been through that has been a testimony to others for the glory of God?*



# INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

*A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. *

**N**o one will ever convince Tyler Beddoes that God does not still miraculously deliver people. In 2015 Tyler was serving on the police force in Spanish Fork, Utah. On a quiet Saturday in March of that year, he was having lunch with his wife and kids when he heard a call over his radio about an automobile accident. Tyler said he had a “gut feeling” he should leave his home and meet the responding officers at the site where it was reported a car was overturned in the Spanish Fork River.

When he and his fellow officers arrived at the accident scene, they began to walk down the riverbank. They all reported simultaneously hearing a clear voice calling to them. They agreed the voice was from an adult female calmly repeating, “Help me. Help me.” Naturally, they all rushed toward the vehicle to rescue whoever was alive inside. When they had splashed through the water and looked inside, they discovered the driver, Jennifer, had died on impact nearly fourteen hours earlier. In the back seat, however, still alive though unconscious was Jennifer’s eighteen-month-old daughter, Lily. The officers were able to save her, but only because of a voice, Tyler would say, with no explanation other than divine intervention.

The prison officers in Acts 12 testified of a miraculous deliverance, but it cost them their lives. Herod was incredulous at their explanation and ordered their execution for what he perceived as their dereliction of duty. Officer Beddoes, on the other hand, found new hope through his miraculous moment. Like many in law enforcement, he had seen so much dysfunction and brokenness, he had stated he was “on the edge of a cliff” spiritually. Experiencing God’s direct intervention to save Lily convinced him once again that “God helps us, sends help for us, and watches over us” (Faithwire.com, “Only Explanation Was Divine Intervention”).

Miracles are much more than simply historical content of the Bible. They are ongoing realities in our world today. Each day God intervenes in the lives of people in ways so far beyond our human abilities, they confound experts. Because God’s intervention is unexplainable, some critics deny it even occurs. While we certainly marvel at God’s power, we should never be surprised when God performs miracles. It is His very nature to do so. They are only miracles from our limited and earthly perspective. To God, they are merely acts of His will, which is not bound by laws of nature or time. He still delivers captives from prisons of all kinds.

## **Prayer Focus**

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

- To have faith to believe God will work miracles
- For God to help us share our testimony of what He has done and build others’ faith

# 3.1

## ET TU, JUDAS?

### FOCUS VERSES

John 18:4-7

<sup>4</sup>Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye?

<sup>5</sup>They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them.

<sup>6</sup>As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground.

<sup>7</sup>Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth.

### LESSON TEXT

John 18:1-11

### TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God loves everyone, even those who reject Him.

### TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

By His grace, I will stay close to God, no matter what.



### Series Overview:

After Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, He was betrayed, arrested, forsaken, tried, and crucified. John 18-19 chronicle His final day as He willingly carried our cross to be our sacrifice for our sins, leading participants to understand the basis for salvation.

## **SG** TEACHING OUTLINE

**Icebreaker:** In your opinion, who is the greatest villain in the Bible?

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

### I. JUDAS' BETRAYAL

- A. Judas Was One of Jesus' Hand-picked Disciples
- B. Judas Was Disillusioned and He Betrayed Jesus
  - » *Can you recall a time when Jesus worked in a way you did not understand? How did you respond in that time?*
- C. I Will Trust Jesus and Not Be Disillusioned
  - » *If you did not know the end of Judas's story, what do you think of him so far? How are we like him sometimes?*

### II. JESUS' RESPONSE

- A. Jesus Revealed Himself **V** **I**
- B. Jesus Was More Concerned about His Disciples Than His Own Life
  - » *Although the governmental and religious leaders feared Jesus was a violent revolutionary, how does His response in the Garden reveal He was not?*
- C. I Am Awed by Jesus' Compassion

### III. OTHERS' RESPONSE

- A. The Guards Arrested Jesus and Led Him Away
- B. All the Disciples Forsook Jesus and Fled
  - » *If you were one of the disciples, what would you have done that night?*
- C. By His Grace I Will Stay Close to God, No Matter What

### **Internalizing the Message**

- » *How could Jim have thought about Jesus' refusal to heal while still being the Savior?*

### **Prayer Focus**

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

- For God to help us keep our faith when we do not understand His ways
- For God to give us compassion for others whose faith fails

## LESSON CONNECTION

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Most people have some idea of what it means to be a success and possible ways to achieve those goals. Not achieving personal ideas of success becomes a mark of failure. A simple search for perseverance stories of successful people provides many examples of people who followed their dreams in the face of insurmountable odds. Motivational speakers and life coaches use these stories to help sustain entrepreneurs through the difficult times when quitting may seem like the only option.

Jack Canfield and Mark Hansen believed inspirational stories would help their readers find peace in difficult times, but they received 130 rejection letters from publishers. Their agent dropped them after the hundredth such letter. They persevered and have now sold over 500 million books globally in their *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series.

Walt Disney failed as a cartoonist for a Kansas City newspaper because they did not think he was creative enough. His animation company failed, so he took his last few dollars and headed to Hollywood, California. The movie brain trusts said Mickey Mouse would fail to attract viewers. Mr. Disney persisted, and today his entertainment conglomerate is recognized worldwide.

Colonel Sanders started his fried chicken business after he began collecting social security benefits. For thirteen years he worked to grow his business through many trying times. Eventually he sold his company for two million dollars to folks who would make Kentucky Fried Chicken another globally known franchise.

Howard Schultz dreamed of a chain of coffee stores that could attract devoted followers. Unfortunately, banks did not agree with his vision and business plan. Over two hundred financial institutions turned him down for a loan. He finally found private investors who fronted him the \$400,000 to get started. Most people would be quite satisfied if they had invested \$10,000 in the initial stock offer—Starbucks' stock value would now be worth about \$4 million.

All dreams do not end in success. Some estimate as many as 80 percent of new restaurants will fail within the first five years after opening. Yet chefs and their business partners seek to make their innovations pay off where most people fail.

When we read the account of young Rabbi Jesus' invitation for twelve men to join Him in His travels, we can only wonder what they saw as the outcome of their decision to follow Him. They came with expectations of what the Messiah would be and how He would behave once He announced His plan. A study of Jesus' final days reveals some of the challenges His disciples had when He made His plans known. The study calls contemporary disciples to persist in following Jesus, regardless of the gap between the promise that His kingdom would have no end and the sometimes grim outlook of our current realities.

# BIBLE LESSON

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## I. JUDAS' BETRAYAL

### A. Judas Was One of Jesus' Hand-picked Disciples

Jesus came to fulfill God's will. He did not come with His own words, deeds, or mission. The plan to restore all things included Jesus' death and resurrection as well as sharing that mission with humanity. Chosen disciples would abide with Him while He embedded His word in them. They too would have an effective prayer life, exhibit love that came out of the Word, and possess an emotional climate characterized by joy. (See John 15:1-12.) The only way Jesus' followers could be assured they could fulfill their God-called purpose was to remember Jesus had chosen them (John 15:16).

John's Gospel begins Jesus' earthly ministry with His baptism and disciple selection. While John only recorded the specific calls of Andrew, Simon Peter, Philip, and Nathaniel (John 1:40-51), he reported the total core disciples as twelve in agreement with the other Gospel writers (John 6:67-71). This inner circle began believing when they saw Jesus turn water to wine (John 2:11). After encountering many more of Jesus' signs and teachings, they received a powerful commission to make disciples. Jesus picked Judas to be one of those chosen men.

### B. Judas Was Disillusioned and He Betrayed Jesus

Contemporary readers can read John's twenty-one Gospel chapters in a fairly short period of time. When we read the account slowly and digest each scene, we realize the disciples had to unlearn so many things. Nearly every chapter illustrates moments of confusion that challenged their concept of what the prophesied, long-awaited Messiah would be.

Judas was there when Jesus asked the disciples who people thought He was. The crowd thought Jesus was a resurrected prophet. The disciples knew better after having seen so many signs and having heard Jesus teach with authority. They also had divine revelation: Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. This new awareness highlighted both learning and misunderstanding. Jesus would not be the Messiah they expected. He would redeem and restore all things by dying, becoming the sacrifice for all humanity. No wonder they were confused and would abandon Jesus.

*Can you recall a time when Jesus worked in a way you did not understand? How did you respond in that time?*

Judas could wait no longer for Jesus to take the lead and become Israel's long-anticipated Messiah. Passover was the right time to either expose Jesus as a fraud or force His hand to fully disclose His divine authority. Judas allowed an evil spirit to guide his thoughts and actions rather than trust Jesus. Jesus would not kick out the Romans and keep the disciples' purse full. Jesus' mission sprang from a different place than a downtrodden, frustrated man's quest for vindication.

### C. I Will Trust Jesus and Not Be Disillusioned

The same Jesus who called the twelve apostles still calls us to follow Him today. The similarities do not stop there. While contemporary disciples have the advantage of reading the end of John's Gospel, we still must walk by faith and trust Jesus. The disciples' stories have been written, but ours are still being written.

With delight we have experienced the wonder of the cross, the empty tomb, the ascension hill, and the upper room. The indescribable joy, peace, and hope that come with new birth help us turn our backs on past pain, failure, and shame as we walk forward with our King's purpose and honor. Disciples marvel at the power that comes with prayer and worship.

But every disciple comes to the same garden moment as Judas. Jesus' ways differ from our expectations. Unexpected losses, ministry disappointments, failure of others, and the long-delayed return of Christ can cause disillusionment to eclipse our joy. Evil thoughts spring unbid to mind. Is Jesus really true? Is the Word really trustworthy? These questions call disciples back to simple faith. While His plans may not match expectations today any more than they did for Judas, we must trust Jesus. We choose to walk by faith.

*If you did not know the end of Judas's story, what would you think of him so far? How are we like him sometimes?*

## II. JESUS' RESPONSE

### A. Jesus Revealed Himself

Jerusalem stood on red alert at every major festival. Each time the city's population swelled with pilgrims to celebrate God's work in the past, Israel looked forward with hope for God to free them from pagan forces again. That Passover was no different. At previous festivals Jesus had shared His offer of new life with those in attendance. At Tabernacles He announced He was the living water (John 7:37-38) and the light (John 8:12).

After Judas disappeared from the other disciples, he showed up at the familiar retreat garden just to identify His one-time teacher for the officers and soldiers. Judas played only a minor role that night. He did not have to corner Jesus. Just as Jesus took the initiative to call and identify Himself to His disciples, He took the initiative to disclose Himself to the "peacekeepers." They came with lanterns, torches, and weapons. Jesus spoke first with a simple question: "Whom seek ye?" Since it was now time to be glorified, He revealed Himself as Jesus of Nazareth (John 18:4-5).

God's self-revelation always calls for a response. In this case the arresting party could not help but respond appropriately; they went backward and fell to the ground. They came with swords and spears. Jesus simply spoke words of revelation. They involuntarily assumed a posture of worship. His words always have more power and authority than the weapons formed against Him.

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

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

## B. Jesus Was More Concerned about His Disciples Than His Own Life

After the soldiers composed themselves from their fall, Jesus asked them again whom they sought. It seems Jesus had to remind them of their mission. They answered the same as before, “Jesus of Nazareth” (John 18:7). He revealed the second time that He was the one. The soldiers may have had weapons and legal authority, but Jesus had the power to direct history for His eternal purposes. He cared for all humanity more than Himself. Jesus directed the scene by commanding, not asking, them to let the disciples go their way. He had commanded sickness to flee, nature to be still, and the tomb to give up the dead, so He now simply issued the command to spare His followers from suffering with Him at that time (John 18:8).

*Although the governmental and religious leaders feared Jesus was a violent revolutionary, how does His response in the Garden reveal He was not?*

## C. I Am Awed by Jesus' Compassion

Western culture lives by an accepted public value: everyone has to look out for number one. While the ancient world would not have seen individualism as an option because life was so fragile, they would have believed you have to look out for your own clan. To do anything else would place the extended family at risk. Jesus lived the opposite. He willingly laid down His own life for His friends as the greatest act of love (John 15:12-13).

As we read the story from a two-thousand-year distance, we know Jesus' death was for whosoever will, rather than just the eleven at His side on that day. Jesus' arrest calls us to make a choice: will we be disappointed by Jesus' kingdom plan and betray Him, or will we kneel in awe of His compassion for all humanity? Jesus refuses to limit His offer of grace.

## III. OTHERS' RESPONSE

### A. The Guards Arrested Jesus and Led Him Away

Soldiers follow their officers' orders. Chief priests and Pharisees both had their selfish reasons for arresting Jesus. By external observation one would assume the leaders wrote of a successful mission in their journals that night. Perhaps they even thought about handing out awards and promotions for taking the young Rabbi with no collateral damage. The threat to Temple peace would finally be over until the next messianic pretender galvanized the crowd against the establishment. But for now, they had quelled Jesus' supposed revolution. Pharisees congratulated each other that they had defended the truth with only a momentary compromise with the priests.

The guards bound Jesus and took Him to their masters for trial. They thought they had followed orders. They could go home to kiss their wives and drink a celebratory cup of wine. Their swords and consciences were clean. They had not needed to resort to violence to quell the mob.

## B. All the Disciples Forsook Jesus and Fleed

As the universe-altering drama unfolded in front of them, the disciples were left at a loss as to what they could do. They certainly wrestled with Judas' defection. They remembered the Master's warning that Satan would sift them, and they too would falter in their resolve to stand by Jesus. Peter's untrained sword slice had only reduced the force against them by one ear. They had heard Jesus' command to let them go, but they had no training in retreat. They had exercised authority over demons and sickness; now they only had puny efforts to defend Jesus.

*If you were one of the disciples, what would you have done that night?*

Jesus' last words in their favorite place of rest would ring in their ears for days to come. Judas was wrong to betray Jesus, but Peter was wrong too. The sword needed to be put away. Jesus was ready to drink the painful, bitter cup. He alone would take the step toward the cross.

Judas betrayed.

Soldiers arrested.

Disciples fled.

## C. By His Grace I Will Stay Close to God, No Matter What

In epic changing moments, old scripts and strategies fail to provide useful guidance for moving forward. Like He called those original disciples, the Master has called and blessed us in many ways. In repentance and baptism, we have left all other allegiances behind. He has shown His goodness in the Holy Spirit that goes beyond what we could ever hope to experience. In every season of our lives, we have experienced the wonder of answered prayer and peace that passes understanding. Each passing year adds to the legacy of grace.

Yet we know more challenges will present themselves. Some challenges arise from occurrences like aging and storms. Other problems flow from being part of a broken culture around us. Still other crises explode out of moments when the light within us clashes with darkness around us as we have an opportunity to suffer for Jesus' sake.

Standing on the shoulders of past generations of believers gives us the advantage of countless witnesses to God's perseverance in caring for His people. Unlike the disciples that especially dark night, we know how the story of Jesus' trial ends: He lives. And He filled the same doubting disciples with His Spirit and proved Himself faithful as they lived among a hostile Roman Empire. God has always graced His faithful people in difficult times. We stand committed to the Savior regardless of the dangers we face, for nothing has the capacity to separate us from God's love (Romans 8:38–39).



## INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Jim had lived his whole life as a Jesus disciple. He did not experience rebellious days during his youth, as did some. Instead, his transition from childhood to adult life could be viewed as a growing commitment to congregational ministry. He generally answered calls to serve with a quick yes and steps to further prepare for new obligations.

Jim's greatest faith crisis came when a severe autoimmune disease left him basically paralyzed in a hospital care unit. His body's decreasing ability to function was replaced with ever-increasing pain. When the neurologist presented the diagnosis, Jim's friends and family joined him in praying for miraculous healing. They all believed God would show Himself mighty once again. Surely an immediate recovery would bring God the greatest glory and would give meaning to the illness. God said no.

With God's refusal to answer the faith cries of so many faithful saints, the suffering disciple began to ask a series of questions. Where was God's loving care when Jim needed it most? Why wasn't his life and ministry worth as much as others who had received miracles when they needed them? Didn't his life of faith and faithfulness count for something? How could God get glory from leaving him useless in the bed, unable to care for himself and his wife who had selflessly followed him in ministry moves?

Jim's hospital room looked different from the Garden where the disciples abandoned Jesus, but the crisis was the same. Jim had to choose to stay close to Jesus even when Jesus would not be the Healer he thought his Savior would be.

What are some commitments disciples can make today to guide them through faith crises that come in the future? How can disciples face challenging, faith-shattering questions when they do occur? Share your answers to these questions with other believers. Learn from their faith crises testimonies. Make a commitment to stay close to Jesus regardless of the crises you may face in the future.

*How could Jim have thought about Jesus' refusal to heal while still being the Savior?*

### **Prayer Focus**

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

- For God to help us keep our faith when we do not understand His ways
- For God to give us compassion for others whose faith fails

# 3.2

## EVEN PETER

### FOCUS VERSE

John 18:27

Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew.

### LESSON TEXT

John 18:15-27

### TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God forgives us of all our sins.

### TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will repent any time I sin or let God down.



### Thinking about Last Week:

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

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

## **SG** TEACHING OUTLINE

**Icebreaker:** With which of Jesus' original twelve disciples do you most identify?

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

### I. PETER: THE SHEPHERD-IN-TRAINING

- A. Jesus Prophesied Peter's Martyrdom
- B. Peter's Faithlessness
- C. By God's Grace, I Will Keep My Promises to God **V**
  - » *What persecution have you faced for your faith? How did you respond?*

### II. PETER AFTER PENTECOST

- » *What made the difference between denying Jesus to a few in a courtyard and preaching Jesus to a crowd in the streets?*
- A. Peter's Faithfulness
- B. Peter's Struggle between Faithlessness and Faithfulness
  - » *Can you relate to Peter's struggle between faithless and faithful? How do we ensure we remain faithful in that struggle?*
- C. Though I Struggle, I Will Repent and Be Faithful

### III. PETER'S LATER YEARS

- A. Pastor Peter in Rome
  - » *Think of the most dangerous city in the world for Christians. How would you answer God if He asked you to move there to make disciples for Him?*
- B. Peter Kept His Promise
- C. I Will Remain
  - » *How do you feel knowing Jesus is on your side, fighting for you, and His sacrifice on Calvary continually intercedes for you?*

### **Internalizing the Message** **I**

#### **Prayer Focus**

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

- For God's grace to remain when I am tempted to run away
- For God's mercy for the times I do run away

## LESSON CONNECTION

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In Luke 15, we meet the good shepherd, who left ninety-nine safe sheep to look for the one missing sheep. But have you heard of the good shepherd's younger brother, the bad shepherd? The bad shepherd appeared to be good. He feared for the safety of his flock, so he built a wall around his sheep while they were grazing on the mountain. The wall saved the bad shepherd from one trouble that often plagued his older brother: sheep wandering off from the flock and being lost.

The bad shepherd's sheep did not wander. They could not wander. However, he was too lazy to lead them to other pastures once the green grass within the wall was gone. Several of the sheep starved to death. Clearly there was a better way to shepherd. The following summer, the bad shepherd found that one of his sheep had fallen from a small mountain cliff, breaking her leg. He knew he could nurse her back to health with a couple of months of careful attention. On the other hand, had he nursed her back to health, the sheep might believe that there were no real consequences to jumping off cliffs. She might jump again—worse yet, she might even convince other sheep to jump with her.

These worries whirred in his mind, and the bad shepherd carefully gathered the wounded sheep in his arms and carried her off to another mountain, far away from the others. He left her there, hoping she would heal herself and realize the true costs of cliff-jumping. One morning, the bad shepherd counted his thinning flock of sheep and found that one was missing. Somehow, one had wandered. He asked his brother what he should do.

“Leave the flock behind because those sheep are safe, and search for the lost one,” the brother advised. Yet the bad shepherd felt unsure. What if the lost sheep did not want to be found? If the sheep wanted to be with the flock, he would never have wandered away.

The bad shepherd made up his mind: he would not wander after lost sheep. If they wandered away, that was their fault and their loss. They could find their own way back. Morning after morning, he watched as more sheep wandered away and stayed away. Morning after morning, he made the same decision to let them wander. Finally, his job that started with quite a large flock became rather manageable. With no remaining sheep to shepherd, he found it much easier to be a shepherd.

# BIBLE LESSON

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## I. PETER: THE SHEPHERD-IN-TRAINING

Jesus' mission called Him to sacrifice Himself for God's flock and to duplicate His character and mission in the lives of His disciples. This fact is spelled out clearly in John's "syllabus" to the Gospel (John 1:1–18, sometimes called John's "Prologue"): "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God" (John 1:12). Sons often inherit the traits of their fathers.

### A. Jesus Prophesied Peter's Martyrdom

This was especially true for Peter. Peter was Jesus' shepherd-in-training. In spite of his impulsive nature, Peter had a shepherd's instinct. He often spoke on behalf of the other disciples (John 6:66–68; 13:24). He sometimes led the disciples (John 21:3, 7–8). And Jesus explicitly commanded Peter: "Feed my sheep" (John 21:16–17). This was not a general call to discipleship; it was specific to Peter's future—a direct repudiation of Peter's decision to go back to fishing (John 21:3). This command pointed toward Peter's unique calling and destiny as a disciple.

In contrast to John, who would *not* die a martyr's death, Jesus called Peter to be a shepherd made in the mold of the Good Shepherd, who laid down His life. Jesus even prophesied to Peter that he would die as Jesus died—hands outstretched on a cross. This is what Jesus meant when He said: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not" (John 21:18).


### B. Peter's Faithlessness

But Peter had a personality problem. He could say the most wonderful words, make the most sacred promises, and express personal devotion to those he loved. But when it came time to live up to his own words, he would turn out to be just like many of us: paralyzed by fear, seeking to thread the almost impossibly tiny needle between obedience and self-preservation.

However, a shepherd's primary gift to the flock is simply abiding, or remaining, with the flock, no matter what. In good times and bad times, the shepherd abides with the flock. Throughout John's Gospel, Jesus placed great emphasis on the importance of abiding, remaining, staying, and dwelling. These four English words are one word in the original Greek text: *meno*, meaning "to remain." (See John 6:56; 14:16–18; 15:4, 7.) At the end of Matthew, Jesus promised, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:20). Jesus beautifully exemplified it: the Shepherd stays.

A glance at Peter's record revealed he was not one to stay. We give him a hard time for denying Jesus, yet Peter was the only disciple to follow Jesus until he found himself just outside the building where the priests were questioning Jesus. The other disciples did not deny Jesus that night because they were not following closely enough to be questioned. However, Peter denied knowing Jesus—three times. He was already acting like a hireling.

### Teacher Option:

*A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit.* 

## C. By God's Grace, I Will Keep My Promises to God

Perhaps we have all faced ridicule or even full-scale persecution for our faith. Our human nature wants to run, but God is calling us to remain faithful to Him. We promised we would follow Him, and sometimes following Him leads us to danger where we may lose our reputation, our influence, our job, our position, our friends, our family, even our life. In those times, let us cling to God's grace and to our faith, and be faithful as Jesus has been faithful to us.

*What persecution have you faced for your faith? How did you respond?*

## II. PETER AFTER PENTECOST

When the crowd outside the upper room on the Day of Pentecost mocked the disciples, Peter stood up and preached: "God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). His sermon contained many of the same elements that would get Stephen stoned to death, yet Peter did not hesitate to tell the truth. Here, he acted like a good shepherd, standing up to the enemy.

### A. Peter's Faithfulness

In Acts 3, Peter preached and was arrested and questioned by the Sanhedrin, the same ruling body who had Jesus crucified. After being released, Peter went right back to preaching Jesus. The shepherd stayed. In Acts 5, after performing miracles in Jesus' name, Peter and the disciples were arrested, then set free by an angel. Instead of running away, Peter stayed and was again brought to the Sanhedrin for interrogation.

Undoubtedly, Peter remembered Jesus' prophecy that Peter would be crucified. Would this be the moment? But he was filled with the Holy Spirit and boldness, and he answered: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). The Sanhedrin, consisting mostly of the high priest and his family, thought they were indeed speaking for God. But Peter stayed with the flock like a good shepherd and told them the truth.

### B. Peter's Struggle between Faithlessness and Faithfulness

Peter later lived in Antioch and pastored many Gentile believers. When Jewish Christian leaders from Jerusalem, who still held onto the belief that Gentiles were unclean, sent messengers to Antioch to determine whether Peter was fellowshiping with Gentiles, Peter had a decision to make. A report that Peter was

*What made the difference between denying Jesus to a few in a courtyard and preaching Jesus to a crowd in the streets?*

having meals with Gentiles could have caused them to consider him backslidden. He weakened, got up from the table, and sat with the Jews, breaking fellowship and turning his back on the Gentiles and essentially the gospel. This act brought Paul's fury upon Peter and an open rebuke. This time, Peter fled from the flock like a hireling.

*Can you relate to Peter's struggle between faithless and faithful? How do we ensure we remain faithful in that struggle?*

### C. Though I Struggle, I Will Repent and Be Faithful

Carl Swick was a wise, quiet man in Mount Vernon, Ohio. He was a pastor's dear friend. Carl worked hard in his own life and around the church property, but he is best known for the motto by which he lived his life of faith: "I have been up and down, but I've never been in and out." A life of faith is sometimes a life of highs and lows, but it should not be a life of walking away from God, even though we are invited to walk back to God. During those low times, if we struggle with our faith, may we repent, ask God to firm up our faith, and be faithful to the One who is forever faithful.

## III. PETER'S LATER YEARS

Late in his life, Peter wrote two letters to a group of churches. Peter's initial letter may have been used by the early church in baptismal services. It also taught Christians how to live faithfully in the foreign country of this world, far from our heavenly home: "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; . . . Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God" (1 Peter 1:13-15, 23).

### A. Pastor Peter in Rome

We can hear the baptismal waters stirring as the words were read out in the church: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9). The next verse refers to the audience as "people of God," who in times past were not people of God. This means the letter was written to Gentiles, like the Gentiles Peter had once disfellowshipped. Peter had repented and returned to his calling to shepherd God's flock.

He understood his role was an under-shepherd to the one he called the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). Peter lived to lead God's people faithfully and sacrificially to heavenly pastures. His role was dangerous since he was writing from Rome (referred to as Babylon). Modern Rome was as cruel to the people of God as ancient Babylon had been, yet Peter still faithfully preached the gospel in the most dangerous city, ruled by Nero and founded by Romulus, the man who legend said was raised by a wolf. Peter

*Think of the most dangerous city in the world for Christians. How would you answer God if He asked you to move there to make disciples for Him?*

shepherded God's people in the city of the wolf's brood. Peter did not run when the wolf came; he actively confronted the wolf.

### **B. Peter Kept His Promise**

Peter walked the knife's edge between good shepherd and hireling for what may have been decades. Perhaps that's why Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him. But why three times? The obvious reason is because Peter had denied Jesus three times. The second reason may be to simulate Peter's longtime pattern of confession followed by failure followed by confession, over and over again. His love for Jesus would be tested again and again and again.

As his life unfolded, he refused to let his failures define him. Instead, he let Jesus' call define him: "The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Peter understood his own propensity to make big promises and then fail to live up to them when the wolf showed up, but in the end he allowed Jesus' call on him to define him.

### **C. I Will Remain**

Perhaps you have had a similar experience in discipleship. Maybe God's call on your life has sometimes felt more like fiction—like a call for other, more capable, more disciplined people, not you. But open your Bible to the Gospels, and in the tiny crevices between the grand story of Jesus and God's purpose for the world, you will see stories of Peter and his fellow disciples—stories that are at once comic and tragic, filled with surprising weaknesses and crippling failures. These smaller stories are your stories too.

Rise up and return to your calling. As Satan tried to sift Peter as wheat—subjecting Peter to severe tribulation in hopes of seeing him reduced to rubble—so his purpose is to cause our faith to crumble. Satan would have you place your faith in yourself, which cannot withstand the trials of this world. But as big as your problems may seem, Satan has a bigger problem: the prayers of Jesus. Jesus said to Peter, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32). Place your faith in God. Let Him define you.

Stand at the altar as the Bishop and Shepherd of your soul comes down from the pulpit to stand in front of you. He places His nail-scarred hand on your forehead and closes His eyes. Jesus is praying for you. Could there be any better prayer? Could there be any better sign in your favor? Even if you started off poorly, like Simon Peter, you can end well.

*How do you feel knowing Jesus is on your side, fighting for you, and His sacrifice on Calvary continually intercedes for you?*



# INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

*A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. *

The story is told of an important magistrate in ancient Rome who had two concubines. But the concubines mysteriously and suddenly changed their behavior toward him one day. They would no longer be intimate with him, but they would not give a straightforward answer as to why they had changed. The magistrate had them followed.

The result of the investigation revealed the two women had become disciples of Jesus under the teaching of a certain apostle Peter. Peter's teaching was therefore responsible for their change of behavior. The furious magistrate sent a detachment to have Peter arrested, detained, and ultimately burned at the stake.

Word secretly reached Peter's congregation that the wolf was on his way, so they pleaded with Peter to flee the city under the cover of darkness before the authorities came for him. The congregation said they could not bear to lose another apostle, as they had lost Paul. They begged Peter to find safety and then return when the controversy died down. Peter listened to their pleas, cloaked himself, and silently walked out onto the road leading out of Rome.

Just as he cleared the city walls, Peter had a vision. Jesus, whom he had not seen in the flesh in many years, appeared to be walking on the same road but toward the city. As Jesus was about to pass him and go into the city, Peter asked, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus looked at Peter the way He had looked at him just before the cock crowed all those years ago and answered him, "Into the city, to be crucified again."

Horror entered Peter's heart. He realized he again was doing exactly what Jesus said the hireling always does: leaving when the wolf comes. Peter remembered Jesus' words: "Feed my sheep." That was one way Peter could show Jesus how much He loved him. Peter turned in sorrow and repented. "Do you love me, Peter? Do you love me, Peter? Do you love me, Peter?"

Now he knew how that question would best be answered. He walked back into the same city and gave himself up to the magistrate, so he would not arrest members of the congregation instead. Peter was then taken to the city's fairgrounds where the public could watch executions of criminals for entertainment. Rome tied Peter to the stake and was about to set him on fire, but Peter, remembering Jesus words, "you shall stretch forth your hands," asked to be crucified. They obliged him, and at his request, they even turned the cross upside down.

Peter died, after the form of his Master, with his hands outstretched, glorifying the Lord. Whatever else Peter had been throughout his life, he died a faithful shepherd, laying down his life for his friends. In the end, the shepherd stayed.

## **Prayer Focus**

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

- For God's grace to remain when I am tempted to run away
- For God's mercy for the times I do run away

# 3.3

## JESUS OR BARABBAS?

### FOCUS VERSE

John 18:40

Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.

### LESSON TEXT

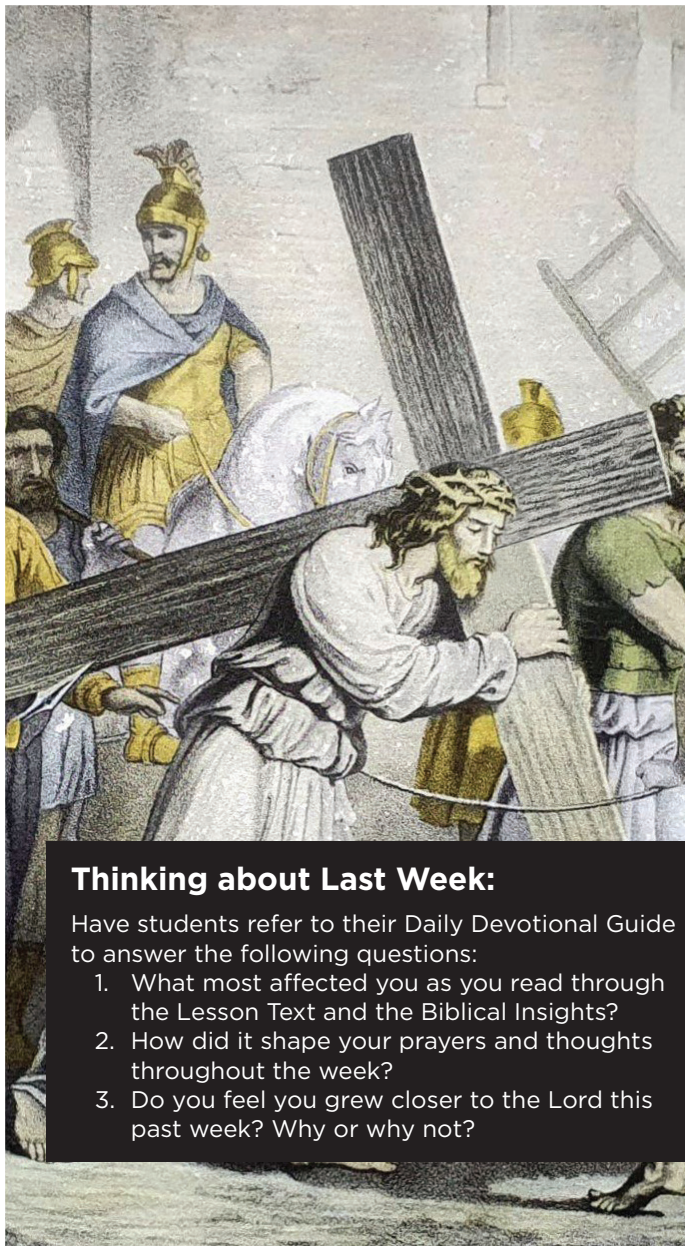
John 18:28-40

### TRUTH ABOUT GOD

On the cross, Jesus took our place.

### TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will choose Jesus, no matter the choice.



### Thinking about Last Week:

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

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

## **SG** TEACHING OUTLINE

**Icebreaker:** Aside from Jesus, what is the greatest story of sacrifice one person has made for another?

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

### I. THE MEANING OF SACRIFICE

- A. Jesus' Sacrifice Is for All
- B. Jesus' Body Was Prepared for Sacrifice
  - » *What do you think of this father's perspective of his sacrifice for his son?*
- C. Only Jesus' Sacrifice Would Suffice
  - » *How does the Incarnation paint your view of God?*
- D. I Will Rejoice in Jesus' Sacrifice for Us
  - » *Why do some people believe Jesus' sacrifice was more a tragedy than a triumph? How can we help them see the victory in the gospel?*

### II. JESUS' LAST DAY

- A. Jesus Ministered to Others
  - » *What would you do if you knew you only had one day left?*
- B. Others Abused Jesus
- C. I Will Sacrifice My Will for God's Will **V**
  - » *Why do you do all you do as it relates to discipleship?*

**Internalizing the Message** **I**

#### **Prayer Focus**

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

- For gratitude for Jesus' sacrifice
- For God to help us sacrifice our will for His

## LESSON CONNECTION

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*A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. *

When you hear his name, you will probably say, “I’ve never heard of him.” But he is one of the greatest American heroes, and after you hear about him, you will likely tell his story to others. If virtue were the measure of a man in this world, his face would be carved into Mount Rushmore.

His name was Charles Jackson French, a twenty-three-year-old African American man from Arkansas. Just before World War II, he enlisted in the Navy. During the war, Seaman French was posted as a cook on the USS *Gregory*, a high-speed transport that patrolled the South Pacific.

While on patrol near the Solomon Islands on the night of September 4, 1942, Japanese submarines surprised the *Gregory* and opened fire. Before the night was over, the *Gregory* was sunk. Fifteen survivors, including Seaman Charles French, floated helplessly on the dark waters in an inflatable raft. But things got even worse for them. Distant ships began to open fire on the life raft. So Seaman French tied the raft’s rope around his waist and jumped into the dark waters as his feet brushed up against the fins of teeming sharks. French then swam for eight hours in the deep, towing the raft alone against the tide to make sure it never came within range of the distant gunfire. The ship’s cook saved fourteen lives, even at the risk of his own life.

# BIBLE LESSON

## I. THE MEANING OF SACRIFICE

### A. Jesus' Sacrifice Is for All

The name *Barabbas* is the ancient equivalent of our contemporary *John Doe*. The name literally means “son of a father,” which is not really a name. It essentially means “any man.” All four Gospels testify that even Jesus’ enemies saw His death as a substitution—a sacrifice for “any man.”

Let’s consider the meaning of *sacrifice*. Sacrifice is the personal loss of something that cannot be regained. Sacrifice is the loss of something more like an appendage—something irreplaceable that will not come back. What was said of Jesus on the cross can almost be said of one who truly sacrifices: “He saved others; himself he cannot save” (Matthew 27:42; Mark 15:31). Sacrifice frees the recipient but binds the one who is sacrificing.

### B. Jesus' Body Was Prepared for Sacrifice

A man who had lost his right arm rolled up his sleeve to reveal the gnarled remnant of his arm. Only four inches of mangled skin and cartilage remained below the shoulder. He held up the stub of his arm and said, “A lot of people feel sorry for me. They try to look away and make sure I don’t see them looking at me funny. But you should not feel sorry for me. You know why God gave me the arm I lost? Because God knew I’d be in a car accident one day and my son would be sitting next to me. And just as a shaft of metal was headed for his face, I would have that right arm to shield his face and take the blow. I lost my arm; shards of metal went straight through the bone. But that arm saved my son. That’s why God gave me a right arm. That was its main purpose. He gave it to me so I could give it away to save the boy. No, don’t feel sorry for me. No man’s right arm has ever served a better purpose. A son for a right arm. I would do the same thing every time. And when I wake up in the morning and feel the arm I’ve lost, I give glory to God for the son it gained.”

This man’s answer is reminiscent of a passage in the Book of Hebrews:

For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore when he [Jesus] cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. (Hebrews 10:4-7)

*What do you think of this father's perspective of his sacrifice for his son?*

Focus on the words: “a body hast thou prepared me.” The author of Hebrews cited the words of David in Psalm 40 but interpreted this passage as a prophecy of Christ. More specifically, these

words are said to be the words of the Christ, the Son of David “when he cometh into the world.” In other words, these words are expressed in the Incarnation itself.

### C. Only Jesus’ Sacrifice Would Suffice

The sacrifice of animals in the Old Testament was insufficient. They could not solve the problem of sin; they could not save human beings from the ravages of sin. So a body was made—a body God Himself could assume. But what was this body for?

The Spirit of God is omnipotent; He can do anything by mere decree. And this fact reveals the problem. As mentioned earlier, sacrifice frees the recipient *but binds the one who sacrifices*. To have a body is to have limitations. A body can be a sacrifice. As Philippians 2:6–7 shows, though Christ was “equal with God,” in taking a human body, He “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant.” He humbled Himself. His body had to depend upon a human mother. His body was susceptible to microbes, sweated through fever, was nourished by mere water, and required a blanket for warmth. His body could misjudge a step and fall, forget the name of someone He met last week, and be crippled by grief. His body could lose its freedoms to the men He made and be fastened with nails to a tree He grew.

*How does the Incarnation paint your view of God?*

When the Incarnate God encountered people battling physical blindness, His simple touch could heal them and give them sight. When a child was on the brink of death, Jesus could simply say a word and the child would rise. When a dead man lay in a tomb for four days, Jesus could call him by name, and he would come forth from the tomb. But when it came to healing men of their sins, Jesus could not just pray our sins away; He could not wish our sins away or touch our sins away; He could not even just speak our sins away. No, this would require a body: “A body hast thou prepared me” (Hebrews 10:5).

Jesus threw His body into the awful machinery of sin. “This is my body,” Jesus told His disciples at the Last Supper, “which is given for you” (Luke 22:19). Imagine a heavenly blueprint for this body before it was formed in Mary’s womb. How tempting it could have been to construct a body that had the appearance of humanity but would not feel pain, the pangs of hunger, and the pressure of an intense headache. This body could have included a forehead that would not feel thorns and a back that would not feel the soldier’s whip. The hands and wrists could have been formed without nerves to shriek at the iron nails penetrating them and the tongue designed not to swell and become parched and need to beg for water.

But this was not the will of God. God Incarnate assumed a body just like ours. “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

## D. I Will Rejoice in Jesus' Sacrifice for Us

How should we respond to Jesus' sacrifice? We should rejoice. Without the cross, we have no hope, but thanks to the cross and the empty tomb, we have hope of salvation. Our sins can be forgiven, and we can be made right with God. Jesus was not caught or trapped by scheming Roman soldiers or jealous chief priests—He willingly laid down His life for us. He lived His own words: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down His life for his friends" (John 15:13).

*Why do some people believe Jesus' sacrifice was more a tragedy than a triumph? How can we help them see the victory in the gospel?*

## II. JESUS' LAST DAY

### A. Jesus Ministered to Others

It is not uncommon for us to ask what someone would do if it were his or her last day to live. Some might say they would go to a place they have always dreamed of going or see something they have always wanted to see. Others might say they would eat their favorite meal and talk to their favorite people.

*What would you do if you knew you only had one day left?*

What would Jesus do if He had one day left to live? Thanks to the Gospels, we know what He did do when He knew death was only twenty-four hours away. With His last day before death, Jesus:

- Washed His disciples' feet (John 13)
- Prayed all night for His disciples (John 17)
- Healed the ear of the man who came to arrest Him (John 18)
- Carried our cross to Calvary (Matthew 27)
- Pardoned a thief, while both hands and feet were nailed to wood, and took him to Paradise (Luke 22)
- Had compassion on His mother and the disciple who was with her (John 19)
- Forgave every one of His murderers (Luke 22)

The one who was born of a virgin womb—who commanded tens of thousands of listeners, who told the sea to be still and it was, who called to the fish and they came, who summoned Moses and Elijah from glory to stand with Him on the mountain, who commanded the host of Heaven's armies, who with a simple command pried the dead loose from the grip of death—in the last day of His earthly life, He suddenly seemed not to be in command anymore.

### B. Others Abused Jesus

Jesus was passed from hand to hand as a prisoner, starting with His weakest and lowliest disciple, Judas. Jesus went to the scheming priest Caiaphas, then to the Roman prefect Pilate, and then to silly King Herod. Then He was handed over to the mob.


The one who has jewels in His crown named Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was forced to wear a crown made from the brambles of the earth. The one who holds Heaven's scepter of righteousness was made in mockery to hold a couple of sticks fastened together into a child's pretend scepter. (See Matthew 27:29.) And the one before whom legions of trembling devils lower their heads in unwilling reverence was handed over to childish pagan soldiers, who bowed their knees and taunted Him as they felt for the quality of His garment they would soon divide. The Rock of Ages was now so weak, another man, a foreigner from Cyrene, had to help Him up the hill. And at last, the one who made that hill with His word somewhere back in distant time was handed over to a cross.

### C. I Will Sacrifice My Will for God's Will

The disciples were walking with Jesus toward Jerusalem, all of them knowing whatever was about to happen in Jerusalem was going to be momentous. Two brothers, James and John, sidled up with Jesus and asked Him, probably in hushed voices, "Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory" (Mark 10:37). Jesus used the moment to teach that authority in God's kingdom, servanthood, is not the entry-level position; servanthood is the supreme promotion.

They wanted to know if they could sit in the seats of power at the right or left hand of Jesus Christ. But the next time we see someone at Jesus' right or left hand in this Gospel is at Calvary. When Jesus was crucified, one man was being crucified on His right hand and another on His left. The seats on Jesus' right and left are rather uncomfortable. In fact, to sit there, they would have to lay down their lives—be "crucified with Christ."

#### Teacher Option:

*A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit.* 

We too have been called to a life of sacrifice. Paul wrote: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). This verse is to us what Hebrews 10:4-7 is to Christ. It is our "body hast thou prepared me." Some problems cannot be solved with wishing them solved. Some problems cannot even be prayed away. Some problems require us to lay down our comfort, convenience, security, safety, and even our health and wealth. Some problems require our bodies.

The world might ask the church: why do you do the things you do, surrender the things you surrender, and live lives of self-denial? The church, saved by the sacrifice of Christ, answers, "A body hast thou prepared me."

*Why do you do all you do as it relates to discipleship?*



## INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

*A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit. *

Nothing expresses love like sacrifice. And nothing reveals the image of God in humans like sacrifice. When seeing a picture of D-Day, one can see a portrait of selfless sacrifice. Strip away the familiarity of the picture, the lines of the land and sea, the form of common humanity. Look at the picture closely, but as a cosmic war of flesh and blood laying siege to principalities and powers with earth as the battlefield.

Here is humanity—not as humans are often understood to be: flawed, wicked, unfaithful, disloyal, weak. No, look at the picture. Here is humanity—humans as they were meant to be: the dread of devils, friends of angels; humans made in the image of God, stepping into Hell and an almost certain death. One hundred thousand rounds of flesh-piercing bullets were flying at the speed of sound, crisscrossing in every direction, and explosive mines were haunting their every step.

When seeing this picture, these men who were just boys saying goodbye to their mothers a few months earlier, walking into an iron shredder that would, by day's end, turn more than ten thousand into dust and ashes. Yet they willingly marched into battle, knowing they may not march out. God's people bravely march into prayer, not knowing what battles will befall us, yet we march anyway because we have our mission. And greater still, we have our example. Jesus willingly marched into Jerusalem knowing what He would face, yet He did so because He is our sacrifice for sins.

On that dark Passover weekend, Jesus died so Barabbas could live. But history does not tell us if Barabbas was at the foot of Jesus' cross or in the upper room to receive the Holy Ghost. He faded into the background, and Jesus Christ took center stage on the center cross. Although Barabbas's untold story has already been written, ours has not. Ours is still being written. And like the growing crowd in Jerusalem, we have a choice: Jesus or anything else in this world. We must get this choice right. Choose abundant life. Choose eternal life. Choose to live for the one who died for us.

### **Prayer Focus**

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

- For gratitude for Jesus' sacrifice
- For God to help us sacrifice our will for His

# 3.4

## POWERLESS PILATE

### FOCUS VERSE

John 19:11

Jesus answered,  
Thou couldst  
have no power  
at all against me,  
except it were  
given thee from  
above: therefore he  
that delivered me  
unto thee hath the  
greater sin.

### LESSON TEXT

John 19:1-16

### TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God is in control.

### TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will stand for God  
in the face of peer  
pressure.



### Thinking about Last Week:

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

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

## **SG** TEACHING OUTLINE

**Icebreaker:** What is the strangest law you know of?

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

### I. JESUS' SUFFERING

- A. Jesus Was Scourged and Mocked **I**
- B. Even in His Suffering, Jesus Was in Control
  - » *If you were Pilate, who would you have thought was in control of the scene?*
- C. When Life Is a Mess, Jesus Is Still in Control

### II. PILATE'S WEAKNESS

- A. Although Pilate Found No Fault in Jesus, He Bowed to Peer Pressure
  - » *Why is it surprising that peer pressure pressed Pilate into a decision that lack of evidence and credible witnesses could not?*
- B. Pilate Was Partly Responsible for Jesus' Death, Although He Washed His Hands of Him (See Matthew 27:24.)
  - » *What should Pilate have done? What might it have cost him?*
- C. I Will Stand for Jesus in the Face of Peer Pressure **V**
  - » *How do we stand when we are tempted to bow in the face of peer pressure?*

### **Internalizing the Message**

- » *What will you do after being pardoned from your sin? How will you live boldly as Jesus' disciple?*

### **Prayer Focus**

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

- For God to help us stand when for Him when pressured to bow
- For God to give us boldness to share Jesus with the world, no matter the cost

## LESSON CONNECTION

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The old Honda 450 motorcycle somehow stayed upright as its relatively inexperienced driver and passenger held on for dear life. An Alaskan Malamute burst out of the darkness onto the dark, narrow country lane in western New York. He seemed to be as large as the motorcycle. The dog lost the battle. The men were shaken. The bike suffered minor damage. Their heart rates gradually returned to normal after finishing the two- or three-mile ride to Dad's garage, where the driver parked the bike with the three other two-wheel vehicles in the garage.

The next few days heard many prayers of thanksgiving for the miracle of escaping the event without injury. All returned to normal until a county police officer came by the house with a warrant to appear before the justice of the peace for violating the law against leaving the scene of a wounded dog. Somehow or other the young man had not heard New York Vehicle and Traffic Law §601 in his high school driver's education course; the law said he had to try to find the wounded or dead dog's owner.

The bike rider grew incensed, refused to pay the twenty-dollar fine, and exercised his rights to stand before the judge. After all, he was the victim, not the perpetrator of an attack. He got his name on the court calendar, paid his bail of sixty dollars, and left confused and angry. When the trial date came, he trusted the judge's verdict rather than exercise his constitutional right to a trial by jury. Bad choice. The justice of the peace had an issue with bikers, particularly if they were not voting members of the township. The judge yelled at the young man standing before the bench, saying he was only sorry the legal limit for the fine was not much higher. He declared he knew where to look if any more bike rabble-rousers brought trouble to his little burg. He then left the bench to shake hands and console the grieving dog owners, who had not restrained their beast.

The young man collected his forty-dollar balance refunded from his bail and went home forever scarred by the injustice of the judicial system of Busti, New York. Even though the event happened forty years ago, he remembers it vividly. This is what happens when Lady Justice lets her blindfold slip a little. The trial did not measure up to the O. J. Simpson, Ted Bundy, Bill Clinton, or Charles Manson trials, and no one rushed to sign a book deal or make a movie about the tense moments in Busti, yet trials always include conflicts of interest and a quest to find justice. In the young man's case, he only suffered irritation, a twenty-dollar fine, and lost respect for a local magistrate.

John 19 opens the doors to a trial with eternal consequences. Busti's justice of the peace tilted justice for an election, and Pilate surrendered to pressures around him. Where will we stand when we encounter challenges to our faith in Jesus?

# BIBLE LESSON

## I. JESUS' SUFFERING

### A. Jesus Was Scourged and Mocked

Sin reigned from the first Adam until the Second Adam could bring life. Isaiah the prophet caught a glimpse of a suffering servant who would take the place of broken humanity. The prophet also saw a king whose reign would never end (Isaiah 9:7). The various antagonists in John 19 could not have imagined one man would fulfill both roles: king and rejected, beaten lamb led to the slaughter. Only in Jesus' obedient journey to the cross could He offer the grace gift of God to humanity. (See Romans 5:13-17.)


The cruel scourging and mocking the Roman soldiers inflicted on Jesus came from this conflict between an apparently weak man and the powerful messianic signs He showed the world. Some biblical historians propose three basic types of beatings could be sentenced on a man found guilty in Roman court. Judges sentenced light beatings to those who committed relatively simple offenses, trusting a beating and warning would keep them from repeating their crimes. Serious offenders would receive a more brutal flogging, while the most severe lashings were reserved for those being prepared for other punishments, such as crucifixion (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*).

Pilate had already pronounced Jesus to be unworthy of severe punishment. The first beating of Jesus likely stemmed from the governor's attempt to placate the Jews. Pilate's actions declared his willingness to shame Jesus with the beating in an attempt to appease the Jewish accusers and secure Jesus' release.

The soldiers had a different agenda. They replaced Jesus' normal garment with a royal purple robe. Then they crowned Him with thorny vines that may have had barbs up to ten inches in length. Perhaps they grew tired of their assigned responsibility of standing guard against civil unrest during the Passover weekend with its messianic overtones. They soothed their frustrations and tedium by mocking Jesus. If only they could have known the truth of their words: "Hail, King of the Jews" (John 19:3). They had nothing to fear if this badly beaten preacher from Nazareth was the best Jewish rebels had to offer. One can almost hear a trained soldier from generations past who jeered at Jesus' ancestor: "Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves?" (1 Samuel 17:43).

Pilate retook custody of Jesus and confessed his previous understanding—Jesus did not deserve more severe punishment. Pilate was handsomely paid to question criminals, but after all his questions, he cast his verdict: "I find no fault in him" (John 19:4).

#### Teacher Option:

*A supplemental image is available in the Resource Kit.* 

With thorns still pressing blood from Jesus' head wounds and bruising beginning to emerge from the soldiers' brutal assault, Pilate presented Jesus with words to mock both Jesus and the Jews: "Behold the man!" (John 19:5). The governor seemed to sneer, "Why are you so afraid of this puny, pitiful slip of a man? I find no reason to be afraid of anything!"

### **B. Even in His Suffering, Jesus Was in Control**

Jesus chose a strange way to dominate the stage that day. Soldiers thought they could control the Jewish carpenter and manipulate Him, as a child pulls the wings off a fly and watches it spin. But Pilate seemed to admire Jesus. Yet he grew angry because Jesus would not defend Himself or join in Pilate's efforts to show how wrong the Jews were on that tense weekend that commemorated the Israelites' liberation from slavery from Egypt so long ago. Just as Jesus controlled the unfolding scene in the garden where He was betrayed, He continued to stand center stage as both the victim of abuse and the author of the story.

Pilate and the soldiers could only act within the parameters set by God above. Jesus knew where He was from and where He was going. Whether Pilate liked it or not, Jesus would also hold the authority over how He got there.

*If you were Pilate, who would you have thought was in control of the scene?*

### **C. When Life Is a Mess, Jesus Is Still in Control**

When John announced the coming of the long-awaited Messiah, he likened it to a battle between light and darkness (John 1:5, 9). The chaos of darkness held no authority over the prevailing light. To light a room, we only have to flip one switch or light one candle. A room does not need an on switch for light and an off switch for darkness. Darkness helplessly loses authority when light enters.

Sin creates more mess than anyone ever imagines. Adam and Eve had no idea the unbroken chain of broken events sin launched when they ate of the forbidden tree. Sin broke relationship with creation and God, with the earth and animals; sin broke relationship with humanity and God. Sin broke social relationships between human beings.

When a family of three welcomes their second child, the number of relationships grows from three to six rather than just adding one more relationship. Now imagine the world of eight billion people across six continents with permanent populations. Multiply that by the various social systems in which those relationships exist. The number of chaotic relationships exceeds our minds' capacity to comprehend.

Even followers of Jesus live in this innumerable number of messy relationships. Yet neither fear, anxiety, nor terror control us. We leave the need to exert control over the chaos of life in the watery baptismal grave. We die to our efforts to control, and we

resurrect to new life in Christ. Jesus is still in control even when evidence seems to say otherwise. When that happens, we look to the one who endured unjust stripes for us. By His stripes we are still healed. By His stripes He still exerts control in our lives today. (See I Peter 2:13–3:9.)

## II. PILATE'S WEAKNESS

### A. Although Pilate Found No Fault in Jesus, He Bowed to Peer Pressure

When making difficult decisions, many people weigh the pros and cons of various options and then choose the option that gives the most reward at the least cost. Unfortunately, chaos does not disappear with clear decision-making processes. Pilate's chaos did not go away. The priests referenced the Law that mandated stoning a blasphemer. Those who heard the blasphemy had to throw the stones, else they would bear the guilt of allowing the blasphemer to live (Leviticus 24:16).

Pilate exclaimed, "Behold the man!" but the priests charged Jesus with claiming to be the Son of God (John 19:5–7). Pilate quaked. The Jews saw they were making little progress with Pilate. Their impatience mingled with their untempered hatred. They knew Pilate was planning to release Jesus, so they pitted Pilate against his superior, Caesar. They cried out, "If you release Jesus, you are no friend to Caesar" (John 19:12). That was the last push to knock over Pilate's already weak convictions.

*Why is it surprising that peer pressure pressed Pilate into a decision that lack of evidence and credible witnesses could not?*

### B. Pilate Was Partly Responsible for Jesus' Death, Although He Washed His Hands of Him

The pressure ate at Pilate's soul. The Greek Empire took culture to the world. The Roman Empire took legal systems and roads to the world. As a Roman governor, the judge could try to deflect responsibility to others, but he was unable to escape the sin of condemning a righteous man to death.

Matthew's Gospel highlights the extent to which Pilate went to absolve himself of responsibility for the judicial murder about to take place. Despite his awareness of the envy at play and his wife's warning to leave Jesus alone (Matthew 27:18–19), Pilate lost his moral center. He called for a basin of water so he could wash the sin from his hands. Just as hand sanitizer cannot fully protect people today from catching an illness, Pilate's washing failed. Even if Pilate dipped himself in the Jordan River, he would not wash away his partial responsibility for judicially murdering Jesus.

According to John, the instigator of the false charges was guilty of the greater sin. The evangelist had charted the death threats from the healing by the pool in John 5:18 through to the raising of Lazarus in John 11. The high priest boldly declared: "One man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not" (John 11:50). Although the high priest was responsible with

*What should Pilate have done? What might it have cost him?*

leveling false charges, Pilate still surrendered his integrity to peer pressure that called for Jesus' death. John summed up the last scene of judgment in a few words: "Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified" (John 19:16). The case was closed. It was time for sentencing.


### C. I Will Stand for Jesus in the Face of Peer Pressure

The effort to shift blame in a chaotic world describes life in the twenty-first century, just as it did the first century. News feeds declare judicial efforts to find guilt and lay the responsibility of harm at the feet of the guilty party. When losers hear the verdict, they frequently appeal to a higher court to get the decision overturned. Society seeks a perpetrator for everything from a driver who left a dead dog by the road all the way to the causes of global disasters. Judges and juries face a real challenge of weighing the evidence and deciding justly.

As disciples of Jesus, we must carefully resist pressures to turn on Jesus, as Pilate did. The chief priests used a variety of efforts to force Pilate to go against his deep awareness of Jesus' innocence. They referenced an Old Testament law compelling a community to execute a blasphemer. They claimed to be more loyal to Caesar than the governor. They even went a blasphemous step further to claim they would have no king but Caesar—not even God Himself, just Caesar. Jesus' accusers did not care that they violated their own professed use of the Law. To pledge their allegiance to Caesar alone accepted the Roman emperor as a demigod worthy of their worship. Pilate could not detangle himself from the web of pressures.

We do not have to stand on our own. The resurrected Christ blessed His followers with clarity of purpose. Jesus breathed on the disciples as a sign they would receive the Holy Spirit. That moment transformed them into agents of reconciliation who could share the gospel message with others (John 20:22–23). When they were filled with the Spirit, Luke records they were also filled with boldness (Acts 4:31). They could share His signs with others so they too could believe "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing [they] might have life through his name" (John 20:31).

#### Teacher Option:

*A supplemental video is available in the Resource Kit. *

*How do we stand when we are tempted to bow in the face of peer pressure?*

We must stand firm for Jesus in the face of peer pressure in our world today. Standing firm testifies of the peace Jesus gives. Resisting pressure to reject Jesus enables disciples to proclaim He has risen and light has come into our deeply broken and chaotic world. We do this because He has redeemed us and because we can share the new life possibility with all those who scream, "Away with Him," just as they did many years ago.

I will stand. Will you?



## INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

**A**t nineteen years old, Serena Nunn went to federal prison for being part of a drug conspiracy. After eleven years in prison, she obtained early release by a presidential commutation of her sentence. She used the opportunity to get a college degree and graduate from law school. A pardon by another president cleared the last hurdle to join the Georgia Bar and become a public defender for people needing an advocate in court. She used her second chance to help others.

The prophet Isaiah clearly stated the stripes, bruises, rejection, and suffering Jesus encountered were results of our sorrows, iniquities, and lack of peace (Isaiah 53:3-5). Our sin caused Jesus' suffering and death. Without human sin and sin's impact on all of creation, the Messiah would not have needed to submit to such abuse. Yet we stand with Pilate and pronounce our own findings: "I find no fault in Him." At the same time, we also scream with the chief priests, "Crucify Him! We are friends of evil powers in the world." As we read John 19, we must confess we are guilty of Jesus' suffering.

Fortunately, we know how the story ends. We know Jesus died. We know He only needed to borrow the tomb for three days. We know He resurrected and restored deniers like Peter. We know He went away and returned through His Spirit as promised. We know Jesus' substitution purchased our redemption.

Only one question remains to be answered: how will we live now that Jesus' suffering granted us pardon for our sins? Pressures from a chaotic world seek to distract disciples from our new mission as Jesus' ambassadors in the world. Some pressures try to silence our testimony and cause us to be satisfied with just being a "good" Christian and being saved. This pressure robs the disciple of the opportunity to live on purpose. Other pressures conspire to rob the disciple of faith, hope, and love. Such efforts have caused some to go back on Christ as they say, "Away with Jesus" one more time.

As we reflect on the courtroom scene in John 19, we are called to stand with Jesus. Standing with Jesus goes beyond finding no fault with Him and dropping the charges. Standing with Jesus joins Paul in his prayer: "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (Philippians 3:10). Rather than bending under the pressure, suffering calls us into a deeper relationship with Jesus. Suffering calls us to stand strong and witness one more time to the wonder of Jesus' forgiving grace. That kind of stand shines the light of redemption into a damaged, dark world. Such glorious light will never be extinguished.

*What will you do after being pardoned from your sin? How will you live boldly as Jesus' disciple?*

### **Prayer Focus**

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

- For God to help us stand when for Him when pressured to bow
- For God to give us boldness to share Jesus with the world, no matter the cost



### **SERIES 1: LETTERS FROM PRISON**

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Paul penned two of his epistles, Ephesians and Philippians, from prison to minister to the church. The principles from these two short books give us power to live godly, even in an ungodly world.

### **SERIES 2: GRACE FOR OUTSIDERS**

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Portraits of grace hang in gilded frames in the galleries of the Old and New Testament. The grace that saved Rahab, gave Mephibosheth a second chance, led Jesus to the cross, and caused Paul to fight for the Gentiles is still available to everyone who needs it.

### **SERIES 3: FROM MURDERER TO MISSIONARY**

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Follow Paul on his murderous ride toward Damascus until God shone a light so bright it knocked him from his horse to his knees. From there, God saved Paul, called him, and used him to preach the same gospel he used to persecute. This series will challenge us to embrace sacrifice, evangelism, and ministry.

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